



Ending Homelessness: Learning from Finland's Housing First Approach

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

January 15, 2024
Ottawa, Ontario & Virtual

AMO thanks Infrastructure Canada and the Ottawa Alliance to End Homelessness for their partnership on making this event possible.

Introduction

The Learning Session on Approaches to Ending Homelessness took place on the morning of January 15th 2024. This event was organized in partnership between AMO, the Ottawa Alliance to End Homelessness, and Infrastructure Canada. The day began with opening remarks from AMO Director of Policy Lindsay Jones and City of Ottawa Councillor Riley Brockington. Both emphasized the critical importance of efforts to end the homelessness crisis, a top priority for AMO, and the value of learning from other jurisdictions.



Y-Säätiö How to End Homelessness (Finland Y Foundation)

[See presentation here.](#)

Teija Ojankowski, CEO, teija.ojankowski@ysaatio.fi

Juha Kajila, Head of International Affairs, juha.kahila@ysaatio.fi

Finland has had remarkable success in significantly reducing and is on its way to ending homelessness. Teija and Juha asserted that their success demonstrates that ending homelessness is solvable with the political will, tools and resources all in place to implement solutions.

Grounded in a Housing First approach, Finland decided in 2008 to invest in more social housing to provide permanent accommodation to people who had experienced homelessness. There was a critical shift from emergency shelter response to housing solutions. The decision was based on the belief that issues such as mental illness and addiction often cannot be solved until someone has a stable and adequate place to live, combined with supportive services. Political will is imperative to make this program successful and to ensure the investment is made into having sufficient housing available.

Finland's model relied on collaboration to build and acquire large amounts of housing for people experiencing homelessness. Individuals pay their rent through various means, including a Housing Benefit, while social and healthcare services in the housing units are

paid through the counties. A key principle of the model is normality, so units become people's permanent homes, without needing to leave after a certain amount of time or stability is achieved.

The initiative not only cut the homeless population dramatically, but it saved money because other costs, such as policing and health, were reduced. In addition, prevention measures were taken to ensure early intervention and support for people at risk of homelessness. These measures decreased homelessness by 80% in Finland.

Participants commented that if we apply learning from Finland experience, then we need to transform our approach in Ontario by developing a comprehensive and integrated service system rather than the fragmented system currently in place.



The Pathologies of Poverty: Homelessness and Health

Dr. Andrew Boozary, MD, MPP, SM, CCFP
Executive Director, Population Health and Gattuso Centre for Social Medicine, UHN
Assistant Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Dr. Andrew Boozary spoke about the importance of a right to housing for better health with the assertion that "there is no universal health care without the right to housing." The presentation outlined data on the current state of homelessness and its impacts on the health of individuals experiencing homelessness. The data shows that the current approach to homelessness is very costly to the health and justice systems.

The [Social Medicine Housing initiative](#) seeks to address this issue. With investments from every order of government and partnerships between the United Way of Greater Toronto, University Health Network (UHN) Gattuso Centre for Social Medicine, Ontario Health and others, an innovative supportive housing site will be opening in March 2024.



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