

Support for Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM) Solve the Crisis Campaign

From OBCM Chair Marianne Meed Ward <chair@obcm.ca>

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To info@obcm.ca <info@obcm.ca>

Cc Michelle Baker (michelle@obcm.ca) <michelle@obcm.ca>; solvethecrisis@obcm.ca <solvethecrisis@obcm.ca>

 3 attachments (607 KB)

Backgrounder for SolvetheCrisis.ca Supporters .pdf; Municipal Motion in Support of SolvetheCrisis.ca Campaign .pdf; How you Can Help SolvetheCrisis.ca.pdf;

Good Morning,

On behalf of the entire Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM) Caucus, I am reaching out today to ask you to share with your Council our request that your municipality joins us in our campaign to end the Humanitarian Crisis facing this province.

This past August OBCM launched our [SolveTheCrisis.ca](https://www.solve-the-crisis.ca) campaign to address the homelessness, mental health, and addictions crisis happening in municipalities big and small across the entire province. It is already having a significant impact with community partners, businesses, first responders, private sector, and the members of the public who have jumped on board.

We have seen hundreds of media hits, thousands of emails sent to both levels of government and Heads of Councils in every corner of Ontario. We are especially thrilled to see the growing number of municipal councils passing motions of support and hope that we can add your municipality to that list!

I am asking you to join us and help keep this issue at the forefront of discussions taking place at the province and within the federal government.

Attached you will find 3 documents.

They include a list of how you can help, a draft motion that you can use as is or you are more than welcome to make it your own, background information, regional information, funding facts, and what you can ask your residents and community partners to do to help support the SolveTheCrisis campaign.

These materials address why we are doing this, why we are doing it now, and what we are asking for in order to meet the needs of our local communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and we look forward to having you onboard.

For any questions or to discuss this further, you can reply to me here, or please feel free to reach out to Michelle Baker, OBCM's Executive Director, at michelle@obcm.ca or 647-308-6602

Sincerely,
Marianne Meed Ward

Marianne Meed Ward, Mayor of Burlington
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About Ontario's Big City Mayors

Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM) is an organization that includes mayors of 29 single and lower-tier cities with a population of 100,000 or more, who collectively represent nearly 70 percent of Ontario's population. OBCM advocates for issues and policies important to Ontario's largest cities.



Backgrounder - SolvethetheCrisis.ca Campaign

Key Asks of the Province

- Appoint a responsible ministry and Minister with the appropriate funding and powers as a single point of contact to address the full spectrum of housing needs as well as mental health, addictions and wrap around supports.
- Have this Minister strike a task force with broad sector representatives including municipalities, healthcare, first responders, community services, the business community and the tourism industry to develop a *Made in Ontario Action Plan*.
- Provide municipalities with the tools and resources to transition those in encampments to more appropriate supports, when deemed necessary
- Commit to funding the appropriate services these individuals need, community by community where there are gaps in the system. Including an immediate increase in detox and rehabilitation beds for those looking to get the health support they need, on their own.
- Invest in 24/7 Community Hubs / Crisis Centres across the province to relieve pressure on emergency centres and first responders

Background Information on the Crisis

OBCM Advocacy

- The 'Solve the Crisis' campaign is a culmination of years of advocacy from Ontario's Big City Mayors on the mental health, addictions and homelessness crisis across Ontario, including our white paper released in 2021, most recently developing our health and homelessness strategy in 2023 and an update to that strategy included in this campaign (see OBCM advocacy timeline below)

A Growing Crisis

- Over the years we have seen this crisis develop to include a growing number of unhoused residents and encampments in many of our communities:
 - Of 72 communities surveyed, 68 reported encampments with an estimated 14-23% of the homeless population staying in encampments - [Infrastructure Canada National Survey on Homeless Encampments](#)
 - In 2023 there were at least 1,400 homeless encampments in communities across the province. Many of the residents of these encampments suffer from mental health or substance abuse challenges. - [The Association of Municipalities \(AMO\)](#)



