



Community  
Health and  
Wellbeing

Shift the  
conversation

# BRIDGING THE GAP

A Call to Action for the Next Federal Government

SEPTEMBER 2015



Association of Ontario Health Centres  
**Community-governed primary health care**

Association des centres de santé de l'Ontario  
**Soins de santé primaires gérés par la communauté**

Ontario  
Trillium  
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# ABOUT US

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## THE COALITION OF COMMUNITY HEALTH AND RESOURCE CENTRES OF OTTAWA

Six Community Health Centres and seven Community Resource Centres comprise our coalition. We build healthy communities and work together developing and delivering community-based health and social service programs for residents in urban, suburban and rural neighbourhoods from Orléans to Osgoode to Kanata.

Our collaborative efforts involve a wide range of health professionals including health care providers, health promoters, community workers, early childhood specialists, social workers and other service partners. We strive to create communities where there is peace, shelter, education, food, livable incomes, a stable environment, sustainable resources, social justice and equity. We pay particular attention to vulnerable community members whose health and wellbeing is most at risk.

The coalition orients its services and programs to the diverse needs within local communities. We have a sound understanding of local priorities. This helps mobilize the necessary resources that will make a difference improving the wellbeing of individuals, families and neighbourhoods.

The coalition also promotes healthy public policy on issues of common interest, such as employment, food security, affordable transit, and access to healthy food. We ensure government decision makers and stakeholders are informed by our community-based perspective. In addition, we develop strategies to better plan, advocate, coordinate and deliver city-wide health and social services in Ottawa, while continuing to deliver results within the 13 communities we serve.

Our coalition envisions a future where diverse communities enjoy a safe, just and healthy life for all—a future where everyone works together developing, managing and making use of opportunities, responsive services and resources.

Learn more by visiting [www.coalitionottawa.ca](http://www.coalitionottawa.ca).

## MAKING VOTES COUNT

Making Votes Count is a grassroots initiative that seeks to increase voter turnout and ongoing civic engagement in low-income neighbourhoods and among people living in poverty in both urban and rural parts of Ottawa. Co-sponsored by the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres and the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), we bring together partners and residents to move community concerns forward.

Learn more by visiting [www.makingvotescount.ca](http://www.makingvotescount.ca).

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# FEDERAL ELECTION 2015

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On October 19<sup>th</sup>, Canadians cast their ballots to determine which political party will guide the direction of our country. Will we elect a government that has a bold vision for change? Will we elect a federal government that will invest in building healthy communities and tackle income inequality? Or will we opt to accept the status quo and the growing gap between the wealthy and everyone else?

The Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa believe this election offers an important opportunity to change course and build much healthier communities where everyone matters.

In the lead-up to last year's municipal election, to describe what our vision would look like at a city level, we released: *Bridging the Gap: The Ottawa Community Wellbeing Report 2014*.<sup>1</sup> Our report called on the municipal government to move forward with policy recommendations to address the impact of growing inequality in our region—impacts that are harming people's health. Now, on the eve of the federal election, we are calling on the federal government to also do its part.

## Ottawa Community Wellbeing

In the *Bridging the Gap* report we measured how Ottawa is really doing using the Canadian Index of Wellbeing. This index's 64 indicator questions, measures eight interconnected wellbeing domains: community vitality, democratic engagement, education, environment, healthy populations, leisure and culture, living standards, and time use. By applying this comprehensive index, we developed a detailed snapshot of how things need to change in our city. We documented how:

- Every one in ten people in Ottawa lives in poverty, highlighting the income gap

between the affluent and everyone else.

- Housing affordability is a high concern with one in every five families in Ottawa having to spend over one-third of their income on shelter.
- Food security is a challenge with ten per cent of Ottawa households not able to afford safe and nutritious food.
- Public transit is a necessity for low-income people to access services, yet one-third of Ottawa residents expressed dissatisfaction with the public transportation services provided by the municipal government.

These challenges are shared by many other Canadian municipalities and without stronger federal-municipal cooperation they cannot be tackled effectively. We need leadership from a federal government that is willing to invest in programs and infrastructure that will build healthy and vibrant municipalities for everyone.

## A Call for Federal Commitment

We are calling for Canada's next federal government to address income inequality by taking action in three key national policy areas:

- Develop and implement an Affordable Housing Strategy
- Develop and implement a National Food Strategy
- Invest in public transit

National strategies on these vital policy areas will augment efforts made by the City of Ottawa and other municipal governments across the country. With the federal and municipal governments working together towards shared goals, we can make progress bridging the income inequality gap across this country.

# BRIDGING THE GAP

Measuring What Matters: The Ottawa Community Wellbeing Report 2014



## Living Standards

One in five Ottawa families spend 30% or more of their household income on shelter related expenses.



