# Frequently Asked Questions
# City of Ottawa Housing Needs Assessment

## INTRODUCTION TO THE HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT (HNA)

**What is the HNA and why was it conducted?**
The Housing Needs Assessment is a data-informed report that helps the City, its partners, and the public understand current and future housing pressures in Ottawa. It is required under provincial legislation, the Housing Services Act, 2011. The HNA is also condition for receiving federal infrastructure funding, including funding through programs such as the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) and the Canada Community Building Fund (CCBF). The HNA supports long-term planning by identifying where needs are changing, where gaps may exist, and how future conditions could shape demand for different types of housing.

**Who led the development of the HNA?**
The HNA was developed by the City of Ottawa's Housing and Homelessness Services team, in partnership with HelpSeeker Technologies. HelpSeeker supported the analysis and technical development of the report, ensuring it met federal template requirements and aligned with national reporting standards. City staff led engagement with internal departments, community agencies, and individuals with lived and living experience to ensure the report reflects Ottawa's local context.

**Why does the City complete an HNA?**
The HNA is a foundational planning tool that helps the City understand and respond to changing housing needs. It is required under Ontario's Housing Services Act. It is also a condition for receiving funding through key federal programs, such as the Housing Accelerator Fund and the Canada Community-Building Fund. Completing and publishing the HNA ensures Ottawa remains eligible for these investments and meets provincial and federal requirements.
More information on federal HNA requirements is available from the Government of Canada at: Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada - Housing Needs Assessments

**What does the HNA aim to achieve?**
The Housing Needs Assessment is a foundational planning tool that helps the City and its partners understand where housing pressures are most acute, how trends are evolving, and where gaps in affordability or access may exist. While the HNA does not make decisions or set policy on its own, it supports evidence-informed planning,

coordination with community partners, and alignment with City strategies such as the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. It also helps inform funding discussions with federal and provincial governments.

**What is new in this HNA compared to previous reports?**
This HNA includes more detailed analysis than in past years, including localized mapping and projections by household type, income level, and tenure. It also reflects broader engagement with community organizations and individuals with lived experience. For the first time, the City was required to follow a standardized federal reporting template. This version meets those new requirements and adds additional analysis to reflect Ottawa's local priorities. In addition, the HNA expands its scope beyond direct housing issues by considering broader determinants of housing access, such as transit connectivity, access to services, and other community infrastructure that influence where and how people live.

**Will the HNA be updated regularly? If so, how often?**
Yes. Under provincial legislation, the HNA must be updated at least every five years. Future updates will align with provincial and federal requirements, as well as the City's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan refresh cycle, to help ensure planning is grounded in the most current available data.

## CONTEXT AND CITY ACTION

**How does the HNA support other City plans like the Official Plan or Housing Strategy?**
The HNA provides a shared data foundation that supports a range of City strategies, including the Official Plan, the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, and the Municipal Housing Pledge. It helps identify where housing pressures are growing, the most needed housing types, and how trends are shifting across the city. While not a decision-making tool, the HNA supports coordination across departments and helps ensure that policies and investments are aligned with Council's strategic priority on housing and homelessness.

The HNA is one part of a broader system of planning and analysis. The City regularly uses a wide range of data and operational insight to guide its work, beyond the HNA's five-year cycle. This includes administrative data such as shelter usage, waitlists, eviction trends, housing placements, and capital project delivery. Community input, including feedback gathered through consultations and partnerships, also helps guide decisions. These sources, along with departmental planning, continue to shape programs and investments throughout the year.

**How will the HNA be used to inform budgeting or funding priorities?**

The HNA outlines where housing pressures are growing and helps provide context for future planning. While it supports federal and provincial funding applications, it is not a budgeting tool. The City has its own established budgeting and capital planning processes, which are guided by Council direction, legislative responsibilities under the Housing Services Act, and the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. That plan helps shape how the City prioritizes investment as Service Manager. More detail is available in the most recent Housing and Homelessness Progress Report.

**How is the City responding to the housing and homelessness challenges outlined in the report?**

The City continues to respond through a wide range of actions that address both housing supply and system pressures. In 2024, 318 new affordable units and 75 supportive housing units were completed, with another 815 affordable and 112 supportive units under construction. The City also provided 996 new housing benefits— its highest number to date—and housed over 1,300 people from the shelter system, including 398 through Housing First.

