

Help for homeless in Hastings-Lennox and Addington on its way

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By Nate Smelle

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, so far the province's homeless population have been among the hardest hit. In an attempt to help some of this vulnerable sector, the provincial government announced last week that they would be providing municipalities and Indigenous community partners in Ontario with some \$241 million.

Within the announcement it was also made clear that a portion of this funding, which is intended to help those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, would land in the riding of Hastings - Lennox and Addington.

Member of Provincial Parliament for the riding, Daryl Kramp indicated within the announcement that Hastings and Lennox and Addington counties would each receive the full amount requested from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. He said this means Hastings County can expect to receive \$954,853 in social services relief funding to fund operations of a housing allowance program; while Lennox and Addington county will receive \$499,757 to purchase and retro-fit a building that will provide transitional housing and longer-term housing solutions.

"Our government is investing in important projects like this to help protect our most vulnerable citizens from COVID-19," said Kramp. "We're working hand-in-hand with our partners to make sure they have the tools and flexibility they need to keep people safe."

As one of the organizations most engaged with addressing homelessness in North Hastings, the team of staff and volunteers at the North Hastings Community Trust understand the urgency to address the convergence of crises during the pandemic. Pointing out how the Trust has remained open to provide support, and a place for people to go who do not have a home since COVID-19 first hit, program coordinator, Jane Kali sees the funding as a step in the right direction.

Expressing her awareness of the severity of the homelessness crisis, and how more needs to be done, she said "We have been witness to the housing crisis in our region, and close up to the impact of decades of neglect by all levels of government. We hope this announcement of funds will help create needed emergency and long-term housing solutions for our community. We also ask the province to raise social assistance rates immediately so people can afford both housing and food. The federal government's financial commitment of \$2,000 a month (CERB) to support people through this pandemic illustrates more realistically what people need to live."

In total, the Ford government is spending \$510 million from the Social Services Relief Fund to protect the health and safety of the province's most vulnerable people. The Social Services Relief Fund is part of a joint investment of \$4 billion from the federal and provincial government provided to Ontario municipalities under the Safe Restart Agreement. The agreement is meant to assist municipalities with protecting the health and well-being of the people of Ontario, while delivering critical public services, such as public transit and shelters, as the province continues down the path of economic recovery. The government also announced that the money delivered through the fund will be used to: protect and support homeless shelter staff and residents; create or renovate over 1,500 housing units; expand rent support programs; and create long-term housing solutions.

Explaining the reason for the government's expenditure, Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Steve Clark said "We know that our municipal and Indigenous partners are facing extraordinary challenges, which is why these significant investments are so important. Our investments are helping to build longer term solutions as well as meet ongoing, immediate needs related to COVID-19."