## Healthy Populations

In 2011/12, 5.4% of Ottawa residents aged 12 years and over reported that they have been diagnosed with diabetes.



## Community Vitality

Sense of belonging decreased from 65% in 2009 to 59.8% in 2011. Ottawa has the lowest rates of community belonging among all metropolitan areas in Ontario.



## Education

The demand for childcare spaces far exceeds the number of available spaces for half of the city's wards; in particular, in River and Gloucester-South Nepean wards.



## Leisure and Culture

Only 22% of Ottawa students in grades 7 to 12 met the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines which recommends 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day.



## Democratic Engagement

Voter turnout dropped 10% between the municipal election in 2006 and 2010. Of all the three levels of government, the sharpest drop occurred at the municipal level.



## Environment

Ottawa's dependency on automobiles contributes to 40% of total Green House Gas emissions.

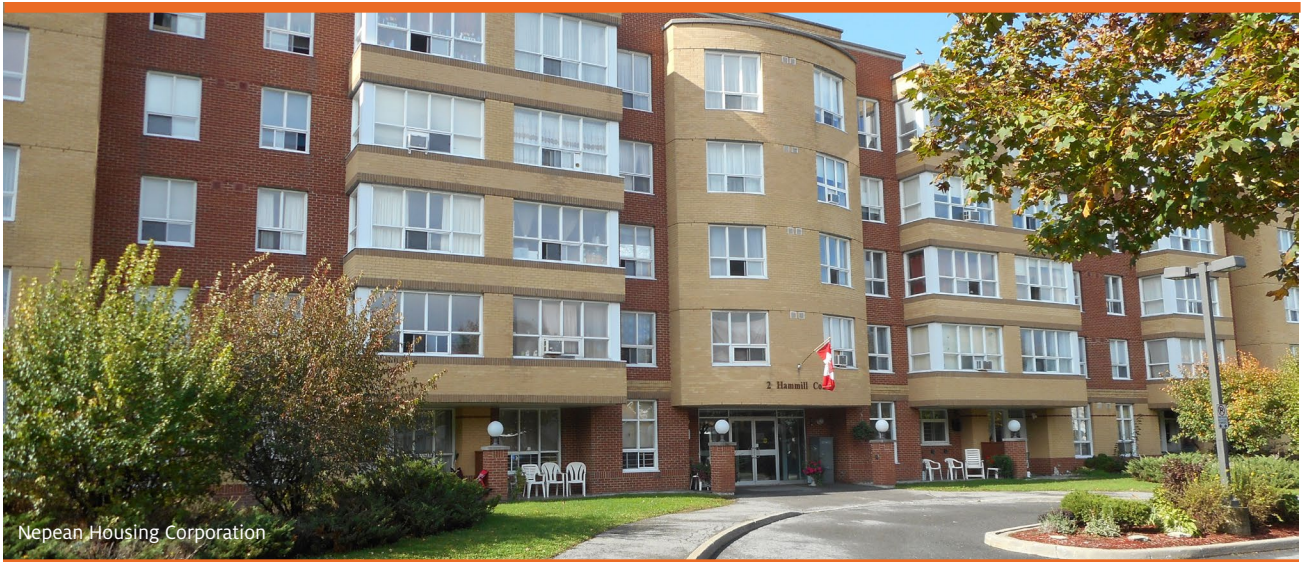


## Time Use

Ottawa is growing older, in Canada there are over two million caregivers aged 45+.

For the complete report, visit: [communityhealthandwellbeing.org/ottawa-report](http://communityhealthandwellbeing.org/ottawa-report)

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING



If they work better together, the federal and municipal government can make great progress addressing the growing need for affordable housing.

Under the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which Canada is a signatory, housing is a human right yet every year in our country at least 200,000 people experience homelessness.<sup>2</sup> In addition, more than 1.5 million households are precariously housed, living in housing that is unaffordable, overcrowded and/or below standard.<sup>3</sup> According to the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, the high cost of housing is the most urgent financial issue facing Canadians.<sup>4</sup>

In Ottawa, last year, more than 10,000 households were on the wait list for subsidized housing and approximately 6,520 people were homeless, with an average stay of seventy-seven nights in emergency shelters.<sup>5</sup> As noted in our *Bridging the Gap* report, housing affordability is a challenge for one in every five families in Ottawa. House prices are climbing beyond the reach of low and middle-income earners. The lack of affordable rental units compounds the problem.

