



THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA
PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
AGENDA

PHSSC 1-2025

Tuesday, January 7, 2025

1:00 p.m.

Meeting will be held by electronic participation only

This electronic meeting can be viewed on Niagara Region's Website at:

<https://www.niagararegion.ca/government/council/>

The Council Chamber at Regional Headquarters WILL NOT be open to the public to attend this Committee meeting. Those interested in viewing the meeting, can view the live stream meeting proceedings at: niagararegion.ca/government/council

Pages

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT
3. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY INTEREST
4. SELECTION OF COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS
 - 4.1 Call for Nominations for Committee Co-Chair aligned to Public Health
 - 4.2 Motion to Close Nominations for Committee Co-Chair aligned to Public Health
 - 4.3 Voting for the Position of Committee Co-Chair aligned to Public Health
 - 4.4 Call for Nominations for Committee Co-Chair aligned to Community Services
 - 4.5 Motion to Close Nominations for Committee Co-Chair aligned to Community Services
 - 4.6 Voting for the Position of Committee Co-Chair aligned to Community Services

5. **PRESENTATIONS**

6. **DELEGATIONS**

7. **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 7.1 **COM 1-2025** 3 - 8
Reaching Home Program Enhancement

8. **CONSENT ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

- 8.1 **COM 2-2025** 9 - 21
Homelessness Services Update

A presentation will precede the consideration of this item.

- 8.2 **COM-C 1-2025** 22 - 27
ReNew The View Partnership

- 8.3 **COM-C 2-2025** 28 - 29
Homelessness Point-in-Time Count

- 8.4 **COM-C 3-2025** 30 - 32
Supporting Housing Strategy Update

9. **OTHER BUSINESS**

10. **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 4, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, Regional Headquarters.

11. **ADJOURNMENT**

If you require any accommodations for a disability in order to attend or participate in meetings or events, please contact the Accessibility Advisor at 905-980-6000 ext. 3252 (office), 289-929-8376 (cellphone) or accessibility@niagararegion.ca (email).

Subject: Reaching Home Program Enhancement

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, January 7, 2025

Recommendations

1. That Regional Council **APPROVE** the addition of one (1) permanent Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) fully funded by an increase in base funding to the Federal Reaching Home Program.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the recent announcement of an increase in funding of \$863,183 per annum as part of the Federal Reaching Home Program for the homelessness system in Niagara.
- Seek approval for the addition of one (1) full-time permanent position as per the Corporate Delegation of Authority Policy.

Financial Considerations

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada (HICC) has announced an increase in year over year base funding to the Reaching Home program. Niagara Region will receive an additional \$0.86 million for 2025 and 2026, increasing the annual allocation from \$3.67 million to \$4.53 million. Niagara will receive a further increase in 2027 and 2028 increasing the annual allocation to \$4.7 million. A budget adjustment to the Niagara Region 2025 operating budget to reflect the increased funding will be processed in accordance with Budget Control By-Law 2017-63, section 6.6(a) for amounts not exceeding \$1 million.

Enhanced Reaching Home funding includes a provision to allocate up to 15% (\$129,477) for staffing costs to support effective service delivery. Homelessness Services staff have reviewed the pressures and opportunities and recommend the addition of one full-time homelessness specialist position estimated at \$110,000, inclusive of salary and benefits.

The additional FTE and service programming enhancements are fully supported by the incremental funding with no levy increase.

Additionally, since the funding is retroactive to April 1, 2024, there is an opportunity to fund expenses budgeted to be levy-funded in 2024. These savings will be reflected in the 2024 year-end operating results for Community Services.

Analysis

Reaching Home, a federal homelessness program, is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness. It provides funding to communities across Canada to help address local homelessness needs. The Reaching Home program supports the most vulnerable people across Niagara in maintaining safe, stable, and affordable housing and supports strategies to reduce chronic homelessness in line with the goals of the National Housing Strategy.

