



# WHAT WE HEARD ABOUT FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL, AND MUNICIPAL RESPONSES TO HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS

The Federal Housing Advocate's visit to Southern Ontario  
September 21–26, 2025

Prepared by the **Office of the Federal Housing Advocate**

**Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, Canadian Human Rights Commission**

344 Slater Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1E1

**Toll Free:** 1-888-214-1090 | **TTY:** 1-888-643-3304 | **Fax:** 613-996-9661 | <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/individuals/right-housing>

*Le présent document existe également en version française sous le titre, Ce que nous avons entendu au sujet des interventions fédérales, provinciales et municipales aux campements de personnes en situation d'itinérance. Il est disponible sur le site du Bureau du défenseur fédéral du logement et sur le Homeless Hub.*

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# Letter from the Federal Housing Advocate

Dear community members, partners, and leaders,

In September 2025, I visited a number of municipalities in Southern Ontario, including Cambridge, Kitchener, London, Hamilton, and Toronto, to meet with residents of homeless encampments, service providers, community organizers, academics, city staff, and local decision-makers. The purpose of this trip was simple: to listen, to learn, and to see firsthand how federal, provincial, and municipal responses are affecting people's lives.

Everywhere I went, I witnessed extraordinary courage and resilience in the face of deep systemic failures. Homelessness is not a personal failing; it is the result of a lack of affordable, supportive, adequate, and accessible housing. The current crisis stems from decades of underinvestment and breakdowns in multiple systems designed to protect people. For many, encampments remain the only option where they can find safety, community, and dignity.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to the frontline workers, outreach teams, mutual aid networks, and organizations who welcomed me into their communities. I especially thank the people with lived experience who shared their stories, often at great personal cost. Your voices must remain at the centre of all decision-making when it comes to encampments.

I also acknowledge and thank the municipal councillors and elected officials who have chosen to act with compassion and respect for human rights. At the same time, I call on all leaders at every level of government to work together to address the systemic failures that force people into homelessness.

This report captures what I heard during the trip: the struggles, the resilience, the systemic barriers, and the urgent need for action. It is both a reflection of the voices I heard and a call to all levels of government to respond with leadership, compassion, and concrete action.

Sincerely,

**Marie-Josée Houle**

Federal Housing Advocate

# Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the dedication of community organizations, service providers, and mutual aid groups across Southern Ontario.

A special thanks to:

- The residents of encampments who shared their experiences with courage and honesty.
- Community organizations in Cambridge, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, Hamilton, and Toronto who continue to innovate and provide care despite immense pressures.
- Frontline workers and outreach staff whose compassion and persistence save lives every day.
- City staff and elected leaders who have shown respect for human rights in their decision-making and advocacy.

Your commitment to dignity and justice stands as a beacon of hope.

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# Executive summary

Between September 21 and 26, 2025, the Federal Housing Advocate visited the Region of Waterloo (including the cities of Cambridge and Kitchener) as well as London, Hamilton, and Toronto to hear directly from residents of homeless encampments, frontline workers, community organizations, and local decision-makers. The purpose of the trip was to assess how federal, provincial, and municipal responses to encampments are impacting people's lives and to monitor the implementation of federal investments.

## Purpose of the visit

- To meet with people living in encampments and hear about their lived experiences.
- To understand the impacts of municipal enforcement and provincial policies.
- To assess how federal funding under the Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiative (UHEI) is contributing to human rights-based approaches and meaningful engagement with encampment residents on the ground.
- To strengthen relationships with municipalities, community organizations, and rights holders.

## Key findings

Across the five cities, some consistent themes emerged:

- 1. Breakdowns in multiple systems are driving increased homelessness and making adequate housing unavailable or very difficult to obtain.** People living in encampments want to move into adequate housing<sup>1</sup> but are confronted with a severe shortage of affordable and accessible units, a lack of supports when needed, and bureaucratic barriers.
- 2. Emergency shelters do not provide adequate housing and are not a long-term solution.** People living in encampments and advocates consistently reported that many or most shelters are unsafe, overcrowded, and inaccessible. The Advocate also heard that most shelters are already at 100% capacity. Many felt safer in encampments despite the risks.
- 3. Encampments are survival spaces when better options are not available.** People living in encampments reported that they believe their encampment is the best option available to them.

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<sup>1</sup> Adequate housing has been defined in international law and is understood to include: security, affordability, habitability, accessibility, the provision of basic service, be in a location in proximity to social services and be culturally appropriate. For more info: [Housing as a human right | Canadian Human Rights Commission](#)

- 4. Extreme weather increases the risks for people experiencing homelessness.** While most municipalities are getting better at planning and taking steps to mitigate the risks from cold weather in the winter, not enough is being done to understand and mitigate the health impacts on people experiencing homelessness of extreme weather during other seasons (e.g., heat, rain, wind, flooding).
- 5. Evictions, enforcement, and criminalization are causing greater harms.** Forced evictions scatter people, destroy survival tools, and deepen trauma. Participants described the insecurity they feel due to the constant threat of displacement and ongoing harassment. An enforcement approach makes it more difficult for people living in encampments to gain access to basic services, as many people are pushed further and further away from the organizations and services they regularly use.
- 6. Women and gender-diverse people face heightened risks.** Testimonies shared in all the communities highlighted the pervasive nature of gender-based violence and sexual assault in shelters, shelter hotels, and on the street.
- 7. There is a need for investment in more supports for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and for direct funding to Indigenous organizations for addressing Indigenous homelessness.** Governments need to recognize the specific context of Indigenous trauma and mistrust and respond appropriately.
- 8. The rhetoric that encampments are a public security hazard is undermining human dignity and puts people at risk.** Stigmatizing language and enforcement-first policies increase hostility towards unhoused people.
- 9. Community organizations are overstretched.** Mutual aid groups and service providers innovate to fill gaps, but they are under-resourced and increasingly face hostility from the public and municipal leaders.
- 10. Housing and health care are inseparable.** People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately represented in emergency rooms and health care facilities. They are sometimes denied life-saving care because of their situation. People discharged back into homelessness by hospitals are unlikely to get better. The absence of integrated care worsens mental and physical health outcomes, which can include amputations, overdoses, addictions, and suicides.
- 11. Federal and provincial funding is not adequate.** While the provided short-term relief, municipalities reported that resources fall far short of addressing the scale of the crisis. Municipalities need long-term financial commitments from higher levels of government that will allow them to plan and effectively coordinate the delivery of adequate housing with health care and other supports as needed.