- **London** - as of March 31, 2024 1758 individuals experiencing homelessness and there were 56 active encampments - [Housing and Homelessness Snapshot, City of London](#)
- **Kingston** - 1,924 clients received some type of service in relation to Homelessness in 2023 this includes (outreach, shelter, housing support services, such as housing loss prevention and housing application assistance) - [Housing and Homelessness Report, City of Kingston](#)
- **Region of Waterloo** - current estimates are that 1,000 people are experiencing homelessness across the region including 450 people experiencing Chronic homelessness - [Encampments Report - City of Waterloo](#)
- **Hamilton** - As of January 31 2024, 1,592 Homeless people, with 585 having been homeless for more than 6 months and, 1007 for less than 6 months - [City of Hamilton](#)
- **Windsor** - 468 Individuals experienced chronic homelessness in 2023 up 19% from 2022 - [Housing and Homelessness Report - City of Windsor](#)
- Ontario residents are frustrated with the impact of this crisis on their communities and want to see the government take action. In a recent survey conducted by [CMHA Ontario](#)
 - More than 8 in 10 Ontarians would prefer solutions for the ongoing opioid and drug poisoning crisis which focus on healthcare and social services support rather than punishments
 - 73% percent of Ontarians are concerned the opioid crisis is getting worse
 - 56% report that opioid addiction is an issue of concern in their community
 - 71% believe government should prioritize addressing the crisis

There Are Solutions

- Municipalities along with community partners have developed programs and spaces that are providing effective solutions to this crisis including:
 - **London** - from October 2023 - March 2024, as part of a partnership between London Cares and LHSC, the House of Hope has been operating 25 highly supportive units at 362 Dundas Street.
 - Residents have seen significant health improvements including a 74% reduction in emergency department visit volumes in the first three months compared with the same time period and the same cohort in 2022 - [City of London](#)
 - **Toronto** - the city's Street to Homes (S2H) and its outreach partners helped transition 654 people to permanent housing throughout the pandemic - [City of Toronto](#)
 - **Kingston** - the affordable rental housing capital funding program has provided financial assistance from municipal, provincial and federal sources to create over 510 units to get people housed and off the streets



- These include - Addiction Mental Health Housing Stabilization Program-18 beds, Supportive/ Transitional Youth Housing - 48 units, Transitional housing for vulnerable women - 17 beds and more - [City of Kingston](#)
- **Oshawa** recently introduced **Mission United**, a collaborative social service and primary health care HUB for those experiencing homelessness.
 - This program seeks to assist those with high acuity and tri morbidity achieve long term stabilization by providing low barrier, wrap-around supports with a point in time model.
 - Through partnerships with various community agencies, they provide specialized person-centred services through a singular access point.
- **Windsor-Essex** - funded by the city and community organizations the Homelessness & Housing Help Hub (H4) is a “one-stop” multidisciplinary service hub. The H4 works towards the community’s goals to reduce homelessness by delivering housing focused, homelessness resolution programs that provide a variety of wrap-around supports for persons experiencing homelessness.
 - 133 people have been housed through supports provided at H4, 93 people were assisted by a family physician and 180 by a nurse practitioner through the Shelter Health Initiative
 - The Essex County Homelessness Hub has also housed 47 people through their support program - [Home Together Annual Report - Windsor Essex](#)

Timeline of OBCM Advocacy Work on Health and Homelessness

- **June 2021** - OBCM released a white paper entitled - *Working Together to Improve our Wellness: Recommendations from Ontario's Big City Mayors to improve mental health and addiction services in Ontario* - including recommendations for:
 - Structural recommendations to ensure more Ontarians get the help they need, when they need it, and where they need it.
 - Support that helps improve and connect municipal services with community mental health services
 - Legislative and regulatory changes that reduce the harm of substance use and support system change
 - Municipal leadership opportunities
 - Full paper found on our website here - [OBCM White Paper 2021](#)
- **June 2022** - OBCM Calls for an Emergency Meeting with Province to Address the Chronic Homelessness, Mental Health, Safety and Addictions Crisis Overwhelming Our Communities
 - This meeting to accelerate solutions to address chronic homelessness, mental health, safety, and addictions issues in our communities as our most



