A Strategy to End Homelessness – Provincial Government Role

The Ontario Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction, led by the Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Children and Youth Services, has committed to the development of a focused poverty reduction strategy by the end of 2008. The Premier has said: "We want everyone in Ontario to have the opportunity to succeed."

Yet, without affordable and stable housing people do not have the opportunity to succeed. Homelessness and unstable housing impose huge costs both on people who experience homelessness and on all of society, while stable housing contributes to social and economic health. Ending homelessness must be a central part of Ontario's poverty reduction agenda.

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) is ready to work with the Province of Ontario and other concerned stakeholders to end homelessness by reducing poverty in Ontario. Municipal governments have long been committed to their key responsibility in addressing the many issues presented by homelessness. They have defined community needs, developed local plans and mobilized local agencies, community groups and private sector partners to address the daily needs of people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of becoming homeless. And over the years the Federal and Provincial governments have provided funding to support innovative municipal and community initiatives. But now the funding is scheduled to come to an end. By early 2009, all of the federal programs will end.

There is an immediate urgency for the provincial government to act to ensure that resources are available to sustain local initiatives and to build on the successes of the past, in social service programs, in housing programs and in dedicated homelessness initiatives:

- Extending funding for programs scheduled to end in 2009, including the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program and the Provincial Rent Bank
- Committing to permanent and sustainable funding for programs to end homelessness in every community and to meet costs incurred by municipal service managers to plan and coordinate program delivery
- Directly engaging municipal service managers in the definition of needs and the design of program solutions
- Committing to active collaboration between ministries within the provincial government and between the different orders of government to ensure coordination and seamless service delivery and to avoid gaps

To end homelessness, the government must recognize that homelessness and housing instability are a reality in every community and that solutions must be developed at the local level to respond to the unique circumstances of that community. The current service system management approach should be affirmed and enhanced, with the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager or District Social Services Administration Board in each area being confirmed as the comprehensive Service System Manager for Homelessness and Housing.

Affirmation and enhancement of the service system manager role also needs to recognize the governance issues related to District Social Services Administration Boards.

Service System Managers are prepared to provide leadership and coordination; but they cannot do it alone. Ending homelessness requires a long term commitment from all governments - federal, provincial and municipal. It requires sustainable funding and resources to implement innovative solutions in every local community.

The Service System to End Homelessness must be broader than the programs and services specifically defined as homelessness programs. In addition to programs funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, the service system must include programs and services provided by other Ministries.

Since housing stability is a key determinant of health, ending homelessness must be a primary health priority: "Housing is the Best Medicine". It is essential that the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) and Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) identify barriers in the health care system and provide resources to support people to maintain stable housing.

The provincial government should establish ongoing sustainable funding agreements with individual Service System Managers. The funding agreements will identify the resources to be allocated and program targets to be achieved, based on a local service system developed in the context of province-wide priorities.

Service System Managers will establish and sustain community engagement and accountability mechanisms which reflect local circumstances, including community advisory panels and funders' forums as well as mechanisms to engage consumers of homelessness services. They will develop and enhance mechanisms to engage a range of community organizations to work with the Service System Manager to determine the needs of the community and to design a service system which incorporates the appropriate mix of program responses for that community. Service System Managers must have adequate resources to ensure the success of this collaboration and to guarantee effective facilitation of the service system.

OMSSA has developed specific recommendations for action in four key areas:

- Housing
- Support to Access and Maintain Housing Stability
- Income Support, and
- System Capacity

OMSSA's housing recommendations complement those set out recently by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Big City Mayors Caucus.

The following table summarizes the recommendations directed to the provincial government.

Recommendations and Provincial Role

Recommendations	Provincial Role

1. Housing
a. All orders of government collaborate to develop National Housing Framework to build on past successes:
  ➢ protect & preserve existing affordable housing
  ➢ increase affordable housing supply
  ➢ address affordability issues
  ➢ ensure funding for supports
	➢ Take initiative & collaborate
	
	➢ Provide multi year funding

b. Provide multi year funding to support National Housing Framework:
  ➢ preserve existing affordable housing
  ➢ increased affordable housing supply
  ➢ rent geared to income subsidies
  ➢ support funding.
	➢ Repair existing social housing
	➢ Cost share
	➢ Cost share
	➢ MCSS & MOHLTC

c. Allow program funding flexibility to respond to local needs & capacities	➢ Allow flexibility
d. Affordability targets to reflect local market & social assistance rates	➢ Consult on design of programs
2. Support to Access and Maintain Housing Stability a. Recognize housing stability as a determinant of health & a health priority	➢ MOHLTC
b. Collaboration between human service ministries	➢ MMAH, MCSS, MOHLTC, MCYS, Corrections, Education

Support to Access and Maintain Housing Stability
c. Interministerial planning and funding:
  ➢ build on current project strengths
  ➢ address Ministry policies & practices
  ➢ resolve program conflicts
  ➢ change policies
	➢ Hostels to Homes, CHPP
	➢ Correctional institutions & hospital discharge planning
	➢ Remove barriers

d. Multi year funding for local initiatives	➢ Affirm & Enhance CHPP
e. Multi year funding for supports linked to housing	➢ MCSS & MOHLTC
3. Sustaining income and Employment a. Address income issues to sustain housing affordability ➢ coordinate and increase the flexibility of income support initiatives	➢ MCSS/OW & MTCU skill development & employment ➢ Increase minimum wage ➢ Increase shelter allowances to reflect local market rents ➢ Continue employment incentives to leave social assistance, including employment supports ➢ Rent Bank, Energy Bank ➢ Ontario Child Benefit
4. Service System Capacity a. Affirm continuing municipal Service System Manager role	➢ Affirm role
b. Support coordinated program delivery by Service System Manager	➢ Multi year funding
c. Provide multi year funding to Service Managers to support the Service System Management role	➢ Housing Framework ➢ Homelessness Initiatives
d. Increase community capacity to end homelessness	➢ Funding