## Summary of recommendations

The Advocate calls on all levels of government to:

1. Expand and sustain federal investments in human rights-based responses to encampments.
2. End forced encampment evictions and the criminalization of homelessness.
3. Stop using coercive methods that force people to choose between the harms of an eviction and inadequate housing.
4. Integrate housing and health care.
5. Put in place culturally specific and trauma-informed programs and supports for Indigenous people.
6. Address gender-based and systemic violence.
7. Put in place strategies and resources to respond to extreme weather year-round.
8. Protect and empower community organizations.
9. Ensure funding is provided to protect the right to adequate housing for refugee claimants.

## Background on the visit

From September 21 to 26, 2025, the Federal Housing Advocate visited the Region of Waterloo (including the cities of Cambridge and Kitchener) as well as London, Hamilton, and Toronto. After the visit, the Advocate followed up with several conversations with people who were unavailable to meet in person during the week.

This visit followed the release of the Advocate's February 2024 report, [\*Upholding Dignity and Human Rights: The Federal Housing Advocate's Review of Homeless Encampments\*](#), which made clear that encampments are one of the most urgent examples of Canada falling short of its obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill the human right to adequate housing. The 2024 report called on all governments to:

1. Act immediately to save lives
2. End forced evictions of encampments
3. Work together to ensure municipalities get the support they need
4. Respect the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples
5. Respect and uphold all human rights
6. Offer permanent housing options as soon as possible
7. Address the root causes of encampments

In particular, the Advocate's report urged the federal government to take a leadership role by unlocking new funding and coordinating the response to the human rights crisis of encampments.

Following that report, the federal government announced the Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiative (UHEI) in 2024 which earmarked **\$250 million** in new federal funding over two years for human rights-based encampment responses and which was to be matched by provinces, territories, and municipalities.

The Advocate's visit in Ontario provided an opportunity to see how this investment is being used on the ground and to hear directly from the people most affected. More specifically, the purpose of the visit was to:

- Meet with people living in encampments and hear directly about their realities.
- Engage with service providers, community organizations, and municipal leaders.
- Assess how federal funding under the UHEI is contributing to human rights-based approaches and meaningful engagement with encampment residents on the ground.
- Understand the human rights implications of local encampment responses.

To support government action based on her recommendations, the Advocate has also published additional reports and tools to deepen their understanding of human rights-based approaches to encampments and their capacity to apply them. These include:

- [Encampments and Legal Obligations: Evolving Rights and Relationships](#)
- [Guide to Meaningful Engagement and Integrating a Human Rights-Based Approach into Encampment Responses](#)

# The Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiative

The federal [Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiative](#) (UHEI) was designed as a short-term (two-year) relief to allow municipalities to innovate in applying a human rights-based approach to encampments. In Ontario, funding was matched by the municipalities who received it, including the Region of Waterloo, London, Hamilton, and Toronto.

From the beginning, it was evident that the 250 million federal dollars allocated would barely scratch the surface of the funds needed to address encampments. The Advocate was also concerned about the lack of consultation with Indigenous governments in the design of the UHEI and the lack of clear targets for how the funds should benefit First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people experiencing homelessness. Nevertheless, the Advocate welcomed the initiative as a first step towards addressing this urgent issue and transforming encampment responses from enforcement first to a human rights-based approach.

## Results of funding community encampment response plans

The Advocate heard that Waterloo Region, London, Hamilton, and Toronto have taken steps to integrate some elements of a human rights-based approach into their local encampment responses. However, the Advocate remains concerned about the lack of meaningful engagement with people living in encampments and Indigenous people as well as the continued use of enforcement approaches and ongoing forced evictions.

In Waterloo Region, the funding supported efforts to increase outreach capacity and rehousing services for people living in encampments. However, local officials emphasized that the two-year timeframe and the lack of sustained operating funds prevented systemic change. The Advocate heard that the situation in Waterloo Region was also complicated by the difficulty in getting sub-regional municipal governments to follow regional direction. For instance, she heard that Cambridge was evicting encampment residents without notifying the Region.

London used funding from the initiative to strengthen its Whole of Community System Response, which included temporary housing pods and expanded partnerships. Yet women's and Indigenous organizations noted persistent underfunding and a lack of gender-responsive supports.

Hamilton directed part of its UHEI funds to the construction of an outdoor shelter site in the Barton/Tiffany area and to Indigenous-led initiatives through its advisory committee. However, the City's return to an enforcement approach to encampments, which was justified in part on

the basis that the new units at Barton/Tiffany made encampments unnecessary, has eroded public trust.

In Toronto, \$25 million in UHEI funds helped expand the city's Enhanced Outreach Model at sites such as Dufferin Grove, with 20% of funds allocated to Indigenous partners. The Advocate heard that the funds were mostly allocated to initiatives in the urban core and that there was not enough to benefit people living in encampments in more distant parts of the city.

### Lessons learned: Limited resources and limited timeframe

The Advocate heard from the municipal leaders that resources fell far short of addressing the scale of the crisis. Municipalities expressed the need for long-term financial commitments that would allow them to plan and effectively coordinate the delivery of adequate housing with health care and other supports as needed.

While the program was rolled out quickly to address the urgency of the crisis, this impeded the ability of municipalities to innovate and make more strategic use of the funds by leveraging other dollars from the federal Reaching Home program or provincial sources. Community organizations expressed frustration that they were not engaged enough in the design of the community-based encampment response plans and that the UHEI represented a missed opportunity.

Municipalities reported that they were able to use UHEI funding to rehouse some people, but the two-year duration of the program with no expectation of renewal means that municipalities are not able to sustain operations or get at systemic issues. Ongoing sustainable funding is needed. There is also a need for coordinated provincial and territorial funding for health care supports and greater and more concerted efforts from all levels of government to stem the inflow into homelessness.

Overall, while the UHEI has enabled important first steps in human rights-based approaches and planning, the Advocate found that its short duration and insufficient funding limited municipalities' ability to sustain progress or address the structural causes of homelessness.

The Advocate's clear conclusion is that dedicated funding for human rights-based responses to encampments must not end as a one-off pilot. The urgency that prompted the UHEI's creation still exists—and, in most places, has deepened. Without continuity, municipalities are forced back into crisis-driven, enforcement-based approaches that violate human rights and waste public resources.