- marginalized and vulnerable populations have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic
- Working alongside the Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA) we emphasized the impact this crisis was having on downtowns and small and medium sized businesses who were still struggling from the impact of the pandemic
 - [OBCM Call for Emergency Meeting](#)
 - **August 2022** - at a joint meeting with the Mayors and Regional Chairs of Ontario (MARCO) OBCM reiterated our call for an emergency meeting on this issue with the support of key stakeholders who signed on to attend, these groups include the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Ontario Association of Business Improvement Areas, Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, AMO, Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario and the Ontario Tourism Industry Association.
 - [OBCM Reiterates Call for Emergency Meeting with Stakeholders](#)
 - **February 2023** - OBCM adopts our Health and Homelessness Strategy including five recommendations for the Ontario government to make an immediate impact on the mental health, addictions and homelessness crisis. These recommendations were developed using information gathered through consultation with local health partners to identify services required to ensure there is a health care continuum and appropriate response to this crisis affecting our cities.
 1. Centralized and integrated intake and dispatch process
 2. More provincial investment in low barrier hubs
 3. More stabilization and treatment beds with experienced staff to support those in their treatment journey
 4. More flexible and predictable funding for supportive housing
 5. More provincial ministry and agency collaboration to reduce red tape and duplication
 - Full motion and strategy can be found here - [OBCM Health and Homelessness Strategy 2023](#)
 - **April 2023** - OBCM meets with Minister Jones and staff, along with partners from the Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario, Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Kingston Health Sciences Centre and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.
 - Discussed the new funding recently announced in the budget of \$202 million each year to the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) and Indigenous Supportive Housing Program, and over half a billion dollars to support mental health and addictions.
 - Presented our Health and Homelessness Strategy, including recommendations to address the growing crisis in Ontario's cities
 - [OBCM Meets with Minister Jones](#)
 - **August 2023** - OBCM representatives have a special "Multi Minister Meeting" on our Health and Homelessness Strategy at the AMO Conference with Minister Parsa (Children, Community and Social Services), Associate Minister Nina Tangri (Housing), Associate Minister Tibollo (Mental Health), Associate Minister Charamine Williams (Women's Social and Economic Opportunity)



- OBCM representatives present our Health and Homelessness plan as well as various programs and facilities that are making a difference in our communities
- **June 2024** - at the OBCM June meeting in Chatham-Kent, members discuss updating the Health and Homelessness Strategy to push for various additional supports/asks from the province, especially as the issue of encampments has now grown and approves a communication campaign leading into the 2024 AMO Conference
 - [OBCM Updated Health and Homelessness Strategy, 2024](#)

Overview of Ontario's Investments in Mental Health and Addictions **(from CMHA)**

- Through the [Roadmap to Wellness](#), Ontario is investing \$3.8 billion over 10 years to fill gaps in mental health and addictions care, create new services and expand programs.
- The government invested \$396 million over three years to improve access and expand existing mental health and addictions services and programs as part of Budget 2024.
- This investment includes:
 - \$124 million over three years to support the continuation of the Addictions Recovery Fund. The fund supports:
 - Maintaining 383 addictions treatment beds for adults who need intensive supports, helping to stabilize and provide care for approximately 7,000 clients each year;
 - Three Mobile Mental Health Clinics to provide a suite of mental health and addictions services to individuals living in remote, rural and underserved communities; and
 - Three police-partnered Mobile Crisis Response Teams to support individuals in a mental health or addictions crisis.
- Ongoing support for the [Ontario Structured Psychotherapy Program](#)
- Between 2020 and 2023, Ontario established a provincial network of 22 [Youth Wellness Hubs](#) which have connected 43,000 youth and their families to mental health, substance use, and wellness services, accounting for over 168,000 visits.
- As part of Budget 2024, Ontario committed \$152 million over the next three years to support individuals facing unstable housing conditions and dealing with mental health and addictions challenges.