Investments supported the expansion of transitional housing, repairs to existing community housing, and programs for specific populations, including newcomers, Indigenous residents, and women. Initiatives like the new Affordable Housing Community Improvement Plan and the conversion of city-owned buildings into transitional housing also moved forward.

This work is part of the City's long-term Housing and Homelessness Plan and reflects Council's strategic priority to ensure everyone in Ottawa has a home. While challenges remain, the City continues to work with community partners and other levels of government to increase housing options and support those most at risk. This includes aligning with the City's Long Range Financial Plan (LRFP), which has costed out key housing and homelessness solutions and outlines a financial roadmap for collaboration with other levels of government to help implement them.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

**How was the data selected for the HNA?**

The HNA uses a mix of public and administrative data to provide a detailed picture of housing need in Ottawa. Demographic trends and housing market patterns were drawn from sources like the Canadian Census and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). Data on homelessness, housing benefits, waitlists, and shelter use came from City-held administrative systems, such as the Homeless Individuals and

Families Information System (HIFIS). These sources were selected to meet both federal reporting expectations and the City's responsibilities under the Housing Services Act. More information on federal HNA requirements is available from the Government of Canada at: https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/housing-logement/hna-ebml/index-eng.htm

**Why is some data only available as recently as 2021?**
Many of the demographic indicators in the HNA are based on the 2021 Canadian Census, which is conducted every five years and is the federal standard for housing needs assessments. This is the most recent and comprehensive national dataset available, and is used by municipalities across the country to ensure consistency and comparability. While the Census has a time lag, it provides detailed, structured information that would not otherwise be available locally. The next Census will take place in 2026. Where more recent data were available—such as shelter use, housing placements, or waitlist trends—City administrative data were used to supplement the analysis.

**How were future data projection figures created?**
The HNA includes projections for housing need and homelessness, using different methods. The City contracted HelpSeeker Technologies to conduct the projection modelling, which was developed using nationally available tools and approaches used in over 100 communities across Canada. For homelessness, two scenarios were modelled: one assuming current investment levels continue, and another reflecting increased capacity and investment. These projections, which were informed by federal guidance and sector expertise, drew on local data such as the 2024 Point-in-Time Count, shelter usage, and service demand trends.

Projections for housing need are based on Ottawa's population forecasts and consider factors such as household formation, income, tenure patterns, and unit size. These methods follow guidance set out in the federal Housing Needs Assessment requirements and reflect approaches commonly used in municipalities across Canada. More information is available in the HNA's appendix and at housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/housing-logement/hna-ebml/index-eng.html.

**Why use Canadian Census dissemination area boundaries for mapping instead of wards or neighbourhoods?**
Dissemination areas are small, relatively stable geographic units that are used for the Canadian Census, and usually represent populations of about 400 to 700 people. It is the smallest standard geographic boundary used for representing census data. Dissemination areas were used instead of neighbourhood or ward boundaries as they

allow for a more detailed, in-depth analysis of demographic trends compared to the larger neighbourhood or ward areas.

**Where can I explore the data from this report in more depth?**
Data sources such as the Canadian Census and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) are referenced in charts, tables, and footnotes throughout the HNA. Data provided by the City of Ottawa—including information on homelessness trends, housing benefits, and the local shelter system—will be available through an interactive dashboard to be published on Ottawa.ca.

Data from our most recent Point in Time Count can be found on the City of Ottawa webpage.

**What are the limitations of the data used in this report?**
Like all Housing Needs Assessments in Canada, this report draws on standard national and local data sources—including the Census, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) datasets, municipal administrative records, and housing market information. While these sources provide a strong foundation, each comes with limitations. For example, Census data is collected every five years and may undercount or misrepresent some groups, including Indigenous peoples, people experiencing homelessness, and those living in congregate or informal housing.

To help address these limitations, the City incorporated additional local data sources, such as shelter and housing waitlist data. It engaged directly with community partners and individuals with lived and living experience. These limitations are documented in the HNA and will continue to inform the City's ongoing work to improve data quality through collaboration, expanded data collection, and future planning cycles.

