
Subject: Homelessness Services Report 2021

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- This report provides information regarding Homelessness Services key activities for system transformation, metrics for 2021, and planned activities for 2022. It should be noted that while there is some similar content to COM 13-2022 (which is a legislatively required report to be approved and then submitted to the Ministry), this report provides additional information on system improvements reflective of important community collaboration and effort. Significant achievements include:
 - Enhanced Niagara Region's Built for Zero (BFZ) initiative through achieving the milestone of a quality By-Name List (BNL) and implementation of a Veterans Cohort initiative
 - Established a data strategy to inform planning, service delivery and monitoring progress on homelessness system goals
 - Implemented a Point-in-Time count in partnership with Niagara Regional Native Centre, Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre and Niagara's homeless-serving system organizations
 - Responded to unsheltered homelessness through the work of the Niagara Assertive Street Outreach team and Niagara Region's EMS Street Outreach team
 - Enhanced Niagara Region's housing assets through the purchase and renovation of two buildings in which to run a Bridge Housing program and a 25 unit permanent Supportive Housing program for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and complex needs
 - Homelessness Services completed 564 intakes at the isolation shelter with testing administered on site, and supported the delivery of over 700 doses of the COVID-19 vaccination (first, second, and booster) to clients experiencing homelessness.

Financial Considerations

The activities highlighted in this report were provided within the 2021 approved operating budget. As per the 2021 approved budget, Homelessness Services is primarily funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) (\$8,438,281 – 63.5% (which includes Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and Home for Good funding), and also by the federal Reaching Home program (\$1,090,019 – 8.2%), as well as Regional levy (\$3,753,641 – 28.3%).

In 2021, Homelessness Services received an additional \$5,799,337 and \$2,366,397 in provincial and federal funding respectively, specific to incremental operating costs related to COVID-19.

Analysis

Community Services operationalizes the Region's provincially mandated responsibilities as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the homeless serving system in Niagara. Its key responsibility is service system planning and administration for the homeless serving system, and it operates under rules established by the MMAH. Niagara Region also receives federal funding under the Reaching Home program and is identified as the local Community Entity for this funding, operating within directives provided by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). Niagara Region is also currently operating within additional, specific COVID-19 funding guidelines and directives for the provincial Social Services Relief Fund and the federal Reaching Home program.

In 2020, Homelessness Services awarded contracts based on a Negotiated Request for Proposal (NRFP) process. Approximately \$8.7 M per annum was awarded to 18 agencies in the following priority areas: prevention, outreach, shelter, transitional housing, Niagara Emergency Energy Fund, and Housing First (HF) and Home for Good (HFG) supportive housing programs. In 2021, through [COM 13-2021 Homelessness Contract Extension Report](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=16858) (https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=16858), extensions were approved to March 31, 2024, to allow time for system transformation, to prepare for the next funding cycle, and to continue to address the significant service pressures created by responding to the pandemic.

The following table details the Homelessness Services metrics for 2019, 2020, and 2021.

Initiative	2019	2020	2021
Emergency Shelter			
Number of unique individuals accessing shelter	2302	2136	2055
Average length of stay (in days per admission)*	20.9	20.9	26.8
Average nightly bed occupancy rate**	107.3%	91.6%	91.6%
Prevention			
Number of unique households that received a Niagara Emergency Energy Fund (NEEF) issuance	802	326	416
Average value of NEEF issuances	\$703	\$796	\$886
Number of unique households that received a Housing Stability Plan (HSP) benefit	3675	2914	2839
Average value of Housing Stability Plan benefits issued (e.g., rent arrears, last month's rent deposit)	\$782	\$831	\$974
Housing with Related Supports			
Number of unique (new) individuals placed in Housing First	63	52	45
Number of unique (new) individuals placed in Home for Good***	9	20	41

*Average length of stay was considerably higher in 2021. Reasons for this may include barriers to finding housing including high rents for available units, very low vacancy rates for affordable units, and pandemic-related issues. Even those clients matched with Housing First and Home for Good supports (i.e., landlord engagement, rent supplements, and intensive case management) struggled to move forward with their housing goals.