Regional Data Points

- **Durham Region:** As of May 31, 2024 The Region of Durham Has at least 757 people experiencing homelessness with 326 having experienced homelessness for 6 months or more.
 - Inflow into shelter system: 35 individuals became chronically homeless, 36 made contact after no contact for 60 days or more and 6 people lost housing.
 - Outflow from Shelter system: 10 people moved from shelters into housing, 6 people lost housing.
 - Durham Municipal Breakdown of active homeless population as of May 2024:
 - Ajax: 241
 - Clarington: 19
 - North Durham: 17
 - Oshawa: 362
 - Pickering: 25
 - Whitby: 58
 - Other/Unknown: 35 - [Durham Region, Built for Zero Report Card](#)

- **Halton Region** - As of October 1st 2023, 172 individuals were receiving emergency shelter from the region
 - 270 additional individuals were residing in transitional housing awaiting offers of permanent housing
 - Between 10-25 individuals sleep outside in Halton on any given night, with most actively working with the street outreach team - [Halton Region](#)
 - In 2023, 28% of all shelter placements required the use of hotels for overflow due to increased demand on services
 - Halton Region's Shelter Capacity 2023(by number of individuals): 148, overflow hotel placements required to meet demand and 99 permanent placement beds.
 - As of 2022, 2,127 emergency housing situations were resolved through outreach and funding through the housing stability fund
 - 884 residents assisted with finding affordable rental housing, and 514 clients received intensive customised supports
 - 56 chronically homeless households were assisted with permanent housing, with intensive wrap around individualized support services
 - Halton Region provided rent geared income to 3,091 households from the Halton Access to Community Housing (HATCH) - [Halton Region 2022 State of Housing](#)

- **Niagara Region** - As of March 2021, at least 665 people in the Niagara Region were experiencing homelessness in 2021
 - 121 were children aged 0-15, 76 were youth aged 16-24,
 - 47 reported staying in unsheltered locations
 - Of the 439 surveys reported in 2021:



- Almost 1 in 4 (22.6%) identified as indigenous Compared to Indigenous making up 2.8% of Niagara's Population.
 - 42 percent had been experiencing homelessness for more than 6 months
 - (Data Recording Paused During Pandemic Point In Time Counts begin again Fall 2024)
 - [Niagara Region - Point in Time Count](#)
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- **Peel Region** - In 2023 4,800 households received one time financial assistance to prevent homelessness
 - 351 households were placed from peels centralized waiting list into subsidized community housing units
 - 16, 497 households currently using the Affordable Housing System - [Peel Region](#)
 - As of October 2023 Peels emergency shelter system was operating above 270% occupancy
 - Overflow expenses have grown significantly projected \$26.9 million for 2023 and \$42 million in 2024 exceeding approved budgets and funding - [Peel Region Report](#)
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- **Region of Waterloo** - According to the Youth impact survey youth experiencing homelessness has increased from 8% in 2021 to 13% in 2023 - [Region of Waterloo](#)
 - As of September 21, 2021 the Region of Waterloo had 1,085 individuals experiencing homelessness
 - 412 of those are living rough (in encampments, on the street or in vehicle)
 - 335 experiencing hidden homelessness
 - 191 in emergency shelter, 84 in transitional housing, and 63 in institutions.
 - 75% of survey respondents experiencing chronic homelessness - [Region of Waterloo Point in Time Count](#)
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- **York Region** - Housed 978 households from the 2023 subsidized housing waitlist
 - Transitioned 1,294 from emergency housing to safe housing over 5 years
 - As of 2023 15,716 households remain on the subsidized housing waitlist Net change of plus 849
 - Opened two new transitional housing sites adding 28 new units to the emergency and transitional housing system
 - Significant increases in the number of people experiencing homelessness projected, with estimates ranging from 2,100 to 2,300 individuals in the next five years.
 - Unique individuals accessing emergency housing increased 5% from 2019 - 2023



- The total number of unique people who experienced chronic homelessness during the year increased by approximately 120% from 2019 to 2023, from 124 to 473.
- 1496 unique persons experiencing homelessness in 2023 - [York Region](#)

