

Another Action Plan



Ottawa — City leaders have unveiled yet another bold new effort to “end homelessness.”

Apparently this time they really mean it.

Which is interesting, because over the last twenty years this city has produced enough action plans, strategic frameworks, leadership tables, collaborative initiatives, pilot programs, emergency responses, and vision statements to wallpaper every shelter in Ottawa twice over.

And yet here we are.

Still overflowing shelters.

Still impossible rents.

Still tent encampments.

Still people dying alone.

Still endless institutional discussions about homelessness that somehow continue happening without homeless people meaningfully included.

Ottawa keeps announcing solutions to homelessness while visibly failing to understand homelessness itself.

On April 10th the city held the Ottawa Health and Housing Symposium.

Conveniently, the public mostly learned about it after it happened.

No major public visibility beforehand.

No broad community engagement.

No meaningful opportunity for live public questioning.

No visible inclusion of the people most directly affected by the policies being discussed.

Just another closed-door gathering followed by a carefully packaged summary explaining what everyone decided on behalf of vulnerable people afterward.

That alone should make people uncomfortable.

If policies meant to reshape people's lives cannot withstand public scrutiny in real time, something is already wrong.

The city announced the creation of the new Health, Housing and Homelessness Action Table under the Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table.

Which sounds important.

Serious.

Urgent.

Official.

And because the word "action" was included, we are presumably supposed to believe this version will finally accomplish what decades of previous "action" tables somehow could not.

Like every strategy before it, the promises sound familiar.

Better collaboration.

Shared action plans.

Integrated systems.

Improved data sharing.

Better coordination between housing and healthcare.

Reduced pressure on emergency services.

More aligned funding.

Stronger partnerships.

The exact same language recycled so many times it has practically become municipal poetry.

Ottawa does not have a shortage of plans. It has a shortage of reality-based implementation informed by people actually living through the crisis.

The city claims integrated housing-health approaches are already improving outcomes.

Where?

Seriously.

Because nothing visible on the ground reflects that optimism.

Shelters remain overwhelmed.

Support systems remain fragmented.

Harm reduction services are actively being scaled back.

Waitlists remain catastrophic.

Frontline workers remain exhausted.

People continue cycling endlessly between shelters, hospitals, policing, treatment systems,

outreach services, temporary placements, evictions, and the street itself.

Data has never been the real problem. The problem is that institutions continue collecting information while refusing to surrender decision-making power to the people surviving the consequences.

And that brings us to the most revealing detail of all.

The action table includes healthcare organizations.

Housing organizations.

Community partners.

Leadership structures.

Administrative stakeholders.

System representatives.

Missing almost entirely from meaningful leadership positions?

People actively experiencing homelessness.

The actual experts.

The people navigating the failures being discussed every single day in real time.

Ottawa keeps designing systems for homeless people while refusing to let homeless people meaningfully lead the conversation.

That absence says more than the press release itself.

Because if lived experience was genuinely considered essential, it would not appear as occasional consultation after decisions are already drafted.

It would exist directly inside leadership.

Not tokenized.

Not symbolic.

Actual authority.

Actual influence.

Actual decision-making power.

Instead the city continues operating through a bizarre cycle where people furthest removed from survival realities repeatedly redesign systems they themselves never have to depend on.

The people writing the strategies are often insulated from the consequences when the strategies fail.

Mayor Mark Sutcliffe stated:

“We have to make sure the right supports are in place alongside new homes.”

Which sounds compassionate.

Reasonable even.

But how exactly can policymakers identify the “right supports” while excluding the people most qualified to explain what supports are actually missing?

Homelessness is not one uniform experience.

People have different trauma histories.

Different mental health realities.

Different addiction histories.

Different support needs.

Different neurological conditions.

Different cultural backgrounds.

Different barriers to stability.

Housing somebody successfully is not just about placing them inside four walls temporarily.

It is about whether the systems surrounding them are capable of keeping them alive, connected, respected, and stable afterward.

Homelessness will never be solved through one-size-fits-all systems designed primarily around administrative convenience.

What Ottawa does not need is another recycled framework wrapped in updated branding language.

We do not need semantic drift presented as innovation.

Renaming the same methodologies is not progress.

Reorganizing leadership structures without changing power structures is not progress.

Press releases are not progress.

Action tables are not progress.

Real progress would require something much more uncomfortable:

leaders leaving boardrooms long enough to confront the actual lived consequences of their systems directly.

Not for photo opportunities.

Not for campaign optics.

Not for temporary public sympathy.

Just to listen.

To connect.

To witness honestly what survival looks like after decades of institutional failure.

On the streets, credibility is earned through action. Not announcements.

People in survival mode do not have the luxury of endless consultations and strategic language.

Their lives depend on systems functioning in reality, not functioning rhetorically.

Without meaningful leadership from people with lived experience, Ottawa will continue cycling through the same failures endlessly.

New names.

New logos.

New tables.

Same outcomes.

Reality: homelessness strategies created without meaningful leadership from homeless people are often just systems talking to themselves about problems they do not fully understand.

Nothing about us should happen without us.