Reaching Home Base Funding Increase

Reaching Home helps to fund the Housing First¹ program, the Home for Good² program and the outreach³ program. The enhanced funding is a welcome support to continue to focus on decreasing the number of people experiencing homelessness in Niagara Region.

A priority for homelessness services is to ensure flow in the shelter system. In 2024 homelessness services supported 991 people to move from emergency shelter to housing, 330 people to move from unsheltered homelessness to emergency shelter, and 50 people to move directly from unsheltered homelessness to housing. Rent subsidy support is a key tool in effectively decreasing the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness that currently use shelters and in achieving housing

¹ Housing First: a program to move people experiencing homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness, rapidly from the street or emergency shelters into stable and long-term housing with supports.

² Home for Good: a supportive housing program for clients who are homeless with complex needs who require multiple supports.

³ Niagara Assertive Street Outreach: engages with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to minimize the harmful effects and helps individuals work towards long-term care housing solutions.

outcomes. Staff have identified priority populations for which a housing subsidy could support an exit from shelter into independent living, thereby freeing up shelter space for others in community, creating capacity in the existing shelters and thereby not requiring further investment to increase shelter capacity across Niagara. The enhanced Reaching Home funding provides an opportunity to develop additional housing subsidy programs for priority populations.

To effectively administer funds and continue to achieve outcomes in a timely fashion staff recommend taking advantage of the funding announcement provision to allocate up to 15% (\$129,477) for staffing costs to support effective service delivery. Homelessness Services staff have reviewed the pressures and opportunities and recommend the addition of one full-time homelessness specialist position estimated at \$110,000, inclusive of salary and benefits.

Alternatives Reviewed

Alternative 1:

Homelessness Services recognizes that there are many competing priorities for any additional funding that comes available. Based on best practice, speed to operationalize, and identified system gaps and opportunities, investment in housing subsidies has been identified as the preferred option to achieve target outcomes. This option also aligns with the 2023 OrgCode Shelter Capacity Review recommendations.

Alternative 2:

Homelessness Services also utilizes funding from the Provincial Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) alongside the Reaching Home program to support its wide range of programs and services. Report CSD 64-2024 – 2025 Consolidated General Levy Budget, outlines programs with incremental levy investments in mandated services provided under provincial and federal agreements, including the HPP and Reaching Home programs. The incremental levy investment for these programs is estimated to be \$4 million in 2025. An alternative considered was using this base funding increase to reduce this incremental levy investment, but this option has not been recommended given the demand for homeless services.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Effective Region – Deliver fiscally responsible and sustainable core services.

Effective Region – Invest and support an aligned workforce at Niagara Region.

Other Pertinent Reports

[COM 21-2023 Homeless Shelter Capacity Review](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jun06_2023/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2021-2023%20Homeless%20Shelter%20Capacity%20Review.pdf)

[Niagara Region Shelter Capacity May 2023](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jun06_2023/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%20A%20-%20Niagara%20Region%20Shelter%20Capacity%20May%202023.pdf)

[CSD 64-2024 Consolidated General Levy Budget](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/CSD%2064-2024%202025%20Consolidated%20General%20Levy%20Budget.pdf)

[Niagara Regional Department Base Budget](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%201%20-%20Niagara%20Region%20Departments%20Base%20Budget.pdf)

[Departmental Program Changes](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%202%20-%20Departmental%20Program%20Changes.pdf)

[CSD 64-2024 Appendix 3](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%203%20-Tax%20Payer%20Relief%20Forecast.pdf)

[Appendix 4 - Capital Levy Projects Allocated Incremental 2.5% Operating Budget Funding](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%204%20-%20Capital%20Projects%20Allocated%20Incremental%20Operating%20Budget%20Funding.pdf)

[Capital Financing Debt Forecast](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%205%20-%20Capital%20Financing%20-%20Debt%20Forecast.pdf)