## Broad themes that emerged during the visit

*“The illusion that people are being housed is false. Homelessness has doubled—people are just scattered, harder to find, and at greater risk.”*

### 1. Breakdowns in multiple systems are driving increased homelessness and making adequate housing unavailable or very difficult to obtain

#### *Homelessness on the rise*

People experiencing homelessness and living in encampments told the Advocate that their goal is to move into adequate housing, which means housing that is safe and secure, habitable, in their community and near to the services and supports they need, accessible, affordable, and culturally appropriate.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has reported that more than 80,000 people are experiencing homelessness in the province. Data from the most recent point-in-time (PiT) counts, shared by people with whom the Advocate met, showed that the number of people experiencing homelessness is increasing in the municipalities the Advocate visited. A disproportionate number of those experiencing homelessness are Indigenous. Community organizations reported seeing a dramatic increase in the number of seniors experiencing homelessness. Concerns were expressed as well about the increasing number of newcomers and refugee claimants experiencing homelessness. The intersectional impacts of homelessness, gender-based discrimination, and racism are also felt more severely by women, racialized people, gender-diverse people, and people with disabilities.

#### *Systemic barriers*

The people the Advocate spoke with highlighted the many barriers they face, including the high price of rent, the burden of needing to secure first and last month’s rent, and the length of waiting lists and the bureaucratic hurdles involved in program eligibility. In Hamilton, people can wait years to even get on the waiting list for social housing, given the backlog in processing applications. Actually getting access to social housing can then take over a decade due to the lack of available units.

Community organizations expressed frustrations with the bureaucratic barriers put in place for people to access benefits from Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. Even when efforts are successful, the amounts provided are insufficient to pay rent in the private market.

There are also huge disconnects between the systems designed to respond to homelessness and other related systems. The Advocate heard about three significant pipelines into homelessness:

- **The child welfare system:** At 20, young adults age out of care and are expected to be self-sufficient, yet many of those leaving care lack the life skills and support networks they need, and many continue to experience trauma.
- **Discharges from hospital:** Pressures in the health care system are pushing hospitals to discharge people early. There is lots of evidence that this leads to discharges into homelessness. People can also lose their housing during their hospital stays. People in addiction treatment programs often have no proper housing upon completing their program. Without adequate housing available after treatment, they too often return to the environment that supported their addiction, which can include the risks involved in trying to survive on the street.
- **The judicial system:** Upon release, former inmates lack resources to transition to adequate housing. Often, they lose their housing while incarcerated. The Advocate also heard how some inmates receive outdated lists of services when they are discharged.

### *Coercion to accept inadequate housing*

People also spoke about the lack of options they were offered. Often, when their name came up on the waiting list, people were told they must take what is available (even if it is far away or uninhabitable) or they will be removed from the list altogether. There is pressure on people to accept whatever is offered to get them out of an encampment, even if a building may be unsafe, be infested with bed bugs, have units without doors, or be miles away from the person's social networks and community supports. Some units may also come with conditions that are too strict, such as forbidding guests, which makes it harder for parents to reunite with their children. As one outreach worker put it: "People from the street are offered housing from a small subset of the worst buildings." The Advocate also heard that single mothers with children can be evicted from a shelter if they do not follow their housing plan. Housing offers for people in encampments are often accompanied by threats of a forced eviction unless the offer is accepted within a very short time. Once an offer is accepted, people are locked into a new situation that does not meet their needs and sets them up for failure.

### *The need for human rights-compliant supportive housing*

While not everyone will need intensive supports, many of the people currently living in encampments will need supportive housing if they are to be rehoused. The types and duration of supports will vary based on individual needs, with some people needing only minimal support and others requiring intensive support for the rest of their lives.

During her visit, the Advocate heard that there is a huge gap between the need for supportive housing and the number of units available. She also heard about the challenge providers face in accessing operating funds to offer the needed supports and services. This is because funds to build housing come from housing budgets, while the funds for the supports come from the health care and social services budgets. The Advocate heard about projects that are ready to be built, but where there is no funding to hire the necessary staff. The Advocate also heard concerns that the province may be considering a move to download responsibility for supportive housing to the municipal level without proper resources or consultation.

The Advocate heard that the problem is exacerbated in municipalities where the local government is reluctant to build the supportive housing units people need because they hope that people who experience homelessness will leave and become somebody else's problem.

The Advocate also heard about the need for a human rights-compliant standard for supportive housing. She visited and heard about several excellent models that embody a human rights-based approach. She also heard about models that follow a more carceral model, where the support may only be a security guard, and models where support staff are not available 24/7. Some organizations subject residents to a program agreement with very strict rules rather than granting them leases with the same occupancy rights as any other tenant, including security of tenure.

#### **Example: Dunn House — Toronto**

While in Toronto, the Advocate visited Dunn House, a permanent supportive housing development operated in partnership with health care providers. The innovative model, co-financed by all levels of government and the University Health Network, offers housing within a human rights-based approach that includes on-site health care as well as assistance to navigate social services. Of critical importance, residents have a lease which guarantees security of tenure. The costs are affordable, and the building and services were designed to ensure accessibility, availability of services, and cultural adequacy.

One resident reflected, "Dunn House allowed me to become me for the first time."

The model highlights a promising approach that could be scaled up through Build Canada Homes and the next National Housing Strategy.

### *The need for more action to prevent homelessness*

It is becoming more difficult to find adequate housing, because governments have also not addressed the systemic factors driving inflows into homelessness. Supply-side factors include the rapid loss of affordable rental housing, due in part to financialization and the lack of investments in non-market and social housing. Another systemic factor is breakdowns in social systems, such as income security, physical and mental health care, and the child welfare and criminal justice systems, in addition to persistent racism and discrimination.

## 2. Emergency shelters do not provide adequate housing or represent a long-term solution

### *Safety concerns*

People living in encampments and advocates consistently reported that many or most shelters are unsafe, overcrowded, and inaccessible. Most felt safer in encampments despite the risks of living outdoors. Even when people want to access a shelter, there are not enough shelter beds available, and the spaces available may not be accessible for someone with a pet, someone with a disability or someone who is in a couple or has a family.

Most of the people we spoke to who were living in encampments had experience living in shelters and emergency hotels or motels. They shared their experiences of being victims of violence, including sexual violence, and theft. One person recounted a sexual assault and their fear of encountering the perpetrator, who was out on bail, in the shelter. Because of their traumatic experiences in the shelter system, they felt safer in an encampment. People shared that they feel that the security measures in place in shelters are there only to protect the shelter workers.

People living in encampments, service providers, and advocates also expressed fears that sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking are sometimes used to justify encampment evictions. They stressed evictions only make people more vulnerable. And, as the Advocate pointed out, you do not evict everyone in an apartment building if a crime is committed in the building.

### *The lack of spaces when they are needed*

In addition to concerns about violence, the people the Advocate spoke with highlighted the insecurity of never being sure if they would get a shelter bed. The Advocate heard that most shelters are at 100% capacity. In many cases, there are long lineups to get in each evening. The people working for community organizations expressed their frustrations at the difficulties in trying to find shelter beds for people in need. Despite the claim that “the first door is the right

door,” there is still a lack of coordination and communication when it comes to finding shelter beds.