**What level of data is presented in the HNA regarding local mapping and projections? Is it possible to drill down to ward or neighbourhood data?**
Jesse: In the HNA, census neighbourhood level data is shown that helps us understand risk of homelessness and different demographics. At a projection level, population is too fluid within a community for us to project it wouldn't be accurate at a neighborhood level. The HNA shows where there are concentrations of Core Housing Needs, priority populations and other demographic data points. It is best to look at housing needs at a city or regional level.

**Which wards or neighbourhoods show the most risk?**
Different neighbourhoods experience different types of housing needs. We know that the downtown core experiences challenges around having a concentration of social

services and clients with the most acute needs. People being served in the downtown core need additional supports connected to healthcare and other wrap around housing focused supports. Moving outside of the downtown core the housing issues may differ for example these residents may need help with accessing affordable housing or housing subsidies. The 10-Year Plan will take a wholistic approach to supporting the variety of housing issues seen across our community. There needs to be a continued focus on ensuring people are able to obtain and retain their housing. (Kale and Jesse to add here)

**The reduction strategy shows a decrease in shelter beds. Does the HNA give you enough information to be able to prioritize where you're reducing shelter beds?**
The HNA provides information that will help to prepare a plan. The 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan Refresh will be the mechanism to strategize deactivating shelter beds. We are working to move away from the Emergency Shelter model and towards a supportive, transitional housing model. The plan would involve scaling back overflow shelters first, moving individuals into new transitional housing programs such as Queen St and St Joseph and transitioning shelters into Supportive Housing. As always, our goal is to eliminate the need for shelter spaces entirely by focusing on building long-term housing.

**Is there data in the report about transit connectivity to housing?**
The HNA reports about transit as an important enabler of housing and income that would support housing and barriers to housing. It was part of the Federal Template to report on housing close to high order transit stops. Transit implications were also reported in qualitative interviews with both community partners and those with lived experience. The HNA will be provided to other relevant City departments for future planning and can support future updates to transit such as the Transportation Master Plan.

<div align="center">FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS</div>

**What is the most significant finding in the report?**
The HNA confirms that housing affordability pressures are increasing across multiple income groups and neighbourhoods in Ottawa. There is a particular strain on lower-income renters and those needing supportive housing. While the City and its partners have supported over 2,000 new affordable and supportive housing opportunities since 2020, the scale of need continues to grow. The findings point to the importance of long-term, system-wide investment to ensure all residents have access to housing that meets their needs. This trend is not unique to Ottawa—it mirrors patterns seen in most major

Canadian cities, where affordability challenges are deepening and the demand for non-market housing is rising.

**What makes Ottawa's housing challenges unique?**
Ottawa faces many of the same housing pressures as other Canadian cities, including rising costs, limited rental supply, and growing demand. However, as Canada's capital and a rapidly growing city, Ottawa's context brings additional complexity. It is a significant settlement destination for newcomers, home to a large public sector workforce, and a regional hub for health care, education, and services. These roles shape demand across the housing system, not only in volume but also in the types of housing needed and where.

Ottawa's population has grown by over 25 per cent since 2006, with more than 100,000 additional households expected by 2035. This includes families, older adults, and newcomers with distinct needs that influence housing demand. At the same time, long-standing inequities persist: Indigenous and racialized residents continue to face systemic barriers to stability and affordability.

While the City continues to invest in new housing and supports, the HNA underscores that addressing these challenges requires coordinated action across governments, sectors, and communities.

**How do Ottawa's housing pressures compare to those of other cities?**
The trends in the Ottawa HNA are parallel to the trends being seen across Ontario. Homelessness, and chronic homelessness is increasing across the province, as housing affordability decreases. The recently completed review of needs across Ontario indicated that Ottawa's experience is in line with what is happening provincially. Of course, the opportunities and challenges differ between communities. For example, Ottawa has access to more public land than Toronto we also have a much high density of Inuit outside of the north. These unique challenges and opportunities are why each municipality needs to develop a plan tailored to our local context.