[Appendix 6 - Debt Substitution Projects](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%206%20-%20Debt%20Substitution%20Projects.pdf)

[Appendix 7 - FTE Summary - Permanent](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%207%20-%20FTE%20Summary%20-%20Permanent.pdf)

[Appendix 8 - Multi-Year Forecast](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%208%20-%20Multi-Year%20Forecast.pdf)

[Appendix 9 - Additional Program Changes not Brought Forward](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%209%20-%20Additional%20Program%20Changes%20Not%20Brought%20Forward.pdf)

[Appendix 10 - 2025 Levy Funding Mandated Services Provided under Provincial and Federal Agreements](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%2010%20-%202025%20Levy%20Funding%20for%20Mandated%20Services%20Provided%20Under%20Federal%20and%20Provincial%20Agreements.pdf)

Prepared by:

Cathy Cousins, CPA, CA
Director, Homelessness Services
Community Services

Recommended by:

Henri Koning, MHSc
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Donovan D'Amboise, Manager Program Financial Specialist.

Homelessness Services Update

Public Health and Social Services Committee
COM 2-2025
January 7, 2025

Jeffrey Sinclair, Manager, Homelessness Services

Homelessness Services Update

January 2025

Jeffrey Sinclair, Manager Homelessness Services

Topics

- Homelessness Services Approach
- Service Focus
- Service Outcomes
- Current Challenges and Opportunities
- Next Steps

Homelessness Services Approach

- Focus on Solutions to Homelessness
 - Prioritize an End to Chronic and Veteran Homelessness
- Data is used to monitor progress and inform decisions
- Continuous improvement by adopting proven practices



Focus on Prevention and Housing

Prevention and Diversion

- Housing Loss Prevention
- Shelter Diversion

Emergency Supports

- Assertive Street Outreach
- Housing Focused Shelter

Returns to Housing

- Rent Supports
- Bridge Housing
- Housing First
- Permanent Supportive Housing

Service Outcomes

Prevention and Diversion

- 462 cases opened
 - 403 prevented from homelessness
 - 317 maintained current housing
- Diversion
 - 56% with youth
 - ~30% with couples and families
 - Overall, 29% success rate

Emergency Supports

Outreach

- 1093 individuals engaged
 - 330 moved to shelter
 - 50 housed
-
- 991 positive exits from emergency shelter (housing, treatment programs, etc)

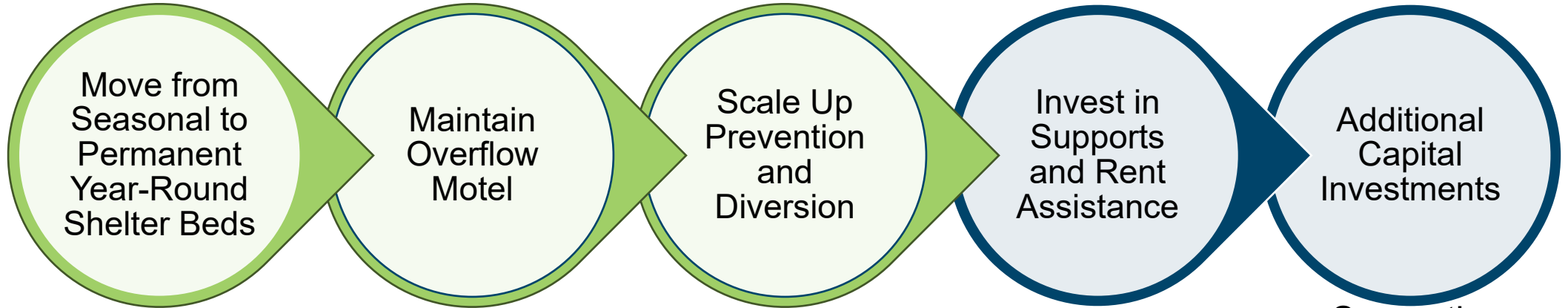
Returns to Housing

- Rapid Rehousing
 - 31 households (54 people) housed
- Bridge Housing
 - 11 exits to housing
- Housing First/ Home for Good
 - 102 Move-ins this year