Concerns were also expressed that people can be restricted from shelters for breaking the rules and that these decisions are often taken by people who are not trained in trauma-informed approaches nor equipped to understand and respond to the mental health disabilities of people frequenting shelters.

Even when they are available, most shelters force people out during the day, creating an additional burden on people who need to carry their possessions with them and find places where they are allowed to stay during the day.

### 3. Encampments are survival spaces when better options are not available

#### *The best available option*

People living in encampments reported that they believe their encampment is the best option available to them. While they recognize the dangers and would prefer to have adequate housing, they believe their encampment provides more safety given their personal circumstances.

People also highlighted that most encampments provide a greater sense of community and more mutual support than shelter spaces. Encampments also offer a space to take some shelter from heat, rain, or cold during the day.

Community organizations stressed that an advantage of encampments is that they make it easier to locate people to provide services. The Advocate heard stories of people losing opportunities for permanent housing because they could not be found when their turn came up. Health care providers raised the importance of knowing where to look for people to offer primary health care or follow up on treatments and prescriptions. Outreach workers expressed concerns about the difficulty of finding people who were forced to move.

While encampments are not a solution to homelessness, the Advocate heard how they can provide a degree of stability, which can be an important step towards adequate housing. For example, a number of people shared stories of being able to hold down a job while living in an encampment, until the encampment was cleared and they were forced to move into a more remote area of the municipality.

The Advocate is concerned that in some municipalities, “Housing First” is being weaponized to justify encampment clearances. Everyone agrees that an encampment is not adequate housing. However, the risks of living in a tent do not justify removing a person when municipalities do not have the housing or the supports to provide a better option to meet that person’s needs.

### *The need for urgent action to meet basic needs*

While encampments provide a survival space, governments are not doing enough to meet essential needs and to respect the basic human dignity of people living in encampments. While volunteers and community organizations provide help, there is not enough access to nutritious food. Access to toilets, drinking water, showers, laundry, and phone charging facilities is often left to the good will of the municipality or community organizations. These services are often only available during the week during business hours. Toilet paper and handwashing stations are rarely offered at all.

## 4. Extreme weather increases the risks for people experiencing homelessness

The Advocate also heard about the increased risk to people experiencing homelessness caused by extreme weather, like the heatwaves experienced in Southern Ontario this summer. While most municipalities are getting better at planning for cold weather in the winter and taking steps to mitigate the risks, not enough is being done to understand and mitigate the health impacts of heat on people experiencing homelessness. Similarly, municipalities need to consider the increasing frequency of other forms of extreme weather, including rain, wind, and flooding.

A recent report from the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless documented that, “People experiencing homelessness are at a heightened risk of developing heat-related illnesses due to constant exposure to harsh environmental conditions, as they are forced to spend prolonged periods of time in direct sunlight and on overheated concrete.”<sup>2</sup> Because of their lack of shelter, people experiencing homelessness face more exposure to extreme heat and have only limited access to showers and toilets. Bylaws and restrictive policies that deny access to public space, water fountains, and other services interfere with them being able to hydrate, rest, or find shade.

## 5. Evictions, enforcement and criminalization are causing greater harms

*“The city just wants us gone. We are treated like outlaws—always running for safety.”*

### *Forced evictions make it more difficult to survive and find housing*

Forced evictions scatter people, destroy survival tools, and deepen trauma. Participants described the insecurity they feel due to the constant threat of displacement and ongoing harassment. Enforcement makes it more difficult for people living in encampments to gain access to basic services, as many people get pushed further away from the organizations and services they regularly use to access hygiene, heating, cooling, and nourishment. People are

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<sup>2</sup> FEANTSA, Heatwaves: The Impact on People Experiencing Homelessness, June 2025.  
[https://www.feantsaresearch.org/public/user/Resources/Feantsa\\_Heat\\_Waves\\_Final.pdf](https://www.feantsaresearch.org/public/user/Resources/Feantsa_Heat_Waves_Final.pdf)

setting up their tents in places that emergency medical services cannot reach, which heightens their health risks considerably. Encampment evictions during extreme weather events may risk even worse consequences for the health and well-being of people living in encampments.

### *Criminalization and experiences of harassment*

The constant presence of bylaw officers, private security, and police is intimidating and creates insecurity. There are ongoing threats of arrest and fines for people trying to survive in public spaces. These fines become an additional barrier when they must be paid before someone can get into housing. One person with lived experience stated, “It is illegal to be homeless.”

Increased enforcement combined with a lack of access to supports creates opportunities for criminal elements to exploit people experiencing homelessness. When people’s basic needs for survival are not met, they become more vulnerable to drug and sex traffickers.

People experiencing homelessness expressed that they feel dehumanized when law enforcement is focused on displacing them but fails to act when they are victims of violence and criminal behaviour. They felt that police were not doing enough to address sexual predators and traffickers who take advantage of the vulnerability of people experiencing homelessness.

The Advocate also heard concerning reports that local authorities were denying access to advocates and media during encampment evictions. There were stories of people being prevented from providing water or offering other forms of support during encampment clearances. Advocates who tried to offer help reported that they were threatened with arrest for interfering with an active investigation.

### *Violence and enforcement are undermining trust*

The Advocate also heard disturbing reports of violent and inhumane tactics used during evictions, including an eviction of a senior woman in the middle of the night and the use of dogs to find people who are trying to stay out of sight in the woods. She also heard reports of increased surveillance and targeting of people who frequent encampments.

People living in encampments and community organizations expressed frustration at the disconnect when municipalities are funding outreach workers to offer services, but bylaw officers are continuing to evict encampments. The Advocate heard that people living in encampments lose trust in municipal outreach workers if they are perceived to work closely with bylaw officers or police.

### *Crackdowns on safe injection sites reduce safety for people on the street*

The Advocate heard the reaction to new provincial legislation that is closing or threatening the continued operation of safe injection sites. Combined with encampment evictions forcing

people to consume in more remote areas, local advocates are concerned about the increased risk of overdoses and deaths. Harm reduction workers reported experiencing increased police harassment, particularly when they are in possession of naloxone or other harm-reduction supplies.

## 6. Women and gender-diverse people face heightened risks

Testimonies shared in all the communities highlighted the pervasive nature of gender-based violence and sexual assault in shelters, shelter hotels, and on the street. Many of the people the Advocate met with described experiences of sexual assault and exploitation that they or someone close to them had experienced. She also heard reports of women going missing.