**How will the Federal and Provincial governments use the data in the HNA?**
Though we do not know the exact nature of how it will used moving forward, it is one of the key indicators that will inform funding through various federal and provincal initiatives. The current interation of National Housing Strategy comes to an end in 2028, and HNA's will be a key collection of data to inform further funding initiatives. The HNA will be shared with the province as part of the requirements under the Housing Services Act, 2011, as part of the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan Refresh. The housing and homelessness sector will utilize the document to inform advocacy efforts

with senior levels of government and to calculate the funding required to meet the needs outlined in the updated 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

**What do staff see as the priority areas for funding from upper levels of government? How should advocacy efforts be focused?**

There is an ongoing need for predictable, sustainable funding and commitment from the provincial and federal government. This includes not only capital funding but also operational funding. It is important for our priorities to be housing-focused. This means having appropriate, supportive and affordable housing and continuing funding capital needs. Although we have Housing Benefits, the long-term most sustainable and permanent solution is to create new affordable housing builds that are owned by our not-for-profit sector. It is also important to prioritize work upstream on housing loss prevention to prevent those that are at-risk of housing from losing their housing. Another way to utilize existing housing stock is advocating for sufficient funding for Housing Benefits, including renewed commitment for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB). As a community we want to continue to demonstrate that Ottawa is a leader and innovator in how we approach supporting housing needs. The team will continue to look at ways to stretch our dollars and put investments in where they can have the most impact on those in need. Again, these efforts need to be focused on long-term solutions.

**Based on the results of the HNA, what are the key areas to prioritize in the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan Refresh?**

The HNA does not prescribe recommendations but presents priorities in broad terms. The 10-Year Plan must focus on where the need is most acute, such as deeply affordable housing, housing benefits to support individuals leaving shelters, continuing growth in transitional housing programs and housing loss prevention. Other strategies and plans within the city, such as the Anti-Racism Strategy and the Anti-Poverty Strategy address needs displayed in the HNA. The plan will need to ensure that we are focused on those high-level targets but be nimble enough to respond to emerging needs such as the inflow of newcomers over the last few years. Our efforts will be focused on working upstream where our investments can be most impactful.

**Is the Long Range Financial Plan (LRFP) going to be updated alongside the 10-Year Plan refresh?**

Yes, the LRFP is updated each term of council. The intent is that once we complete the update to the 10-Year Plan there will be a subsequent updated to the LRFP.

**What would we need to do differently to achieve the Reduction Scenario?**

To achieve the Reduction Scenario, one thing we would need to do differently is put an increased focus on upstream, prevention efforts. Typically the City is responsive, and

reactive. There is a need for continued, sustainable funding for housing loss prevention. This would mean working to ensure individuals and families remain in that low-cost housing that naturally exists.  This strategy includes using Housing Benefits to our advantage, and working to spread funding dollars as far as possible. We also need sustained investments with long-term horizons to support long-term planning. It is imperative to recognize we cannot obtain success in the reduction scenario with municipal resources. We need to ensure our plans are coordinated with an all of government approach and resourcing. The goal is to work with senior levels of government to close the funding gaps outlined in the City's Long-Range Financial Plan.

**Do we have a cost estimate of the cost to achieving the reduction scenario?**
We are working on estimating costs. Through the 10-Year Plan refresh process we will look at mapping out what we need to do and the cost to the individual elements of that plan. This will be costed out in the update to the LRFP. The magnitude of the problem is significant, and thus is not a problem the city can solve alone. We must rely on our provincial and federal partners, and the solution will demand creativity and innovation.

The HNA is reporting on people and their needs. It is not as simple as numbers, but in Ottawa we are trying to address local needs. The needs are critical at this time – we are facing a toxic drug supply, mental health crisis and a housing affordability crisis. The goal is to use the research to apply real, tangible solutions that meet the needs of our local residents.

It is also important to note that housing and homelessness systems are regional making it difficult to make meaningful projections on the cost to achieve success. For example, if Ottawa solved all homelessness, it is likely we would see an inflow from other communities. People in Ontario have the ability to move and typically will go to communities that have programs that will support the best outcomes for their household.

**The report shows a very significant increase in homelessness for single adult women. How can we ramp up support for this demographic?**
Each time there is a 10-Year Plan Refresh staff assess where the needs are most acute. To ramp up support for women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness the city must ramp up existing strategies that prioritize women such as individual shelter spaces, transitional housing spaces and strategies to quickly transition people into housing. There are currently various set strategies under our 10-Year Plan that target women as a priority group. As discussed, the intent is to have the 10-Year Plan as a guiding document that will address overall priorities such as women experiencing

homelessness. Staff will work with the HHLT on yearly workplans that can respond to emerging needs such as this grow in need for women in the community.

