Ottawa—

City leaders just released yet another move toward ending homelessness in Ottawa. Only this time they mean it. Throughout the last 20 years, we've seen action plan after action plan, so why should we believe this one is any different? It seems like another bold move toward lying to the public that these so-called leaders claim to serve.

On April 10th, they held the Ottawa Health and Housing Symposium but forgot to send out the memo beforehand. Convenient. They released the details after the fact, which immediately gives the impression that they don't even believe their own messaging. The community should be notified in advance and at least be able to watch it live on the city's YouTube channel. Better yet, there should be an opportunity for a live Q&A and contributions from the community—and the actual people this table aims to help.

Instead, the people furthest removed from the reality of life on the street are meeting behind closed doors and giving us a sanitized retelling afterward. That makes me uneasy. It suggests that whatever was said wouldn't stand up to public questioning. It's also hard to believe that people this far removed from the problem have any real-life insight into what it actually is. If they did, we wouldn't be repeating the same promises under different names with fresh, polished language.

The symposium announced the creation of the new Health, Housing and Homelessness Action Table. Established under the Housing and Homelessness Leadership Table (HHLT), this is new and will work, obviously, because they included the word "action."

Like all the others, it promises a shared action plan, better collaboration, improved data sharing, and reduced pressure on health and emergency systems. We're told integrated housing-health approaches are already improving outcomes—though no one can point to where, and nothing on the ground suggests that's true. They say they want to explore opportunities to better align funding and resources. Easy solution would be to stop defunding them. We're also told this will reduce strain on systems, despite cuts to harm reduction that are clearly doing the opposite.

Another action plan isn't the solution. Ottawa already has plenty of plans, reports, and frameworks—many still technically active. Data isn't the problem either. The problem is that people actually living this reality are rarely listened to, let alone put in positions of decision-making power or engaged with on ground level by descision makers.
Which makes the most telling detail this: the table includes housing, health care, and community partners across Ottawa. Notably absent are the people experiencing homelessness themselves. And

that says everything.

This news release is one of the clearest examples of optics I've seen. The fact that our "leaders" can hide behind closed doors and then present this as progress is insulting. They aren't addressing the real problems; they're addressing what they think the problem is—or worse, what they think Ottawa thinks the problem is. Meanwhile, the real experts are still dehumanized, still ignored, and still on the streets cycling through systems that pass the buck onto supports that don't exist.

Mark Sutcliffe said, "we have to make sure the right supports are in place alongside new homes. That's how we create a city that's more compassionate, more effective, and works better for everyone." That sounds nice, but how can they claim to know what the "right supports" are if they aren't consulting the real experts on what the problems actually are?

Every person has different needs to be housed successfully—and, more importantly, to stay housed. That's the real issue. Homelessness will never be solved by trying to build a system that works for everyone, or even one that works for "most people."
This is a person-by-person reality that requires real care, real compassion, and the meaningful involvement of people with lived experience in decision-making.
What we don't need is another round of recycled promises, rebranded tables, or press releases issued long after the damage is done. We don't need language carefully sanitized to mask the uncomfortable truth that the underlying methodology, frameworks, and standards of care have barely shifted since the turn of the century. Semantic drift is not innovation. Renaming the same ideas is not progress.
If leaders are serious about change, they need to leave boardrooms and briefing notes behind and walk the streets where these policies land. Not for optics. Not for cameras. Not for votes. Just to listen, to connect, and to confront the consequences of inaction firsthand. Plans on paper mean nothing if they're never informed by lived reality.

On the streets, credibility isn't earned by talking—it's earned by doing. People in survival mode don't have the luxury of empty consultations or endless "strategies." Talk is cheap when your life depends on results. Policymakers would do well to remember that if they truly want to meet people where they are.
Without people with real lived experience not just consulted, but leading the work, Ottawa will continue cycling through the same failures—only with newer names, fresher logos, and the same sad outcomes.