These dangers are exacerbated by the shortage of shelter beds and drop-in centres for women and gender-diverse people in the communities visited. This is made worse when women have to line up to get into the shelters that do exist, where they are often confronted by sexual predators.

Because of the risk of violence and theft, women living outdoors shared that they need to have someone with them and that they sleep in shifts to be safer. Others said that they or people they know were expected to exchange sex for a safe place to sleep.

## 7. There is a need for investment in more supports for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people and for direct funding to Indigenous organizations for addressing Indigenous homelessness.

Governments need to recognize the specific context of Indigenous trauma and mistrust and respond appropriately. Indigenous youth, for example, are reluctant to go to shelters and often prefer encampments. The Advocate heard that there is not enough meaningful engagement with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. While many people need low-barrier shelters, some Indigenous people also need spaces free of drugs and alcohol to facilitate recovery from addictions. The Advocate heard about the lack of culturally relevant and trauma-informed supports for Indigenous people. These culturally relevant supports should include emergency shelters, transitional shelters, Indigenous outreach workers, and programs that help Indigenous people connect to their culture. The Advocate also heard about the challenges many Indigenous people experiencing homelessness face when their ID is stolen and they lose their status card.

## 8. The rhetoric of public security is undermining human dignity and puts people at risk

*“We don’t deserve to be criminalized or lose our dignity just for being poor.”*

As in the rest of the country, the issues of homelessness and encampments are polarizing in the communities the Advocate visited. Local advocates talked about “compassion fatigue” and an increase in rhetoric from political leaders that prioritizes the safety and security concerns of people who are housed at the expense of people experiencing homelessness. The housed public is saying they do not feel safe, but there is a huge difference between **being** unsafe and **feeling** unsafe. People in encampments are in a daily struggle for survival, and public perceptions about their safety are being weaponized to justify the criminalization of poverty and homelessness.

Public security discourse is often accompanied by stigmatizing language that paints all people living in encampments as thieves, violent, and drug users. This discourse blames the people involved instead of the systemic causes and government neglect that have contributed to the problem. This type of language increases public hostility towards unhoused people and is used to justify enforcement-first approaches. It often leads to increased investment in policing without addressing the underlying causes of homelessness and encampments.

Community organizations are also concerned that mayors and municipal councils are exclusively listening to local business associations and failing to consult them. Some community organizations shared experiences of being targeted during council meetings as a result of their advocacy for people living in encampments.

The Advocate also heard concerns about the politicization of funding and new provincial legislation in Ontario that is encouraging municipalities to back away from a human rights-based response to encampments. The Advocate heard that:

- [Bill 6, Safer Municipalities Act, 2025](#), is emboldening some municipalities to take more of an enforcement approach to encampments.
- [Bill 10, Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act, 2025](#), has made it more difficult to provide harm reduction services that many people living in encampments and supportive housing need.
- [Bill 25, Emergency Management Modernization Act, 2025](#), would allow the Minister of Community and Children’s Services to force an agency that receives provincial funding to adopt even stricter approaches to enforcement responses to encampments.

## 9. Community organizations are overstretched and facing severe challenges

The Advocate heard many examples of mutual aid groups and service providers innovating to fill gaps and develop effective tools and strategies, but these groups are under-resourced. In many cases, volunteers are putting their own money into tents, food, and heating options in addition to offering their time. Unfortunately, community advocates are increasingly facing hostility from the public and municipal leaders. This hostility and the breakdown in trust get in the way of more effective and efficient collaboration.

Housing outreach workers from community organizations and municipalities are facing increasing frustrations as, despite their best efforts, there just is not housing available, and the physical and mental health supports and other services people need are lacking. For example, in the absence of mental health care, housing outreach workers are often the ones who bear the burden of their client's distress without appropriate tools, resources, or training.

## 10. Housing and health care are inseparable

People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately represented in emergency rooms and health care facilities. People discharged back into homelessness by hospitals are unlikely to get better. The absence of integrated care worsens mental and physical health outcomes, often leading to amputations, overdoses, addictions, and suicides.

The Advocate also heard that some people are denied life-saving health care, like surgery or chemotherapy, because they do not have a permanent residence where they can prepare for, or recover from, these procedures.

Researchers also talked about the need to use health care data to identify trends and track homelessness, particularly in communities (including Indigenous communities) that do not have the resources to do point-in-time counts or use Reaching Home's Homeless Individuals & Families Information System (HIFIS) system.

The Advocate was encouraged to learn about two effective models for integrating housing and health care supports. The Greater Hamilton Health Network and its hospital partners work with The Hub to ensure that there is a warm space for people when they are discharged. While this falls short of offering adequate housing, it ensures that discharged patients have shelter and access to follow up medical care. The second model is Dunn House in Toronto, which provides integrated housing with on-site medical care and other supports. Residents have their own units with a lease, and there is a nurse on-site as well as other services.

## 11. Federal and provincial funding is inadequate

There was a clear and consistent message in all the municipalities visited that provincial and federal funds are insufficient to address the scale of the challenge. The lack of funds is compounded by jurisdictional disputes, bureaucratic silos, and the short-term nature of most project funding. In particular, as highlighted earlier, funding for housing is not coordinated with the operating funds required for staffing, health care, and other social supports. This leads to significant additional work and delays and can result in projects that are ready to be built being unable to proceed because the operating funds are not confirmed. People advocating for supportive housing called for a new approach that ensures that providers can plan for the long-term and build programs that will last.

The announcement of Build Canada Homes provides some optimism, but people are waiting to see what it will look like in practice.

Concerns were expressed about the potential end of some federal funds and programs:

- People expressed concerns that potential funding cuts at the Department of Women and Gender Equality would have negative impacts on women and gender-diverse and racialized people experiencing homelessness.
- While funding for the Reaching Home program has been extended to March 2028, there is uncertainty after that, which complicates the ability of municipalities and community organizations to plan and retain staff.
- Most of the programs in the National Housing Strategy are coming to an end in fiscal year 2027–2028. In addition to the need for targeted funds for people experiencing homelessness, everyone the Advocate met felt there was an urgent need to create more affordable housing and preserve the affordability of current housing. The Ontario Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing shared that the federal government should put in place the next iteration of the National Housing Strategy as quickly as possible to facilitate strategic investments and avoid housing programs falling off a fiscal cliff when these investments end.

## Community focus

The Advocate's exposure to each municipality's context was limited by time and by the people she was able to meet, making it difficult to paint a complete picture of the situation in each community. Nonetheless, the discussions brought to the surface some distinct issues and challenges in each community that are worth highlighting. The issues raised below emerged during her in-person discussions during the trip and a number of follow-up conversations, including during the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Annual Conference from October 28 to 30, 2025.