Challenges and Opportunities

- Lack of Supportive Housing
- Persistently Low Social Assistance Rates
 - OW single \$733/month
- Lack of Access to Clinical Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment
- Challenging Behaviors
- Solutions to Homelessness are well understood
- Rental Market Calming
 - Vacancy Rate 2.8%
 - Asking rent for a 1-bed \$1,660
 - Asking rent for a 2-bed \$1,972
- Year to Date Housing Outcomes (Flow through System)
 - Street to shelter 651 people
 - Street to housing 83 people
 - Shelter to housing 753 people

Next Steps



- Riordon 45 beds
- Summer Street 55 beds

- Families Supported in Interim Family Shelter as needed

- Diversion practice in all shelters 2025
- Prevention work in 2025

- Increased COHB Supplements
- Estimated 70 additional people to be supported

- Supportive Housing Master Plan
- Bridge Housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Additional Shelter Spaces

Subject: Homelessness Services Update

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, January 7, 2025

Recommendations

1. That Report COM 2-2025 **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to update Council on the current state of Niagara's Homeless Serving System and identify next steps for incremental improvement.
- While many factors impacting homelessness are beyond its control, the Region in its role as service manager can choose to invest in proven practices that support an end to homelessness.
- Based on the recommendations of Niagara's shelter capacity review, the next system improvement to implement is to significantly increase available supports and housing allowances to increase the flow of people from encampments and shelters to permanent housing.

Financial Considerations

The activities described in this report are delivered within the existing budget of the Homelessness Services Division. As such, there are no direct financial implications, and no new expenditures or funding requests are proposed through this information report.

Analysis

Niagara Region is one of 68 communities in Canada that are part of Built for Zero Canada (BFZ). BFZ is an ambitious national change effort helping a core group of leading communities end chronic homelessness and veteran homelessness as steps to ending all homelessness. Niagara and other BFZ Communities use a structured, data-driven approach to optimizing local homeless systems, adopting proven practices and driving continuous improvement. Through its work with BFZ the Niagara Region has achieved the milestones of a quality By Name List and Coordinated Access. A By

Name List is a list of everyone in the community known to be experiencing homelessness. Coordinated Access is a system for consistently and equitably connecting people experiencing homelessness to services and housing related resources. Niagara Region and its community partners have received recognition for practices in the areas of Data Collection and Use, Engagement of Lived Experts, Youth Homelessness Prevention, Shelter Diversion, Bridge Housing, Recuperative Care and other Health Interventions, Housing Focused Shelters and Assertive Street Outreach.

While some communities have seen large increases in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness since the pandemic, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Niagara has increased by up to 10% annually and held steady between 2023 and 2024 at about 1,200 people. However, during this time Niagara has also seen nearly a doubling in the number of people experiencing Chronic Homelessness (long-term homelessness). Currently 53% of all people who are homeless in Niagara are chronically homeless. Chronic homelessness often includes those with complex needs, struggling with a disabling condition such as a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, physical disability, illness or medical condition, learning disability, acquired brain injury or a combination of such challenges.

Homelessness is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Many factors impacting homelessness, such as inadequate social assistance rates, access to mental health and substance use treatment and supply of affordable housing are in part or in whole beyond the control of Regional and Municipal governments. Local Point in Time Count surveys have consistently identified a lack of affordable housing and low income as top factors preventing people from being housed. Some factors are within the control of the Region in its role as service manager including decisions about investment in solutions that create housing and supports for people experiencing homelessness.