Quality housing is a fundamental requirement for good health and ensures strong, safe communities for all of us. Research shows that public investment to ensure adequate shelter results in lower use of health care services.<sup>6</sup> For example, every \$10 invested in supporting and housing people who are chronically homeless results in savings of \$21.72 that would have been spent on health care, social supports, emergency shelter and corrections.<sup>7</sup>

The City of Ottawa has a ten-year Housing and Homelessness Investment Plan but needs financial support at the federal government level to implement it. The Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa joins many other organizations and communities across the country in calling for the next federal government to develop an Affordable Housing Strategy for Canada in consultation with all levels of government and key stakeholders from the non-profit and private sectors. This strategy must include goals and timelines for ending homelessness, as well as investment to ensure adequate social housing and affordable rental housing across the country.



# FOOD SECURITY



Without healthy food, people get sick. For this reason, federal and municipal governments must work together to solve the problem that far too many people can't access the healthy food they need.

According to Food Secure Canada, four million people in this country experience food insecurity, struggling with rising food prices, unhealthy diets and hunger.<sup>8</sup> Recent statistics confirm that 841,000 people use food banks each month in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

People who face challenges accessing food are at higher risk for poor health. Research recently published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that household food insecurity is growing in Canada and is tightly linked to poorer health status. In Ontario, annual healthcare costs are more than double for people who are severely food insecure than for households who are food secure. These additional healthcare costs include emergency department visits, psychiatric hospital stays, physician visits, day surgeries, home care and prescription drugs.<sup>10</sup>

Here in Ottawa, 140 agencies help feed 50,000 people per month.<sup>11</sup> In fact, 10 per cent of Ottawa households are unable to buy the nutritious food they need to stay healthy.<sup>12</sup>

The Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa supports the call by Food Secure Canada for the next federal government to develop a national food policy where no one goes hungry and all people in Canada have access to healthy and sustainable food. This new strategy for food security should seek to achieve zero hunger in Canada, healthy and safe food as well as a sustainable food production and consumption system that protects the environment while providing adequate livelihoods for people working in agriculture.

# PUBLIC TRANSIT



Cities benefit in many ways from investment in public transit. It reduces automobile dependency, highway congestion and greenhouse gases. What's more, without effective public transit people living on low incomes who can't afford cars face limited employment choices and inaccessibility to the vital services they need.

But as reported in our 2014 report *Bridging the Gap*, only five per cent of Ottawa residents rated public transit 'excellent' while 33 per cent rated it as 'poor.' In the lead up to last year's municipal election, we called on the City to make transit more affordable by extending low cost passes to all Ottawa residents on low income, and to improve transit safety. Now, as the whole country prepares to go to the polls, we are calling on our next federal government to play its vital role in creating improved public transit.

The Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa joins with members of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in calling for the next federal government to maintain the \$1 billion per year in permanent, dedicated funding to expand public transit, reduce car congestion and cut commuter times, energy use and emissions.

More specifically, we urge greater federal-municipal cost-sharing to fund the planned light rail system in Ottawa. The next federal government must contribute financially to this public transit expansion so that the Ottawa municipal government can take steps to make the bus and light rail transit system more accessible and affordable for all residents.



# MAKE YOUR VOTE COUNT

The richest 10 per cent of Canadians account for almost half (47.9%) of the wealth in Canada, while the poorest 30 per cent own less than one per cent of wealth.<sup>13</sup> Deep income inequality harms our country and our city in many disturbing ways.

In Community Health Centres and Community Resource Centres we see the impact of this inequality on people's health and wellbeing. Far too many people in Ottawa are suffering from mental stress and physical illness when they cannot afford safe housing, nutritious food and transportation, or easily travel to their jobs or school. Our frontline observations about inequality's impact on people's health are supported by a growing body of evidence.

A recent study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, which followed high cost users of Ontario's health system, found that improved policies to address the determinants of health, such as housing and food security, may be important components of intervention that will improve health outcomes and reduce costs for our healthcare system.<sup>14</sup>

For all these reasons, we are calling on our next federal government to take action to reduce income inequality and its impacts here in Ottawa and other municipalities across this country. It's time for our federal government to tackle one of the urgent issues facing our country and our community: the harmful health impacts of income inequality.

As we approach the October 19<sup>th</sup> federal election we encourage people to:



Get informed on the federal party positions regarding income inequality



Ask candidates what they will do to build healthy communities and tackle income inequality:

- Will your party develop and implement an Affordable Housing Strategy for Canada?
- Will your party develop a National Food Policy so no one goes hungry in Canada?
- Will your party invest in public transit at the municipal level?



Make sure you are registered to vote, and then go vote on October 19<sup>th</sup>

For more information on how to get involved in the federal election, visit the Making Votes Count initiative at [www.makingvotescount.ca/resources/federal](http://www.makingvotescount.ca/resources/federal)

# REFERENCES

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Shift the  
conversation

**WE CAN DO BETTER!  
ADD YOUR VOICE**

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Tweet your candidate and federal party leaders. Call for strong commitments on affordable housing, food security and public transit.

**Use the hashtags:** #cdnpoli #elxn42 #ACAC2015