

## **Canadian Alliance on Ending Homelessness' 2022 National Conference Report for ACPD**

This year's conference was a hybrid model. The Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities (ACPD) paid for two virtual tickets so that members of the Housing Working Group (HWG) could attend. Jayne Cardno and James Kemp represented the ACPD at the conference.

The in-person event took place in Toronto this year and both forms of the conference were fraught with organizational problems. We were only able to attend some of the sessions on our preferences list as some of them weren't streamed properly. Slides were not made available to us and they were inaccessible to all, regardless of the disability. Q and A sessions were equally difficult for those of us attending virtually to participate, but this improved as the conference progressed.

Key note addresses were mostly informative and entertaining. Of particular note was the address from the newly created Office of the Federal Housing Advocate: Marie-Josée Houle. She described the new office's mandate, stressing that it can only address systemic issues and has no enforcement powers, but she mentioned three major issues of note: Accessibility of Housing is a human right, Criminalization of Encampments constitutes a clear human rights violation,

as well as the increased commodification and financialization of rental housing resulting in drastic numbers of “renovictions” and “econovictions”.

I attended 7 sessions over the course of three days.

1. **Investing in Early and Upstream Efforts to Prevent Youth Homelessness:** This was the only session available for streaming during the first session. It was discussing youth policy and social systems from the Wisconsin Youth Initiatives. They spent a lot of time focussing on the “Hidden Homeless” as youths are often couch surfing at friends or relatives. The presenters were discussing programs and policies that were so radically different from what we know of that they were completely alien to us.
2. **Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments in Canada:** This was a fascinating discussion by a man named Iain DeJong. I was only able to hear half of his discussion because the sound cut out, but the session described the issues of encampments from all levels, from those trying to provide services, to those living in them, to the politicians trying to either address them or hide them. He also discussed Master Leases, as well as Wraparound Supports; like day programs, storage, kenneling, etc. He also discussed the importance of leadership and practical experience by giving us examples of well-meaning people doing horrible

things in a misguided effort to help. I am hoping to get a copy of a complete presentation so I can provide it to the HWG, but the promised videos of the conference have yet to materialize.

3. **Politics of Prevention:** I attended this session primarily for the discussion on “NIMBYism” and community engagement. It was a fascinating discussion on the root causes and driving forces behind community disengagement. Through anecdotal evidence on successes and failures I learned a number of effective methods of addressing NIMBYism as well as things to be wary or watchful for when these groups begin protesting.
4. **Housing is a Human Right, Not a Commodity; The Impacts of “Financialization”:** This was an illuminating session on why our housing market is spiralling out of control. They talked about the commodification of housing and explained that it is considered investment portfolio material. The problem being that investment firms are always striving for more and more profit. Keeping stable tenants is not profitable when you can dump them and increase rent to the new tenants. Bill 23 will further erode what little protections we have by removing municipal policies like right of return and restricting a municipality’s ability to demand affordable and attainable housing. A strange twist is that some of the investment portfolios that are

causing the problem are actually owned by public pensions.

5. **Compassion and the Complexities of**

**Encampments:** This was enlightening in that it described a single community's different attempts to address the homeless issue. From the creation of an encampment, to the addition of different levels of government, to the addition of police community support, to the addition of medical supports. This collaboration seemed to be very successful until a gang moved into the encampment and began to extort residents to sell drugs. Due to the pre-existing group effort to create a safe space, they were quickly able to go into the encampment and move people out to another location, and while doing so, identified the individuals from said gang and were able to isolate them. The encampment was relocated without incident and the residents were very cooperative as they felt safer in the regulated environment. This was a good example of how the community can care for its most vulnerable if they work together with the correct mindset and intentions. One thing I found interesting about this session, the group was from Alberta which I have discovered is not quite as accessible as Ontario. I asked what sort of disability supports they provided and they were confused by the question. Their answer was that the building was low

barrier; as though the simple fact that a wheelchair could wheel in the front door was all that was required.

6. **Inequity in Housing/Reclaiming Human Rights:** This was the only Disability related session on the events agenda and it was only the first half an hour. Cas Star from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness came and discussed briefly the difficulties in addressing housing needs for persons with disabilities; specifically how little research actually exists on homelessness and persons with disabilities. She spoke briefly on the reactionary methods for dealing with issues related to us. That the government only gets involved when things are brought to a crisis point. I was able to engage her in a brief discussion regarding MAID and how persons with disabilities are applying for it instead of living on the streets or trying to survive on current social assistance rates.
7. **From Rentals to Tent Cities:** This was looking at improving housing rights from the federal level on down. From setting federal housing guidelines for provinces, to creating federal minimum policies to provinces, to creating federal guidelines on not for profit housing as well as regional quotas. Also discussed changes to municipal laws with a rights based housing lens. We also discussed the right to shelter vs. the right to housing. This was a recurring theme in a lot of sessions. We have a

right to shelter, not a right to housing. It is defining those words that created the very different provincial and municipal approaches we currently have regarding encampments. Also discussed using legal precedents to create progressive change for encampment residents.

Due to Tim Nolan's request for us to consider condos in the social housing inventory, I stopped into a session that was talking about Ottawa's attempt to introduce condos into their inventory. They had some 800 units but they were not able to provide them at an attainable rent, only an affordable one. They did not seem too successful.

I hope to be able to access some of the sessions regarding women's housing and women's housing issues as that is a perspective that I haven't been able to access yet. There are another 17 sessions I have earmarked for review if I ever get access to them. I will report these to the HWG as needed and anything that comes out of that will be brought before the Committee. There was a total of 54 separate sessions over the course of three days. While the Ontario government was proudly professing success in the past two years as there have been some improvements to homelessness numbers, it is clearly because of the brief pandemic funding that has buoyed up the current numbers. As we see that funding ending now, we will see those numbers worsen within the year. My overall

assessment from the event was that housing, particularly accessible, attainable housing, is in serious trouble without significant changes in the near future. The HWG will seek out ways we can recommend improvements at the municipal level and will continue to create relationships with area stakeholders.