**How are we addressing the over-representation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness?**

We are addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples by working directly with our Indigenous partners on Indigenous-led initiatives. In our most recent 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, created in 2020, it was stated that the City would develop an Indigenous 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. The Indigenous community has since tabled their plan and the city plays the role of standing behind the plan to support identified objectives. The newly formed Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table (HHLT) has Indigenous representation and is a mechanism for consultation and decision-guiding within our sector. The 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan will continue to focus on the needs of Indigenous community members. As this group continues to overrepresented in our shelter system, we will continue to separate out Indigenous specific Key Performance Indicators.

**The HNA reports that applications to the CWL increased to more that 5600 last year, do all these applicants end up on the CWL?**

Not necessarily, the city does a number of assessment processes when individuals and families make an application. Not everyone meets the eligibility criteria. The City is legislated under the Housing Services act to adhere to a minimum criteria including income and asset limits.

**The HNA reports a decrease in households being placed in permanent housing from the CWL, why is that?**

There are a couple of reasons for this trend. First, the city is doing a good job with housing stability, less people are moving out of their affordable units. Secondly, market-affordability has decreased, outside of rent-geared-to-income housing, or housing with some type of subsidy is extremely limited. Housing costs have increased, and in many cases wages have not. It's also important to note that Ottawa continues to grow and we have a fix number of RGI units. Like other municipalities across Canada, Ottawa's waitlists continue to grow due to fixed stock.

**The housing supply projections states we need 129,000 more homes by 2035, as well as the housing mix. Do these align with our current planning and development targets?**

The City's current OP notes around 108,00 additional homes by 2036. Staff are in the process of updating growth projections to align with provincal growth targets. It is anticipated that the number will around 125,000 homes following the update.

**ENGAGEMENT AND NEXT STEPS**

**When can I expect to see changes or benefits as a result of the HNA?**
We are looking forward to presenting the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan refresh in Q1 2026, and that is where the real work starts. Then we will get our funded agencies and community partners behind the initiatives. The Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table (HHLT) will work with sector partners to do immediate implementation. This will include a work plan identifying key priorities each year throughout the plan, and timelines will be assessed.

**Who was consulted in the development of the HNA?**
The HNA was developed through engagement with various stakeholders, including internal City staff, non-profit housing providers, supportive housing operators, and organizations serving equity-deserving groups. Engagement also included individuals with lived and living experience of homelessness and housing precarity. The City used a combination of interviews, targeted discussions, and group consultations to gather insights on housing needs, system pressures, and emerging challenges.

This process is built on existing relationships through the administration of housing and homelessness programs. Key partners included the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition, the Social Housing Registry of Ottawa, Housing First providers, gender-based violence organizations, newcomer-serving agencies, and health and justice sector partners. Interviews were also conducted with residents currently experiencing homelessness, including youth, to ensure that these perspectives were meaningfully reflected.

Engaging community voices is core to how the City delivers housing and homelessness services, and this work will continue well beyond the development of the HNA. These insights helped validate trends and surface gaps not captured in standard datasets and inform future planning priorities. Additional engagement and other ongoing initiatives will occur as part of the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan refresh in 2025–2026.

**How can the public or organizations give feedback or ask questions on the HNA?**
Feedback opportunities will be shared through Ottawa.ca and through engagement processes related to the 10-Year Plan update. Community agencies and the general public are encouraged to provide input to help shape next steps. Additional consultation may occur as part of specific housing strategies.

**Will there be training or orientation sessions for staff or partners on how to use the HNA?**
Yes. The City will offer briefings, webinars, and information sessions to help staff,

partners, and Council members use the data effectively. The aim is to support evidence-based planning across the housing system and enhance alignment on shared priorities.

**How do I access the dashboard and raw data for program planning?**

A public dashboard will be launched on Ottawa.ca to display key findings in an accessible format. For additional data needs, staff and community partners can reach out to Housing and Homelessness Services. The dashboard is designed to support transparency and collaborative planning. All raw data used for the dashboard will be available on [Open Ottawa](#)