

# SW2024-04: Reducing Homelessness in Canada Proposal

**Origin: Social and Ecological Justice Commission**

## 1. What is the issue?

### **Background:**

Research shows that 35,000 Canadians are homeless right now and 36% of Canadians have been homeless or know someone who has been homeless. Furthermore, statistics show that 1.7 million Canadian households live in precarious housing that is either unaffordable, overcrowded and/or needs major repairs,

Organizations such as the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC), the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) and others have been advocating for decades for policies at all levels of government which would help to significantly reduce homelessness in Canada.

Bringing together representatives of the interfaith community, ISARC has participated in Government consultations on affordable housing among other social justice issues affecting people living on the margins. They urge the Provincial and Federal Governments to work together to create more affordable housing and to introduce a Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit to stop growing homelessness in Canada.

## 2. Why is this issue important?

The gospel calls us to love our neighbour, especially our neighbour in need. Jesus reminded his disciples that whatever you do to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do to me. Justice, equity, compassion and care for neighbour are at the heart of the Christian gospels and Christian theology.

## 3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitment on equity?

One only needs to look at the demographic of those in poverty to see that disproportionately it is composed of those who are victims of inequity: people with disabilities, immigrants, women, people of colour, the sick, the elderly and those seeking to escape the trauma of abuse and violence. Impoverished people are far more likely to be inadequately housed, or to suffer chronic or intermittent homelessness, than those whose incomes are above the poverty line. Ontario is in the midst of a housing affordability crisis. Small and large communities identify lack of housing, particularly lack of affordable housing as a major issue in their municipalities.

Not only are mortgage costs extremely high but rents have reached levels that place people at risk of homelessness. It is not enough to build additional units. Attention needs to be given to existing affordable units being lost due to vacancy decontrol and demolition to build more expensive rental units. These inequitable situations in Canada must be rectified with bold steps to reverse homelessness with affordable housing and with homelessness prevention supports.

## 4. How might Shining Waters Regional Council respond to this issue?

The Regional Council might:

- Commend the Federal Government for the bold initiative of promising \$8.1 billion in new spending on housing, complemented by as much as \$55 billion in financing;
- Call on the Federal Government to implement a Homelessness Prevention and Housing Benefit as a necessary tool to stop growing homelessness while more housing is created and housing affordability is restored. This benefit would provide direct support to assist with paying real rents and assisting those who are unhoused to find affordable rents. (HPHB) would provide immediate rental relief to up to 385,000 households at imminent risk of homelessness, help over 50,000 people leave homelessness and reduce pressure on Canada's overwhelmed homeless systems.

- Call on the Federal Government to ensure that the promised new funding includes both an Encampment Response Program to rapidly respond to people living in encampments to assist with finding appropriate, safe and secure housing and a comprehensive Refugee and Asylum Seeker Resettlement Program that ensures those fleeing from their own countries are not placed in municipal homeless shelter systems.
- Call on the Provincial Government to take steps to preserve existing and new housing at affordable rents by:
  1. Restoring rent control to **all** rental housing, and applying vacancy control.  
*The decision to remove the HST on new apartment buildings and the Federal Government's recent decision to increase the amount of low-interest financing for new apartments is enough of an incentive for new apartment construction. There is no justification for vacancy decontrol or for new apartments not to be covered by rent control;*
  2. Insuring above guideline rent increases are limited to the period needed to recover the costs of renovations, and rents then returned to previous levels;
  3. stemming the conversion of long-term housing into short-term vacation units (AirBnbs).  
*Groups like Fairbnb have called for provinces to set up short-term rental registries and allow municipalities access to collected data;*
  4. limiting short-term rentals to principal residences, and hold platforms like AirBnB accountable for the properties they advertise.