**Ottawa Media Q&A for ATEH and Partners Spokespeople**

Q: So tell me what is the 20,000 Homes Action Week?

* The 20,000 Homes Campaign is a national movement of communities – led by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness - working together to permanently house 20,000 of Canada’s must vulnerable homeless people by July 1, 2018
* Our local Action Week marks the beginning of Ottawa’s participation in the campaign.
* From April 18-23, over 100 skilled professionals and trained volunteers will survey many who are homeless in Ottawa – including those we meet on our streets, in our shelters, at our homeless drop-ins and day programs and among the ‘hidden homeless.’   These teams will come to know our homeless neighbours by name and will better understand their housing needs, identifying the most vulnerable.
* This information will help drive a community ‘call to action’ to find permanent housing solutions for those who are most vulnerable.

Q: Who is behind the 20,000 Homes Campaign?

* The 20,000 Homes Campaign is a national movement of communities – led by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness.
* Ottawa’s Action Week is organised by the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa in collaboration with numerous partners. *In addition to the Alliance and the 25+ programs and agencies involved in surveying,* Ottawa’s Action Week is being made possible with the generous support of numerous partners and sponsors, including:
  + Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness; Canadian Mental Health Association, Ottawa Branch; Christie Walther Communications; City of Ottawa; Community Solutions; Downtown Rideau BIA; Jewish Family Services; John Howard Society of Ottawa; Ottawa Little Theatre; Ottawa Mission; Ottawa Police Service; Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre; St. Albans Church; Salvation Army Booth Centre; Tewegan Aboriginal Youth Housing; United Way Ottawa; anonymous donors and committed volunteers!

Q: What will happen during Ottawa’s Action Week?

* On April 18, 20 and 21, skilled professionals and trained volunteers will survey homeless people on our streets, in our shelters, at our homeless drop-ins and day programs and among the ‘hidden homeless.’
* The survey is similar to one used by the very successful 100,000 Homes Campaign in the U.S.A., and uses a vulnerability index to better understand the needs of individuals who are homeless – so we as a community might plan the best responses.
* On April 23, from 10:00-11:30 am at the Ottawa Little Theatre, the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa will hold a Community Debrief – sponsored by the Downtown Rideau BIA - to present the top findings of the surveys, to offer a portrait of homelessness in Ottawa, and to launch a call to action - building public support for ending homelessness and political support for renewed federal and provincial investment in housing and support services.

Q: Who are the homeless and the hidden homeless?

* We know that in 2014, over 6500 individuals stayed overnight at one of our community’s emergency overnight shelters. Many were there for weeks and months. In fact, the average length of stay at our emergency shelters – 73 days in 2013 – was longer in 2014. Permanent, safe, appropriate and affordable housing solutions, with the support necessary to sustain them, are urgently needed.
* We know that over half of those in Ottawa experiencing homelessness and staying at our emergency shelters are female, youth or members of family households.
* While a substantial portion of the homeless population stays in homeless shelters, or is unsheltered, others are not. Some stay temporarily with acquaintances, friends or family, with no immediate prospect of getting their own place, knowing they might be kicked out at any time – what is known as ‘couch surfing’ or hidden homelessness.
* A conservative estimate, as reported in the 2013 State of Homelessness in Canada, suggests that there may be three individuals experiencing hidden homelessness for every one person in our shelters.

Q: Will you survey the entire city?

* During Ottawa’s Action Week, in addition to street-based outreach, survey teams will go to at least 30 different locations where homeless people are in large numbers, including both our emergency shelters and at places where the ‘hidden homeless’ may gather.
* Our objective is to create a snapshot of the most vulnerable in our community to identify the housing solutions we need.
* By engaging homeless individuals firsthand, we aim to encourage housing solutions that integrate the stories, needs and perspectives of our homeless neighbours.

Q: How many people are homeless in Ottawa today?

* We have excellent data and information on the families and individuals that stay in our emergency shelter system. In 2014, over 6500 individuals accessed an emergency shelter in Ottawa at some point in the year.
* Each spring, the Alliance publishes shelter data from the year prior; a complete picture of 2014 shelter data will be released in May.
* We only have estimates of the numbers of families and individuals who are among our hidden homeless. A conservative estimate, as reported in the 2013 State of Homelessness in Canada, suggests that there may be three individuals experiencing hidden homelessness for every one person in our shelters. Through this survey, we hope to learn the names and better understand the needs of some of Ottawa’s hidden homeless.

Q: The national campaign has established a target of housing for 20,000 by July 1, 2018. What is Ottawa’s target for 2018?

* Through our community’s 10-year plan, we in Ottawa are committed to ending long-term homelessness. Our City is developing interim targets to achieve that goal.
* We know that the City can not do this alone. Through this campaign, we will issue a Call to Action, building public support for ending homelessness and political support for renewed federal and provincial investment in housing and support services. Drawing on Action Week data, we will collaborate with partners and stakeholders to set ambitious targets for us in Ottawa. We know ending long-term homelessness is possible, and we are committed to that goal.

Q: How does Housing First help end homelessness?

* Our community is moving ahead with a coordinated system of supports to ensure that those individuals who are the most vulnerable are housed first and fast.
* Research has demonstrated that housing homeless people as quickly as possible without pre-conditions, is not only more effective but saves money.
* This approach means providing people with a place to live first and offering recovery-oriented services and additional support for underlying issues, such as addiction and mental illness, that best meet the needs of the individual.
* Access to a home (one that is subsidized) – and access to the supports to help one stay housed – these are the two basic ingredients.
* With a limited supply of affordable and subsidized housing here in Ottawa, we’re currently missing a crucial part of the solution.

Q: Can we really end homelessness?

* Ending homelessness may not mean that no one will ever experience a housing crisis again – the dynamics of our world are such that job losses, health crises, family conflicts, and other phenomena – experiences which interrupt housing stability – are likely to continue. But no one should be – or needs to be - trapped in an endless cycle of homelessness.

Q: How can people get involved?

* During our Action Week, and specifically at our April 23 Community Debrief (10:00 – 11:30 am, Ottawa Little Theatre), individuals will be invited to respond to a Call to Action – wherein together we might all become champions for, and participants in creating, permanent housing solutions for our homeless neighbours.
* During our Action Week, we will also release a number of testimonials and stories of individuals – once homeless – but not housed.
* All are welcome to follow along via social media, as well, using the hashtag #20kOttawa – and following the Alliance handle - @ateh\_ott
* Learn more on the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa’s website at <http://endhomelessnessottawa.ca/>20kOttawa
* Together, we can end homelessness.