### What we heard in Waterloo Region

Waterloo Region consists of three cities and four townships. The Advocate visited the two cities with the largest populations: Cambridge and Kitchener. Following the Advocate's visit in person, a virtual meeting was organized between the Advocate's staff and staff from Waterloo Region who have responsibilities in the areas of housing and homelessness.

Within the region, homelessness services are concentrated in Kitchener for historic and socio-economic reasons. Nevertheless, homelessness is increasing throughout the region. While it is the Region that receives federal homelessness funding, the cities retain powers to determine housing development through bylaw and zoning and their own response to encampments.

### What we heard in Cambridge

The Advocate visited Cambridge in the morning on September 22, 2025. She participated in a roundtable with advocates and local community organizations that provide services to people living in encampments and then met separately with some city councillors.

The visit provided an opportunity to follow up the letter the Advocate sent to the Mayor and Cambridge city council on July 4, 2025, in response to eviction notices posted at an encampment in the city in late June.

The visit also took place the day before the council was to debate a motion to study the issue of encampment evictions during extreme weather events.

#### *Encampments and displacement*

Encampments in Cambridge are often small and scattered, but people living in encampments face constant threats of displacement. Service providers reported some people were displaced multiple times in a single summer. Participants described Cambridge as a "service desert"

compared to neighbouring Kitchener, with outreach teams struggling to help people meet their basic needs.

Participants described forced moves during extreme weather as particularly cruel. Insights from Cambridge painted a picture of a community where homelessness is deepening amid active hostility from some municipal leaders, limited services, and systemic barriers to building supportive housing.

### *Extreme weather motion and council politics*

A central issue during the visit was a motion before Cambridge city council to study the possibility of halting encampment evictions during extreme weather events. Councillors Scott Hamilton and Ross Earnshaw introduced the motion following the Advocate's letter in July, citing human rights obligations and the risks posed by climate change. Despite strong delegations from concerned citizens, academics, and service providers, the motion to study the issue was defeated 6-3.

The Advocate is also concerned about the characterization, repeated during the council meeting, that she was provided misinformation about encampment evictions that were proposed to take place during a heatwave.

Prior to sending her letter to Cambridge council, the Advocate was informed that eviction notices had been posted at an encampment on June 20, and police and bylaw showed up to enforce the evictions on June 24.

She learned subsequently that eviction notices were posted again on July 16, and bylaw and police showed up on the same.

This sequence of events has not been contradicted by the City of Cambridge. The fact that the evictions may not have taken place does not fundamentally alter the nature of the Advocate's concerns. During the council meeting, the City mentioned that it had an informal policy in place to not evict during extreme weather. However, this does not explain the timing of the trespass notices, and concerns remain about accountability and transparency in the implementation of policies.

### *Hostility and harassment*

The Advocate heard that people living in encampments and local service providers feel they are not being listened to when they express their needs or share solutions that can help to reduce homelessness and suffering in the community.

Participants reported that some city officials have engaged in open hostility towards community service providers and advocates. Outreach workers described being harassed during evictions,

while encampment residents reported acts of vigilante surveillance and even arson targeting encampment sites.

During the Advocate's visit, some people stressed that local Cambridge bylaws block outreach teams from the Region from establishing mobile health services, and people experiencing homelessness are left exposed to dangerous weather without adequate rest or recovery spaces.

## What we heard in Kitchener

In the afternoon on September 22, 2025, the Advocate met with community organizations, service providers, lived experts, and advocates in Kitchener to hear about the realities of unsheltered homelessness and local encampment responses. She participated in a roundtable with advocates and local community organizations that provide services to people living in encampments.

Participants emphasized that the point-in-time counts from 2021 and 2024 demonstrate that unsheltered homelessness more than doubled in recent years, driven by rising rents, inadequate income supports, and system failures in housing and health care. Service providers reported escalating levels of sexual violence and trafficking in motels and encampments. Women, men, and gender-diverse individuals described being coerced, assaulted, or targeted while staying in temporary shelters or motels funded by the Region. When this was raised with staff from the Region, they said they are aware of the issue and taking steps to increase safety.

### *Litigation undermining trust*

The visit provided an opportunity for the Advocate to visit the encampment at 100 Victoria Street North in Kitchener. This followed the [open letter she sent to the regional council on July 16, 2025](#), about efforts by the Region to evict the encampment to make way for the construction of a new transit hub.

On January 27, 2023, Justice Michael Valente ruled the Region of Waterloo's attempts to clear the 100 Victoria encampment were a violation of residents' Charter rights. Two years later, in April 2025, regional council passed a site-specific bylaw to allow the region to clear the lot, which it says is needed for a new transit hub that will be built nearby. On June 6, 2025, Waterloo Region Community Legal Services filed a motion seeking an injunction to prevent the eviction.

The Advocate also provided an affidavit in the case based on her report and recommendations on homeless encampments, *Upholding Dignity and Human Rights*, which was published in 2024.

Participants in the roundtable criticized the Region for litigating against people experiencing homelessness who are simply defending their rights. They also expressed concerns about the

lack of public consultation before the regional council adopted a bylaw to make people living at 100 Victoria move. No information was provided to residents in advance, and heavy equipment was deployed to the encampment without explanation on the same day the bylaw was passed. The Advocate has repeatedly called for meaningful engagement with people living in encampments to find long-term, rights-compliant housing solutions. The lack of meaningful engagement in this case undermined trust.

The Advocate was pleased to learn, following her visit, that the Region has agreed to mediation with the people living at 100 Victoria. The Advocate urges all parties to ensure they work towards an agreement that respects human rights and aligns with the recommendations and guidance in the Advocate's reports.

### *The situation at 100 Vic*

The Advocate had an opportunity to speak with a number of residents and see the site for herself. Everyone she spoke to expressed a desire to move into adequate housing, but they felt the encampment was the best option available to them at the moment. They also shared their experiences of theft, violence, and exploitation in the shelter system.

Since the litigation was launched, residents reported that they were feeling increased insecurity due to the risk of being evicted.

Efforts by the Region to meet the basic needs of people in the encampment were felt to be inadequate. The people living in the encampment felt they were not consulted and had little influence over how and when the services they were able to receive were delivered. There was not enough access to drinking water, particularly during heatwaves, and the two port-a-potties on site lacked toilet paper and were not maintained frequently enough. While the Region provided dumpsters, it was done without consultation or warning, and they were placed in such a way that they disrupted life in the camp. Residents of the encampment also share their frustration that the 24-hour security guards are there to control them rather than keep them safe. They noted numerous incidents of people driving by and throwing rocks at the encampment and hurling insults without any action from the security guards.

