



Social Justice & Advocacy Vestry Motion 2018:
Affordable Housing and Homelessness

All levels of government need to work together to build and sustain affordable housing. We, the vestry of [name of parish] in the Diocese of Toronto, urge the provincial government to:

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to increase and maintain the available stock of affordable housing in Ontario.
2. Develop specific strategies to address the needs of communities and populations experiencing disproportionately high levels of inadequate housing, including members of Indigenous and racialized communities, newcomers to Canada, seniors, youth, survivors of domestic violence, and people living with mental illness or addictions.
3. Work with the federal government to maximize the impact of the National Housing Strategy on housing in Ontario.
4. Work with municipalities to ensure that emergency shelters are adequately funded to meet the needs of their communities.

For further information and resources on this issue, please see
<http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/sjac>

Housing Vestry Motion Backgrounder

“My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”

– Isaiah 32:18

Homelessness and lack of affordable housing have emerged as major social problems in Canada over the last three decades. Over this period, there has been a sharp decrease in public investment in affordable housing, with fewer units being built and existing units falling into disrepair. Together with reduced spending on social programs, the rise of precarious work, and rising housing costs, this has left more and more people unable to afford shelter, increasing poor health, marginalization, and social isolation for many of our most vulnerable citizens. This crisis affects communities large and small, urban, suburban, rural, and Indigenous. Across our Diocese, nearly half of renters pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs, and one in five pay more than 50% of their income on housing.¹

Housing people appropriately makes economic sense. Homelessness and inadequate housing cost Canadian taxpayers over \$7 billion annually, due to the increased expenses imposed upon the health care, social service, and justice systems.² In Peterborough, for example, the cost of renting a bachelor apartment is 57% cheaper than that of supplying emergency shelter for one person³.

¹ <http://rentalhousingindex.ca/>

² <http://homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/cost-analysis-homelessness>

³ [http://www.peterborough.ca/Assets/City+Assets/Housing/Documents/Report s/Housing+is+Fundamental%20c+AHAC/2017+Housing+is+Fundamental%20c+AH AC.pdf](http://www.peterborough.ca/Assets/City+Assets/Housing/Documents/Report%20s/Housing+is+Fundamental%20c+AHAC/2017+Housing+is+Fundamental%20c+AHAC.pdf)

More importantly, homelessness and inadequate housing are associated with social and human costs including personal risk, increased stress, poor health, increased emergency hospitalization, increased rates of addiction and incarceration, lower academic performance of students, and social isolation. Providing safe, adequate, and affordable housing is the right thing to do.

As Christians, we cannot turn our backs on this urgent need. The Bible recognizes the need of each person for dignity, shelter, and security. We are called to see the face of Jesus in those who are at the margins of our society, and to provide for their needs. (Matthew 25:31-45; 1 John 3:17-18). Anglicans throughout our Diocese have been working to address this crisis in a number of ways. We have helped to build affordable housing units in our communities. We support FaithWorks ministries that provide housing and housing supports for vulnerable people, help connect people with housing options, and highlight the humanity of those at risk. Parishes throughout our Diocese have hosted Out of the Cold emergency shelters and drop-in programs with housing support workers available to guests. Many clergy provide pastoral support to parishioners and community members experiencing homelessness or precarious housing.

These programs are vital for providing relief on a day-to-day basis for many who do not have access to affordable housing. However, **any effort to address the long-term needs underlying this crisis requires more resources than churches and community agencies can provide alone.**

At the end of 2015, 171,360 households in Ontario were on active waiting lists for affordable housing, with average wait times of four years overall, and over twice as long in the GTA.⁴ In the city of Toronto, homeless shelters operate at over 95% capacity, and even Out of the Cold programs have started having to turn people away. Smaller communities in our Diocese report even higher shelter occupancy, while in rural areas there may be no shelters at all. Public policy and funding measures are needed to make significant inroads on this issue.

While there will always be crises which cause people to lose their homes temporarily, **chronic homelessness, which is a relatively recent phenomenon, can be ended.** Several Canadian cities, including Medicine Hat and Hamilton, have seen significant progress toward this goal by using the “Housing First” approach, which seeks to move people out of homelessness quickly and prevent people from losing their homes in the first place. For Housing First to work, however, there must be an adequate supply of affordable housing units, repairs to maintain existing units, and ongoing health, social and income supports to keep people in their homes. In the short term, and for certain high-need populations, emergency shelters continue to be needed. The provincial government has issued a Long Term Housing Strategy, but this **must be backed by clear and measurable goals, and significant financial investment, if homelessness is to be ended.**



⁴ Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association 2016 Waiting Lists Survey Report, <http://qc.onpha.on.ca/flipbooks/WaitingListReport/files/assets/basic-html/page-1.html>