**Average nightly bed occupancy rate remained lower than pre-pandemic. Reasons for this may include individuals continuing to avoid shelter related to COVID-19 risk, outbreaks not allowing for shelter admissions at times, the success of the shelter diversion pilot in supporting clients to access alternative safe housing arrangements instead of shelter, especially among youth, and the addition of temporary shelter spaces with admission criteria at the Housing-Focused Shelter pilot, financed with COVID monies.

***YWCA Niagara Region's Home for Good-funded build, Oakdale Commons, opened for occupancy in 2021, with 15 affordable units for women and gender-diverse

individuals. Individuals in Home for Good are supported by intensive case management, as well as mental health and addictions supports, if required.

Homelessness Services Activities

The following are key activities undertaken in 2021, to support continuous improvement within the homeless serving system and which drive outcomes related to the reduction of chronic homelessness.

Built for Zero

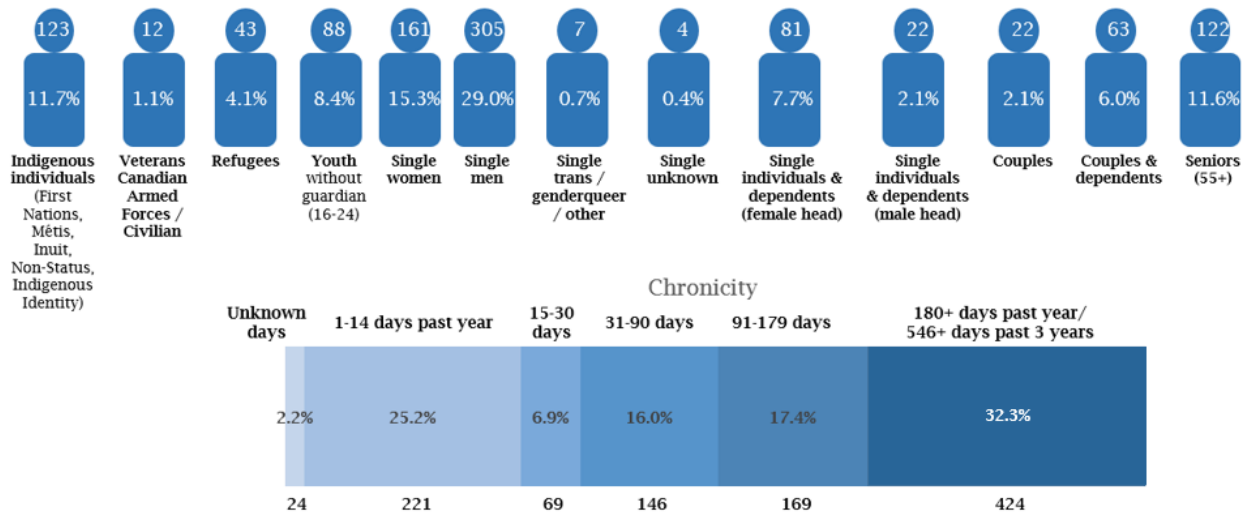
Through the leadership of Niagara's Built for Zero (BFZ) Home Team, Niagara announced in September 2020, the achievement of a Quality By-Name List (BNL), a list of all known individuals experiencing homelessness and active¹ in the community, updated in real-time. As of January 1, 2022, the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness on Niagara's BNL was 1,053, with 424 (32.3%) experiencing chronic homelessness². The following diagram offers a population segmentation of individuals experiencing homelessness accessing the homeless-serving system.

¹ Individuals have received a service from a homeless-serving system organization (as recorded in Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) in the past 90 days. Once it has been more than 90 days since their last service, an individual drops off the BNL. This is so that the BNL remains current and actionable (individuals can be engaged for housing offers).

² Individuals have a total of at least 6 months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year or they have recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past 3 years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days).