When thinking about supporting people who are experiencing homelessness the first thing that often comes to mind is emergency shelters. A shelter capacity review completed for the Region by OrgCode Consulting in 2023 identified several system improvements related to shelters and is being used by staff to guide investment related to shelters and supportive housing. Improvements already made or underway include:

- Transitioned 95 seasonal shelter beds to permanent shelter beds (Riordan and Summer Street shelters in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls); added more bed capacity to achieve a total of 120 permanent shelter beds.
- Continue to maintain overflow motels (Interim Family Sheltering in St Catharines and Niagara Falls)
- Increased capacity for couples (Riordon, Summer Street and new South Niagara Shelters)
- Scaled up Shelter Diversion at all shelters

The next system improvement to implement is to significantly increase supports and rent supplements to increase the flow of people from encampments and shelters to permanent housing.

After an increase in rent supports, the final recommendation is to increase the amount of bridge housing, permanent supportive housing, and housing focused shelter spaces to address identified unmet needs for women, non-binary and gender fluid people, Indigenous community, and older adults. Note that the new Bridge Housing site at Geneva Street in St. Catharines, currently under development, contributes to fulfilling this recommendation.

Supporting unsheltered and emergency sheltered people who are experiencing homelessness to access housing is a critical success factor for any homeless serving system. Between January and December 2024, Niagara's homeless serving system supported 991 people to successfully transition from emergency shelter to housing. During the same time, 330 people moved from unsheltered homelessness to emergency shelter and 50 people moved directly from unsheltered homelessness into housing. These numbers do not include additional people who self-resolved their unsheltered or sheltered homelessness. There has been space in local shelters year-round, with 14 people a day on average booking into an available shelter space. Although shelter occupancy increases with colder weather, the 30 net new shelter beds at the South Niagara Shelter will help address this seasonal pressure.

For the first time since the pandemic Niagara's rental housing market has begun to stabilize in 2024. Vacancy rates are around 2.8%¹ and the cost of rent for someone

¹ CMHC Data Portal

moving into a rental unit has levelled off at around \$1,660 for a 1-bed and \$1,972 for a two-bed unit². However, a single person receiving \$733 per month on Ontario works is unable to afford \$1,660 per month without significant rent subsidy.

The current state of Niagara's homeless serving system, a stabilizing rental market, and a focus on increasing the flow of people from encampments and shelters to permanent housing make increasing available supports and rent assistance an effective strategy to decreasing the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not Applicable

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report supports the council priority of an Equitable Region by providing access to housing and supports for people challenged with homelessness.

Other Pertinent Reports

[COM 21-2023 Homeless Shelter Capacity Review](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jun06_2023/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2021-2023%20Homeless%20Shelter%20Capacity%20Review.pdf)

[COM 8-2024 Homelessness Prevention Program Investment Plan 2024-25](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Mar05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%208-2024%20Homelessness%20Prevention%20Plan%20Investment%20Plan%202024-25%20Fiscal%20Year%20-%20DD.pdf)

[COM 8-2024 Appendix 1](#)

² Rentals.ca December 2024 Rental Report

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Mar05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%208-2024%20Appendix%201%20Sub-Categories%20Table%20Revised%20HPP%20investment%20plan%202024%20short.pdf)

[COM 15-2024 Housing and Homelessness Action Plan Update 2023](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_May07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2015-2024%20Housing%20and%20Homelessness%20Action%20Plan%20Update.pdf)

COM-C 2-2025 Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Memorandum

Prepared by:
Jeffrey Sinclair
Manager, Homelessness Services
Community Services

Recommended by:
Henri Koning, MHSc
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:
Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared in consultation with Cathy Cousins, Director, Homelessness and Community Engagement.

Memorandum

COM-C 1-2025

Subject: ReNew The View Partnership

Date: January 7, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Wendy Thompson, Manager Community Resource Programs

Purpose

The Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) Board of Directors has requested that NRH share with PHSSC a partnership initiative called ReNew the View.