The encampment residents were relying mostly on local community organizations and volunteers to meet their day-to-day needs for nourishment, drinking water, access to showers, and solidarity.

## What we heard in London

On September 23, 2025, the Advocate participated in a roundtable with members of All Our Sisters, a grassroots organization that advocates for gender-based approaches to homelessness. The discussions revealed how women, Indigenous people, seniors, and marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by homelessness and encampments. The Advocate heard that London's housing crisis is driven by unaffordable rents, the financialization of housing, and a breakdown in social supports. Earlier in the day, the Advocate met with researchers at the University of Western Ontario's Faculty of Nursing who shared their research on some of the systemic drivers of homelessness and encampments in Canada.

### *Gendered violence and vulnerability*

Participants in the roundtable emphasized that encampments, while precarious, often provide greater safety than shelters. Women described the constant threat of assault, theft, and exploitation in emergency shelters, leading many to sleep outside despite the risks.

Others noted that shelters often separate families, prohibit pets, or lack accessible spaces, forcing people back into encampments or unsafe arrangements.

The meeting heard powerful testimony about the pervasive risks faced by women and gender-diverse people:

- Many reported being sold into prostitution or going missing.
- Survey results from Take Back the Night showed that every woman surveyed had been assaulted and only 34% reported the sexual assault.
- Women in encampments said they had to sleep in shifts, always ensuring someone stayed awake to guard against predators.

These experiences underscore how homelessness magnifies exposure to gender-based violence, exploitation, and stigma.

## What we heard in Hamilton

On September 24, 2025, the Advocate visited Hamilton to meet with people living in encampments, community groups, and local politicians. She participated in two roundtables that brought together community organizations and people with lived experience. She also met with the mayor and a member of city council.

The encampment landscape in Hamilton is contentious, following the city council's decision in January to rescind its encampment protocol on March 6, 2025. This protocol was introduced in 2023 and allowed temporary shelters in the city's parks in groups of no more than five.

The Advocate wrote to the Mayor of Hamilton and city council on March 4, 2025, to share her concerns and urge the city to adopt a human rights-based approach in its encampment responses.

During the roundtables that took place during the Advocate's visit, unhoused people and advocates shared concerns about an enforcement-first approach, ongoing evictions, and increasing levels of distrust between the City and community organizations that advocate for the human rights of encampment residents.

### *Encampments and enforcement*

Community members described an ongoing cycle of eviction since the encampment protocol was rescinded. Bylaw and police officers were reported to use divide-and-conquer tactics, forcing people from one encampment into another, only to declare the new site "non-compliant" and enforce removals, even though the new site may have been suggested by police or bylaw. One person described the new approach as "enforcement first, housing second."

A number of people expressed concerns about the increased policing costs that accompanied the new approach.

The Advocate also heard that the shift towards enforcement has been accompanied by greater hostility from municipal officials towards community advocates.

- A council motion proposed penalizing community organizations that supported Charter challenges against the city.
- Service providers face surveillance, intimidation, and threats of funding cuts.
- Outreach workers reported being harassed during evictions.

She heard that the timing of municipal actions and decisions around the Charter rights case have been perceived as forms of retaliation, and this has eroded trust in the possibility for meaningful engagement.

### *Gender-based violence and exploitation*

Community groups highlighted the devastating impacts of gender-based violence and trafficking in encampments and shelters. The YWCA's gender-based safety audit confirmed that women are at heightened risk of sexual exploitation and coercion.

Advocates warned against rhetoric framing encampment evictions as a measure to “rescue women.” As one participant cautioned: “We must be careful—trafficking is being used as an excuse to evict, not to protect.”

### *Community innovation*

Hamilton's community organizations have created innovative, rights-based solutions, such as The Hub's work with the Greater Hamilton Health Network, which combines medical, justice, and low-barrier services.

The Hub and other community-led models were highlighted as low-cost, effective alternatives, but they remain precariously funded.

## What we heard in Toronto

On September 25–26, 2025, the Advocate visited Toronto and met with community organizations, city officials, oversight bodies, councillors, and people living or who had lived in encampments. The discussions focused heavily on enforcement of the city's Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments (IDP), the clearance of the Dufferin Grove encampment, and funding concerns regarding the Interim Housing Assistance Program for refugee claimants administered by the federal department Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

### *Interdivisional Protocol and ongoing enforcement*

Toronto city council adopted the IDP in June 2024. The IDP marked a step forward for the city, as it enumerated a number of human rights-based principles to guide encampment responses, including dignity and respect, participation, and Indigenous-led responses. According to the city's figures, it was able to house 259 people living outdoors in the first eight months of the year.

At the time of the IDP's adoption, the Advocate welcomed the new approach but expressed her concern that the IDP still permitted forced evictions. During the Advocate's visit to Toronto, the city proceeded with the eviction of a long-standing encampment at Dufferin Grove. In addition to this large-scale eviction of an encampment that had benefited from the city's enhanced engagement process over many months, the Advocate heard about an ongoing cycle of evictions and clearances of smaller encampments, often affecting a single person and a tent. People with experience on the street reported that they are constantly being forced to move,

which creates greater stress and hardship. Rarely, when forced to move, are they offered a bed or a safe space to go. As in other cities, these enforcement measures are forcing people into more remote areas and are often accompanied by the seizure of belongings that people need to survive.

### *Dufferin Grove clearance and the politicization of the issue*

The experience of Dufferin Grove underlines the complexity and challenge of encampment responses. Benefiting from enhanced outreach and engagement for eight months under the IDP, city outreach workers and others were able to rehouse eight people and move another 70 to shelters. At the time of the clearance, only nine people remained and all had been offered some form of shelter or housing, including access to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit.

The remaining people in the encampment made a series of demands to move into permanent adequate housing which the City deemed it was unable to meet before confirming the decision to clear the encampment. The City and some observers maintained that efforts to find a solution were complicated by the presence of advocates, who, they felt, were acting as intermediaries and had their own political agenda. Furthermore, the Advocate understands that pressure from the province was a factor in the decision.

For the Advocate, this impasse underlines the importance for both municipalities and local advocates to ensure their engagement with encampment residents is rooted in human rights principles and designed with their best interests in mind. Everyone has the right to understand their options before making a choice. As the Advocate heard elsewhere, increasing politicization and polarization of encampment issues get in the way of finding human rights-compliant solutions.