- **District of Muskoka Lakes** - As of July, 2022 650 households are on the social housing waitlist with 357 of those waiting for a one bedroom unit and a wait time up to 8 years.
 - Median Employment income for individuals is 21% lower than the rest of the province
 - 13% of Muskoka Residents living in poverty
 - 50% of rental households spend more than 30% of their total income on shelter costs.
 - 11 unique households moved from emergency shelters into longer-term housing solutions (i.e. transitional or supportive housing)
 - 15 households were moved from unsheltered/provisionally accommodated to transitional or long-term housing
 - 6 households were supported to move from transitional to long-term housing
 - 973 requests for assistance in obtaining housing from households experiencing homelessness
 - 19,518 requests for assistance from households experiencing homelessness received supports and services (not related to accommodation)
 - 1,209 requests for assistance from households at risk of homelessness received supports and services (not related to accommodation) to support housing loss prevention, retention, or re-housing - [Muskoka 10 Year Housing & Homelessness Plan Annual Report](#)

- **South Eastern Ontario**
 - **Kingston** - As of December 2023, Approximately 127 people slept rough meaning makeshift accommodations, sleeping in street, park or vehicle an increase of 12 from august - december of 2023
 - 1,924 clients received some type of service in relation to Homelessness in 2023 this includes (outreach, shelter, housing support services, such as housing loss prevention and housing application assistance) - [City of Kingston](#)
 - **Ottawa** - As of December 31, 2023 Ottawa had 12,447 households on the centralized waitlist with 1,186 households housed from the waitlist
 - 49 New Affordable units and 57 New Supportive units were completed
 - 301 households were housed through the housing first program
 - 1,129 households housed from the shelter system
 - 988 people Chronically homeless, with 382 individuals with a history of chronic homelessness being housed
 - 13% increase in people using the shelter system



- 3% decrease in the average length of stay in shelter system, 25% increase in newcomer inflow into shelter system - [City of Ottawa](#)
- **South Western Ontario**
 - **Windsor** - In 2023, 715 households experiencing homelessness were housed
 - 95 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness were housed with supports
 - Youth Homelessness: 25 youth experiencing homelessness housed with supports
 - 1105 households assisted with rent assistance. - [City of Windsor](#)

MOTION : *[insert name of your municipality or organization here]* supports the SolvethetheCrisis.ca Campaign and requests that the Provincial and Federal Governments take Action to Address the Growing Mental Health, Addictions and Homelessness Crisis in Ontario

Whereas there is a humanitarian crisis unfolding on the streets in our cities, large and small, urban and rural, across Ontario. The time for words is over, we need immediate action at all levels of government, starting with the Province of Ontario

Whereas the homelessness, mental health and addictions crisis continues to grow with 3432 drug related deaths in Ontario in 2023¹ and over 1400 homeless encampments across Ontario communities in 2023²; and

Whereas the province has provided additional funding and supports, such as the recent investment of \$378 million for HART Hubs and approximately 375 beds with wraparound supports, it does not adequately address the growing crisis and the financial and social impact on municipalities and regions across the province; and

Whereas municipalities and regions are stepping up and working with community partners to put in place community-specific solutions to address this crisis, but municipalities and regions lack the expertise, capacity, or resources to address these increasingly complex health care and housing issues alone; and

Whereas this is primarily a health issue that falls under provincial jurisdiction and municipalities and regions should not be using the property tax base to fund these programs; and

Whereas there is no provincial lead focused on this crisis leading to unanswered questions that span over a dozen ministries, and a lack of support to manage the increasing needs of those who are unhoused.

Therefore, be it resolved that *[insert name of your municipality here]* supports the SolvethetheCrisis.ca Campaign;

And calls on provincial and federal governments to commit to immediate action to solve the Humanitarian Crisis that Ontario is facing as the numbers of unhoused individuals and those suffering with mental health & addictions grows exponentially;

AND that the province officially makes Homelessness a Health Priority;

AND appoints a responsible Minister and Ministry with the appropriate funding and powers as a single point of contact to address the full spectrum of housing needs as well as mental health, addictions and wrap around supports;

AND that the provincial government strike a task force with broad sector representatives including municipalities, regions, healthcare, first responders, community services, the business community and the tourism industry to develop a *Made in Ontario Action Plan*;

¹ Office of the Chief Coroner, Ontario (2024). OCC Opioid Mortality Summary Q4 2023. [PDF] .

