



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Ontario

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Ontario

May 19, 2026

Toronto City Council
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto ON M5H 2N2

Re: Support for Member Motion Introduced by Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie

Dear Mayor Chow and Members of Council,

On behalf of the **Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Toronto and CMHA Ontario Division**, I am writing to express our strong support for the member motion being introduced by Toronto Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie urging the Province of Ontario to amend Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rules to allow individuals without a fixed address to retain and save their shelter allowance, so it can be used toward securing housing.

CMHA supports clients with mental health and addictions-related challenges by providing community-based clinical services, supportive housing, homelessness supports, case management, and more. Through supportive housing programs, Housing First initiatives, crisis supports, and homelessness-focused programs, we see firsthand how the loss of shelter allowances places people further behind when they are trying to secure housing and regain stability.

Housing is critical to health and well-being and is one of the most important social determinants of health. Without stable housing, individuals face greater challenges in managing their mental and physical health, maintaining employment or income supports, and accessing treatment and community-based services. Prolonged homelessness can also increase reliance on emergency departments, shelters, and crisis services, and lead to justice involvement.

Under current social assistance rules in Ontario, when recipients lose their housing, they also lose their shelter allowance (\$390 for Ontario Works and \$599 for ODSP), creating a significant barrier to securing new housing. The motion requests the Province of Ontario to establish a mechanism (such as a reserve or escrow account) that allows these funds to be held and used for first and last month's rent and other housing-related costs necessary to secure and stabilize housing when housing is secured.



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Allowing OW and ODSP recipients to retain their shelter allowance while unhoused would provide a practical pathway to securing stable housing more quickly by enabling individuals to save toward first and last month's rent and other housing-related costs that are often barriers to securing housing. This proposed change would help reduce the length and severity of homelessness, improve housing stability and health outcomes, and prevent further downstream pressures on our healthcare, justice, and social service sectors.

With nearly 85,000 people experiencing homelessness across Ontario—and homelessness in Toronto more than doubling since 2021 to over 15,400 individuals—this targeted policy solution could support over 30,000 OW and ODSP recipients in regaining housing, while also reducing downstream costs to the healthcare and emergency shelter systems.

We commend the City of Toronto, and Deputy Mayor Ainslie in particular, for bringing forward this motion and demonstrating leadership, and we urge the City Council to adopt this motion.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to addressing homelessness and improving outcomes for people receiving social assistance so everyone can live with dignity.

Sincerely,

Michael Anhorn
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Mental Health Association - Toronto Branch

Camille Quenneville
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division