### *Funding gaps to shelter refugee claimants*

*“There is a \$100 million gap between what is needed and what was awarded. If the problem is not fixed, refugee claimants will end up in shelters or on the streets.”*

In Toronto, a number of advocates and the City raised serious concerns about a reduction in federal funding for Toronto under the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP), which is designed to help house refugee claimants. The Advocate heard about the negative impacts this decision will have on the right to adequate housing for refugee claimants in the city. Even with a decline in the number of new refugee claimants, she heard that the federal commitment will leave the city with a \$143.1 million shortfall—representing the loss of approximately 1,800 shelter beds. This decision places an unfair burden on the municipal government, which lacks the fiscal capacity to respond without adequate federal help.

The Advocate heard that a failure to bridge this funding gap will result in the City's already overburdened emergency shelter system being unable to meet the needs of refugee claimants, and it risks pushing refugee claimants into even more precarious forms of homelessness. The Advocate heard that these cuts are inconsistent with Canada's domestic and international legal obligations under the *National Housing Strategy Act* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. She also heard that reducing support for refugees' shelter constitutes a retrogressive measure that violates the government's obligation to pursue the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing for everyone in Canada.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The stories and experiences that were shared with the Advocate in Southern Ontario echo what she has heard in other parts of the country. They also underline that the recommendations in her 2024 report on homeless encampments in Canada remain just as valid today. There has not been enough government leadership and action since the report was released. Consequently, we are continuing to see encampments being set up in communities across the country. Disturbingly, the Advocate heard in Southern Ontario that the lack of leadership and action has created a void that is being filled by increasing politicization and polarization. This trend, if it continues, will make it harder to address the systemic issues and find human rights-compliant solutions.

Based on what she learned during her trip, the Advocate reiterates the calls from her February 2024 report that federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments must:

- Act immediately to save lives
- End forced evictions of encampments
- Work together to ensure municipalities get the support they need
- Respect the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Respect and uphold all human rights
- Offer permanent housing options as soon as possible
- Address the root causes of encampments

### Recommendations

Furthermore, the Advocate recommends that governments:

- 1. Expand and sustain federal investments in human rights-based responses to encampments**
  - a) Embed a human rights-based approach in all municipal, provincial, and federal responses to homelessness and encampments.
  - b) Meaningfully engage people living in encampments in decision-making, ensuring dignity, safety, and agency.
  - c) Municipalities, Indigenous organizations, and service providers need sustainable sources of funding to develop responses that are effective and that get at the systemic nature of the issue after the UHEI funding comes to an end in March 2026.
  - d) It is important to evaluate the UHEI and document lessons learned from the experience, including the results for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. The

evaluation should include the municipalities involved as well as people living in encampments, Indigenous governments and organizations, service providers, and advocates, and the results should inform future funding for municipalities and community organizations to respond to encampments.

The Advocate heard a number of suggestions that should be considered during the evaluation:

- It is important to ensure there is time for future Community Encampment Response Plans to be made and proposals developed following meaningful engagement with encampment residents, Indigenous governments and organizations, service providers, and advocates.
  - Dedicated resources for encampment responses should be aligned with broader community plans to address homelessness.
  - Dedicated funding should be provided to support Indigenous organizations, Indigenous outreach workers, and Indigenous-specific supports.
  - Resources should be made available (i.e., funds, technical guides, human rights experts) to build capacity to understand and implement a human rights-based approach.
- e)** Future federal housing initiatives, including Build Canada Homes and the next iteration of the National Housing Strategy, should be explicit about a human rights-based approach to housing. Programs should include expected results to reduce the flow of people into encampments as well as to support human rights-based pathways out of encampments.
- f)** Scale up supportive and non-market housing:
- Invest in deeply affordable, non-market housing and supportive housing partnerships and models, like Dunn House in Toronto, that break down traditional silos between housing and health care.
  - Provide health care carveouts to provinces and territories that are dedicated to supportive housing projects (existing and new) and to the physical and mental health needs of people experiencing homelessness.
  - Create acquisition funds to prevent mass renovictions and preserve existing affordable housing.

- g) Work closely with provinces, territories, and municipalities to coordinate human rights-based responses.

## **2. End forced encampment evictions and the criminalization of homelessness**

- a) All orders of government must prohibit the forced removal of encampments, particularly during extreme weather events.

Evictions are violations of human rights and exacerbate trauma, violence, and health risks. They are particularly dangerous during extreme weather, including both extreme heat and cold.

- b) Put an end to bylaws and regulations that criminalize and marginalize people experiencing homelessness for occupying public space. Put an end to practices which result in the destruction or confiscation of personal belongings.

Focus on meeting the needs of people rather than enforcement measures that make people living in encampments feel more insecure and can lead to a violation of their human rights, including the right to life.

## **3. Stop using coercive methods that force people to choose between the harms of an eviction and inadequate housing.**

- a) Offer people living in encampments a real choice of adequate housing or at minimum a clear path to get there.

This requires recognizing that emergency and transitional shelters are not an option for many due to accessibility or safety concerns.

## **4. Integrate housing and health care**

- a) Develop coordinated responses that ensure no one is discharged from hospitals, long-term care, or correctional facilities into homelessness.
- b) Provide on-site health supports within supportive housing.

## **5. Put in place culturally specific and trauma-informed programs and supports for Indigenous people**

- a) Invest in Indigenous-specific supports (emergency shelters, transitional shelters, outreach workers, supportive housing, and permanent housing) through Indigenous governments and organizations.
- b) Provide direct dedicated funding to support Indigenous healing (e.g., sweat lodges) in urban settings.

- c) Support Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in obtaining their status cards when they lose their identification.

**6. Address gender-based and systemic violence**

- a) Fund safe, women-led shelters and housing initiatives.
- b) Apply a gendered lens to encampment and homelessness responses.

**7. Put in place strategies and resources to respond to extreme weather year-round**

- a) The municipalities visited all developed extreme weather plans for the winter months, which often run from December to April. Given the increasing risk to people from heat and even rain at other times of the year, municipalities should study the impact of climate change on people experiencing homelessness and put in place appropriate responses. These studies should take into account that the standard for extreme weather for people who are unhoused will be very different than for people who are housed.

**8. Protect and empower community organizations**

- a) End retaliation and surveillance against service providers and advocates.
- b) Recognize mutual aid groups as essential partners, and fund their work directly.

**9. Ensure funding is provided to protect the right to adequate housing for refugee claimants**

- a) Ensure funding is provided to cover actual municipal costs and prevent forced homelessness, either through the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) or another mechanism.
- b) Recommit to dignified, safe, and adequate housing for refugee claimants, consistent with Canada's legal obligations.
- c) Work with provinces and municipalities to develop a sustainable, long-term national reception plan—including federally funded reception centres and scalable community partnerships.
- d) Adopt a rights-based funding approach: provide services first, settle jurisdictional and fiscal questions later, in line with Canada's human rights duties.