Background

Community engagement is designed to engage and empower Community Housing tenants/members to improve their communities and their own lives through positive programs, workshops and events that bring tenants together. Housing Services Staff work in partnership with local agencies and others to provide community engagement, which helps to embed supports and develop relationships and trust with the organizations that are able to assist them. Community engagement delivered with partners helps to integrate low-income communities into their broader neighbourhoods and municipalities. Positive interaction among tenants also improves community safety and reduces social issues as neighbours begin to look out for each other and see each other in positive circumstances.

Currently there are more than 20 partners delivering community engagement in Community Housing across Niagara. These partners include the RAFT, Faith Welland Outreach, Brock University, Niagara College, Niagara Region Public Health and Senior Services, Community Cares and many others. Programs include homework help, sports, cultural activities and wellness workshops etc.

ReNew The View

One example of community engagement is the ReNew the View project in St. Catharines. This initiative began when St. Catharines City Councillor Robin McPherson reached out to Housing Services to invite Niagara Region Housing (NRH's) Manchester community to participate in a project to beautify the old General Motors property in her ward.

St Patrick's Ward Councillors McPherson and Caleb Ratzlaff had been working with The Willow Arts Community and the neighbourhoods surrounding the site to create murals that tell the stories of their community and their lives. Willow Arts provides a peer support network for individuals living with mental illness or substance use through the arts. NRH's Manchester community is across the street from the Haig site of the mural, so the tenants were the ideal partners to participate in the storytelling. Willow Arts and the City joined with the RAFT, who deliver Manchester's After-School Program, to consult with the Manchester community and draft their vision for the mural.

On October 19, Willow Arts, Councillors McPherson and Ratzlaff, the RAFT and NRH joined the Manchester youth to produce murals that reflect the innocence of the children who live there. In addition to bringing the Manchester youth and parents together with City Councillors and Willow Arts for the day, this project enabled Manchester youth to leave their mark on a piece of St. Catharines history with murals of handprints and pictures. Below are pictures of the event, which capture a unique partnership that will continue to show this community that they are a valued part of St. Catharines.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Wendy Thompson
Manager Community Resource Unit









Memorandum

COM-C 2-2025

Subject: Homelessness Point-in-Time Count

Date: January 7, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Jeffrey Sinclair, Manager, Homelessness Services

The purpose of this memorandum is to share initial findings of the 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count in Niagara with Regional Council and the community. A PiT Count is a provincial and federal requirement conducted every two years, providing a snapshot of homelessness at a single point in time. It supports the objectives of Built for Zero-Canada (BFZ-C) and Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP).

Niagara Counts 2024, the Region's fourth PiT Count, was conducted in late October. The count was supported by 81 community volunteers and 65 staff from 24 agencies. Two magnet events were hosted by the RAFT and Niagara Regional Native Centre to capture the experiences of youth and Indigenous populations.

The PiT Count was developed collaboratively with a steering committee representing emergency shelters, homelessness prevention providers, transitional housing programs, VAW Shelters, Niagara Region Native Centre, Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre, CORE Police Team, and the Niagara Assertive Street Outreach team.

Although Niagara's Point-in-Time (PiT) Count number, reflecting the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness on October 22, 2024, is under analysis, the most accurate real-time data can be accessed through Niagara's robust By-Name Data. In total, 460 surveys were completed, offering valuable insights into the demographics, experiences, and service needs of Niagara's homeless population. A major trend identified in the 2024 survey is the rise in chronic homelessness. 61% of respondents reported being homeless for six or more months in the past year, a significant increase from 42% in the 2021. This increase highlights the growing need for long-term solutions and intensive support for individuals with higher acuity and complex needs. Self-identified health-related issues were also reported by an increasing number of respondents. The conditions with the greatest increase from year 2021, in order, include substance use issues, acquired brain injuries, physical disabilities, and mental health

concerns. This trend underscores the need for specialized health and social services to address the complex needs (or higher acuity) of the population experiencing homelessness.