Niagara's By-Name List at January 1st, 2022

All Homelessness = 1053 individuals; Chronic = 424



As part of the Coordinated Access system, Niagara Region has been using the BNL throughout 2021, to move individuals from homelessness into housing programs. This is accomplished by filtering and sorting the BNL by eligibility and prioritization criteria, to match an individual to the most appropriate housing resource. In Q2 of 2022, the unprocessed By-Name List will be shared with homeless serving system organizations, which will support Niagara Region in improving the quality of the data on the list (e.g., client income types, desired community, document readiness, etc.).

In 2021, there were 239 move-ins to housing for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. A return from housing back to chronic homelessness occurred 65 times in 2021. This low average (fewer than 6 people per month) reflects successful housing stability and supports for individuals who move in to housing. Despite Niagara's success in achieving a steady stream of housing move-ins, 424 people were actively experiencing chronic homelessness on January 1, 2022, a 39% increase from the September 2020 baseline³ of 306 people. This increase can be attributed to improved data reporting, pandemic impacts, a competitive housing and rental market, and

³ Niagara's chronic baseline was set as it achieved a Quality By-Name List (meaning By-Name List data were reliable and balanced for three months following completion of the BFZ-C By-Name List Scorecard tasks).

average vacancy rates as low as 1% for units that are affordable for lower income households. These factors have reduced the capacity of moving individuals and families forward in their housing goals and as a result, individuals are ageing in⁴ to chronicity (also known as chronic homelessness) at too high a rate. Further details about Niagara's progress can be found on the [Built for Zero -Canada](https://bfzcanada.ca/) (https://bfzcanada.ca/) (BFZ-C) website.

Niagara Joins Built for Zero Veterans Cohort

Niagara Region joined the BFZ-C Veterans Cohort initiative and made a commitment to ending veteran homelessness in the community. Niagara Region has partnered with Veterans Affairs Canada and the local Royal Canadian Legion (RCL) to coordinate efforts in identifying veterans and providing access to veteran-specific services. In 2021, RCL delivered training to staff to inform the resources available for veterans experiencing homelessness. Veterans account for just over 1% of individuals on Niagara's BNL.

Building an Evidence-Based Approach

As part of BFZ-C, Niagara Region will continue to pilot projects that place the community on the path to reaching functional zero for chronic homelessness. Niagara Region constantly analyzes data related to homelessness in the region. Using a balanced scorecard approach, the Homelessness Services and Community Engagement Division has established a data strategy and framework that include performance metrics and key performance indicators. These data have informed planning, service delivery, measurement, and monitoring of how Homelessness Services and the homeless serving system are performing, individually and collectively. In September of 2021, a presentation was provided to Public Health & Social Services Committee.

⁴ Individuals are remaining homeless for longer (not exiting/moving in to housing as quickly) and are hitting chronicity, when they have at least 180 cumulative days of homelessness in the past year or at least 546 cumulative days of homelessness in the past three years.

Point in Time Count

Niagara Counts 2021, Niagara's third homelessness point-in-time (PiT) count took place on March 23, 2021. Similar counts took place in 2016 and 2018. While the PiT count is a count of individuals experiencing homelessness in Niagara on one specific night, Niagara's work on the BNL shows a more complete representation of the number of individuals experiencing homelessness. As part of the count, 439 surveys were completed, providing valuable information on the demographics, experiences and service needs of Niagara's homeless population. Detailed information on the PiT count is referenced in [COM 17-2021 Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Report](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=e8575525-4276-4670-917f-8757689c02ca&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=17&Tab=attachments) (https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=e8575525-4276-4670-917f-8757689c02ca&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=17&Tab=attachments).

Capturing the Experience of Indigenous Homelessness

Niagara Regional Native Centre and Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre partnered with Niagara Region in the planning and execution of the PiT count. Friendship Centre staff conducted surveys and provided support to individuals at various sheltered sites and with Niagara Assertive Street Outreach for the street count. Through direct feedback from Friendship Centre staff, the PiT count survey was modified to better encompass Indigeneity. Niagara Regional Native Centre arranged for an elder to be available by telephone to offer support.