<https://odprn.ca/occ-opioid-and-suspect-drug-related-death-data/>

² [Homeless Encampments in Ontario. A Municipal Perspective. Association of Municipalities of Ontario. July 2024 -](#)

AND that this provincial task force reviews current programs developed by municipalities, regions and community partners that have proven successful in our communities, to ensure that solutions can be implemented quickly and effectively to tackle this crisis.

AND that the federal government is included in these conversations.

AND that both levels of government provide adequate, sufficient and sustainable funding to ensure that municipalities have the tools and resources to support individuals suffering with mental health and addictions, including unhoused people and those from vulnerable populations that may be disproportionately impacted;

And that this **[Council or Board]** calls on the residents of **[insert name of your municipality, region or organization here]** to join us in appealing to the provincial and federal governments for support by visiting SolveTheCrisis.ca and showing your support;

AND further that a copy of this motion be sent to:

- The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
- The Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities of Canada
- The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
- The Honourable Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
- The Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- The Honourable Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
- The Honourable Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
- Local MPs
- Local MPPs and
- Ontario's Big City Mayors



— **OBCM** —
Ontario's Big City Mayors

How You Can Help **SolvetheCrisis.ca** A Request to Ontario Municipalities From Ontario's Big City Mayors

What is the **SolvetheCrisis.ca** Campaign?

Ontario's Big City Mayors (OBCM) launched the [SolvetheCrisis.ca](https://www.solveethecrisis.ca) campaign in August 2024 to address the homelessness, mental health and addictions crisis happening across Ontario.

After years of advocacy we are at a turning point, the time to act is now. This crisis is growing in municipalities and regions of every size across Ontario, and we need help more than ever!

Ontario municipalities of all sizes have stepped up, putting in place programs and housing options along with community partners and other stakeholders, advocating for funding that might be provided from other levels of government but is never consistent and never enough. We cannot tackle this alone, the federal and provincial governments' must come to the table.

We launched the [SolvetheCrisis.ca](https://www.solveethecrisis.ca) Campaign with a press conference at Queen's Park including a video that can be shared and found here: [OBCM You Tube Channel](#), a social media campaign that is still underway, and a website www.solveethecrisis.ca where your residents/networks/councils & staff can watch our video, join our call to action by filling out a letter to the Premier, various Ministers, local MPPs and MPs.

How Can You Help?

There are so many ways!

- Follow us on our socials & like and reshare our posts:
 - X (formerly Twitter) [@SolvetheCrisis_](#) and [@ONBigCityMayors](#),
 - LinkedIn [Ontario's Big City Mayors \(OBCM\)](#) and
 - Facebook [Ontario's Big City Mayors](#)

- Pass the draft motion attached, a more personalized version of the attached motion, or create one of your own!

- Share this call to action with your Council, Board of Directors, Membership, Networks and the public

- Share your motion and support of the SolveTheCrisis.ca campaign on social media and tag our accounts:
 - X (formerly Twitter) [@SolvetheCrisis_](#) and [@ONBigCityMayors](#),
 - LinkedIn [Ontario's Big City Mayors \(OBCM\)](#) and



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- Facebook [Ontario's Big City Mayors](#)
- Use the hashtags #solvethecrisis and tag Solve the Crisis and OBCM's socials if you can to help us track and report on engagement
- Ask residents, staff, councillors, supporters, members and even your Mayor / Warden / Chair / Head of Council to visit www.solvethecrisis.ca fill out the letter to send the message to their local representatives stating that they want action now.
 - Encourage them to share it with their networks as well.
- Read through our attached backgrounders and key messages and include them in any advocacy efforts you may undertaking on this issue
- Draft an op-ed or article specific to your municipality or region to push out to your local media (see OBCM Chair Meed Ward's Op-Ed here - [Toronto Star - August 17th](#))
- Contact us at solvethecrisis@obcm.ca for more information