The survey also revealed a shift in age demographics. Youth (16–24) represented only 8% of respondents, which reflects a decline from their contribution of over 10% in 2021. This decrease contrasts with the upward trend seen in other communities and reflects the success of diversion efforts and strategies aimed at preventing youth homelessness. Early intervention remains critical, as 28% of respondents reported experiencing homelessness for the first time before adulthood, an increase by 16.7% compared to 2021.

Rent affordability continues to be a significant barrier to securing housing in 2024, mirroring the challenges identified in 2021. The top two reasons for not obtaining housing are high rents and low income, which remain unchanged from the 2021 PiT Count. These ongoing challenges highlight a need for increased rent subsidies and affordable housing initiatives. The data also revealed a growing need for housing solutions targeted at older adults. The 65+ age group saw the largest increase in homelessness, rising by 19.6%. This trend points to the need for specialized housing options and support systems for this aging population. The Indigenous population, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, accounted for 28% of the population experiencing homelessness in Niagara. This highlights the need for culturally sensitive, community-driven solutions to homelessness within these communities.

Finally, the most common reasons for housing loss include, in order, landlord/tenant conflict, financial hardship, conflict with a spouse/partner, and experienced abuse by spouse/partner. Notably, landlord/tenant conflict became the leading cause of housing loss, a shift from its previous ranking within top three. This points to the need for stronger eviction prevention strategies, and support services for individuals at risk of housing instability.

A full report on Niagara’s 2024 PiT Count will be forthcoming in Q2 of 2025

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Jeffrey Sinclair
Manager Homelessness Services

Memorandum

COM-C 3-2025

Subject: Supportive Housing Strategy Update

Date: January 7, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Sandy Dupuis, Associate Director Community Strategies and Priorities