As a consequence of the pandemic, planned Indigenous magnet events, in collaboration with Indigenous-led service providers, were unable to take place. The PiT Count Report recognized that data from the PiT count may underrepresent Indigenous experiences and that critical input from local Indigenous communities is still needed to ensure that the experiences and extent of Indigenous homelessness in Niagara is represented and heard.

Niagara Assertive Street Outreach Team

The Niagara Assertive Street Outreach team is a collaboration between Gateway Residential and Community Support Services, The RAFT, Southridge Community Church, and Port Cares. The team was expanded as part of Niagara's pandemic response to support clients who tend to avoid shelter for safety and social distancing, and those individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness generally. With the support of the City of St. Catharines, three street outreach workers focused on activities for that specific city. Funding was also obtained through the Niagara Prosperity Initiative

for a dual diagnosis⁵ outreach specialist. The NASO team works closely with local area municipalities, St. Lawrence Seaway Corp., the Ministry of Transportation, and hydro companies. The table below provides additional information on NASO's outcomes in supporting unsheltered individuals.

Outreach Data and Outcomes	Q1 2021	Q2 2021	Q3 2021	Q4 2021
Number of new encampments ⁶	12	32	39	7
Number of resolved encampments	27	9	4	2
Number of unique clients supported by Outreach who accessed emergency shelter	68	74	74	47
Number of unique clients supported by Outreach who accessed housing	47	64	32	37

NASO Joins Forces with EMS Paramedic Street Outreach

In 2021, NASO and EMS Street Outreach Paramedics were funded through Homelessness Services to bridge the gap in accessing primary care for individuals who are unsheltered. Paramedics provided supports by offering medical assessments, education, exploring service options to help with patient needs, and by providing resources for individuals struggling with addiction. The table below provides a summary of key outcomes in 2021 for the Paramedic Street Outreach Program.

# of brief interactions (medical/health support not given/accepted)	# of significant interactions (medical/ health support performed/accepted)	# of unique clients served	# Naloxone kits distributed
1952	345	177	68

⁵ Refers to the combination of a developmental disability and mental health problem.

⁶ An encampment may just be one individual. Niagara's average encampment size was 1.4 individuals in 2021.

Housing-Focused Shelter Pilot

The housing-focused shelter (HFS) pilot was established in June of 2020, to test the best practices of harm reduction, low barrier service and using a coordinated access approach to housing services. All clients admitted to the HFS were selected from the By-Name List. Initial clients selected for the pilot had experienced an average of 318 days of homelessness in the past year, 639 days of homelessness in the past three years and averaged a score of eight on the VI-SPDAT (indicating an individual with high acuity, complex needs). In 2021, the 25-bed capacity housing-focused shelter pilot had 51 intakes, with 60% exiting to permanent housing.

Shelter Diversion Pilot Expansion and System-Wide Training

In 2021, the shelter diversion pilot (two dedicated shelter diversion staff), was operating at three emergency shelters, supporting individuals presenting to shelter to access alternate safe and appropriate housing options, where possible, instead of a shelter stay.

In 2021, there were 127 successful diversions for youth (age 16-24 years), representing just over 41% of possible shelter intakes. In the same period, there were 117 successful diversions for adults (age 25+), representing almost 11% of possible shelter intakes.

In Q2 of 2021, Niagara Region worked with shelter diversion staff from The RAFT and Southridge to develop a system-wide training program for shelter diversion. Training was provided to emergency shelter staff, the Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities Hostels and Homelessness team, and NASO.

In December 2021, work commenced to undertake an evaluation of the shelter diversion pilot. The analysis is expected to be completed by April 2022, and will provide recommendations on a future model of shelter diversion for the system.

Additional Supportive Housing Programs

Bridge Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing

Throughout 2021, Niagara Region worked towards developing and opening two new housing facilities to support individuals with a very high number of days of homelessness in the past year and longer, and with complex needs. These facilities will be in full operation within Q1/Q2 of 2022.