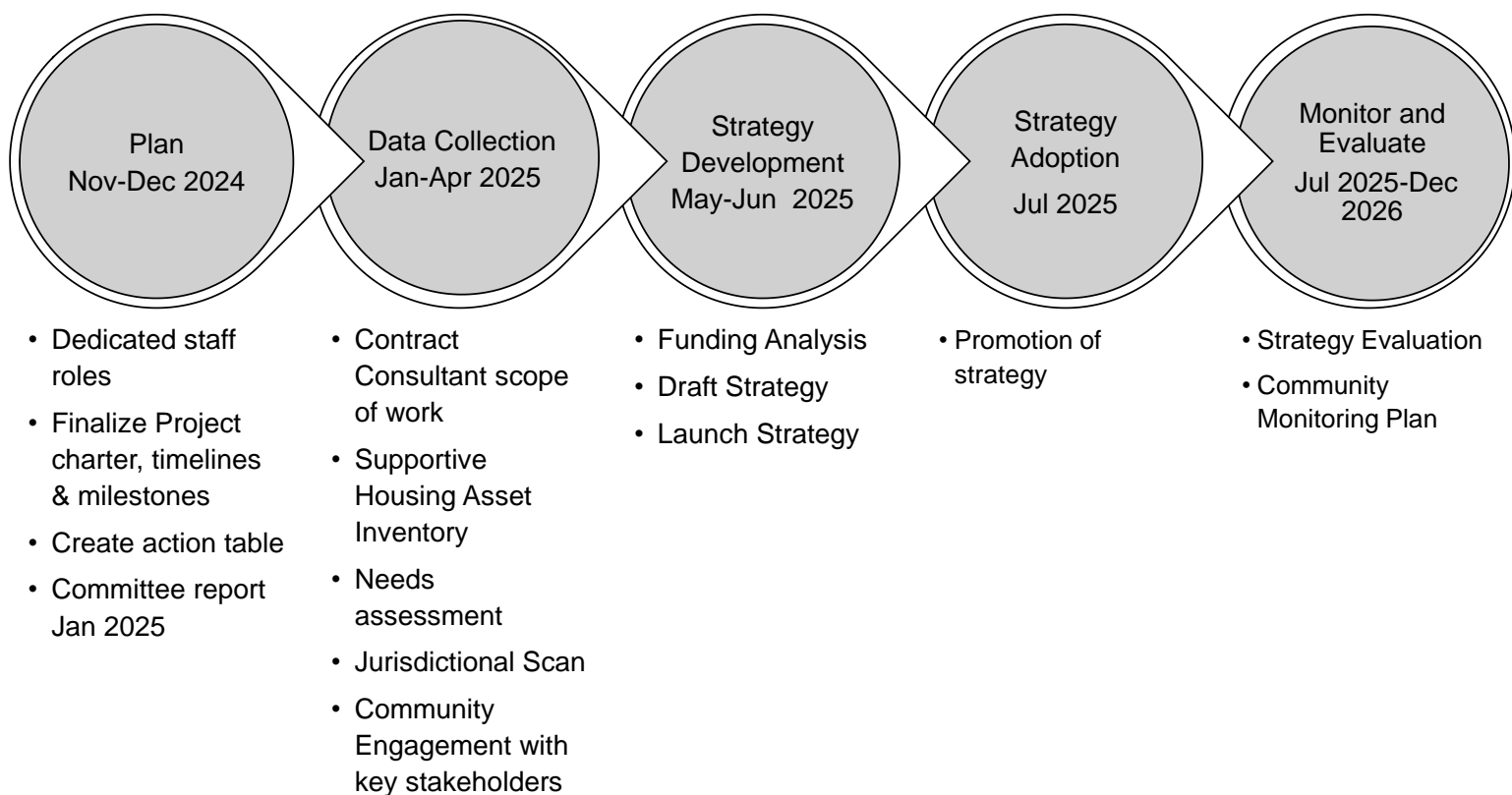
The solution to homelessness is housing. The type of housing needed to exit homelessness is determined by an individual's complexity of health and housing needs. Supportive housing is one very important type of housing in exiting people from homelessness. Broadly speaking, supportive housing (also known as housing with supports), is a term used to describe a wide range of housing options with support services that enable people exiting homelessness, people with mental health and addictions, people with disabilities and more to achieve housing stability and live independently in community. As the proportion of people experiencing homelessness who have complex needs continues year after year to increase, supportive housing options become a more important housing solution.

Niagara currently has limited supportive housing supply for people exiting homelessness, which includes options such as housing first, home for good, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing and bridge housing. These housing options total approximately 412 supportive housing units in Niagara. It is known that a well-functioning homelessness system typically has a 1:4 or 1:5 ratio of shelter beds to housing exits (reference Org Code). In Niagara, this sits at approximately 1:1.5; meaning for every one shelter bed there is only a 1.5 supportive housing exit option.

With the urgent and growing need for supportive housing in Niagara Region, Niagara Region Community Services is proposing the development of a multi-year supportive housing strategy and investment plan to address homelessness and the housing needs of our community's most vulnerable residents. This plan will determine the number of supportive housing units needed for our region and the funding required from all orders of government (including Ministry of Health, Niagara Region investment, and others) to meet the identified supportive housing targets.

To create this plan, the following steps will be taken over the course of 2025 to develop a comprehensive local supportive housing strategy for Niagara Region (see also visual below with identified timelines):

- Needs Assessment: develop a detailed understanding of the need, define priority groups in need of supportive housing, establishing a community action table to inform the local need, contracting a consultant to identify the number of supportive housing needs and potential funding sources
- Asset Inventory: complete a local supportive housing asset inventory beyond just the homelessness sector
- Funding analysis: analyze the potential government funding available to fund growth of supportive housing in Niagara.



Respectfully submitted and signed by

Sandy Dupuis
 Associate Director Community Strategies and Priorities

Jeffrey Sinclair
Manager Homelessness Services