1. Permanent Supportive Housing provides long-term housing with support services to meet an individual's complex needs. This new 25-unit location offers on site staff 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and community programming. Gateway Residential and Community Support Services was the successful proponent to operate this program.
2. Bridge Housing offers intensive supports and shorter-term accommodation for individuals within the homeless serving system who have accessed a considerable amount of shelter services and community resources while "stuck" in a state of homelessness. At this new facility each bridge housing resident will have an individualized housing plan and will work with staff in securing permanent housing. Regional staff are also working with community and health partners to explore the integration of recuperative care beds at the same site. These beds would offer a safe place for individuals experiencing homelessness when they no longer require hospitalization but still require some care to heal from an illness or injury.

Homelessness System Pandemic Response

All of the above successes have been achieved within an environment of COVID-19. Niagara Region and its homelessness partners continued to ensure the ongoing delivery of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following are some examples of how Niagara Region and its partners achieved a coordinated pandemic approach.

Outbreak Response

Niagara Region Homelessness Services, in partnership with Public Health, supported all Niagara region emergency shelters with their pandemic response to protect staff and homeless clients from COVID-19. In 2021, Homelessness Services:

- Completed 564 intakes at the isolation shelter with testing administered on site. Of those intakes, 35 individuals moved from isolation into permanent housing, 21 moved to other housing options or a family reunification took place.
- Provided support for 14 outbreaks in emergency shelters as well as 30 COVID-19 positive clients identified and supported through the isolation shelter.
- Provided PPE to emergency shelter staff to ensure adequate supply.
- Increased physical accessibility within the shelter system through a \$60,000 grant from the Inclusive Community Grants Program, Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.
- Hosted monthly emergency shelter meetings and bi-weekly health and safety meetings to discuss changes to guidance and to provide support.

Vaccination Strategy

In 2021, Homelessness Services supported the delivery of over 700 doses of the COVID-19 vaccination (first, second, and booster) to clients experiencing homelessness, with ongoing vaccination supported into 2022.

- Early on in 2021, first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine for homeless clients were provided through organized vaccination clinics in emergency shelters across Niagara in partnership with REACH Niagara medical professionals.
- Additional partnerships with local pharmacies and Public Health mass immunization clinics were also arranged to ensure ease of access to vaccine for clients.
- Vaccine clinic locations were expanded for those accessing additional homelessness services such as at food banks and for those who were precariously housed (i.e., motels).
- Access to first doses of vaccine was arranged for homeless serving system staff early on in the pandemic and staff were supported on an ongoing basis to get second doses. Booster clinics were also arranged for staff during December to prepare for wave five of the pandemic.

Providing access to primary care

In late fall of 2021, Homelessness Services partnered with REACH Niagara, Telus Health and multiple community health agencies across Niagara region to roll out the operation of the REACH Mobile Health Clinic. This service provided access to primary care services for individuals experiencing homelessness in more remote and rural locations. The REACH Mobile Health Clinic operates in five communities across Niagara at eight different sites. In just two months' time, the clinic was able to support 203 clients with access to primary care and mental health supports.

Other Planned Enhancements

Enhancements planned or started for 2022:

- Built for Zero - continue to work on implementing a coordinated access system, a common assessment tool, and achieving functional zero for veteran homelessness in Niagara. Reapply to Built for Zero for the April 2022-March 2024 cycle.
- In alignment with the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, continue to implement system transformation in the areas of housing-focused shelter, prevention, and transitional housing.

- Further develop the Homelessness Services data strategy to enhance measurement and progress toward program and system-wide key performance indicators.
- Enhance the effectiveness of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) database as a tool to facilitate Coordinated Access, through improved data quality and policy projects.
- Work with the homeless serving system to prepare to navigate reopening and post-pandemic service delivery.
- Develop a coordinated, supportive, and dignified approach for those living in encampments.
- Operationalize Bridge Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing, and seek opportunities for additional capital builds.
- Continue with CHAMP (Collaboration Homeless Addiction & Mental Health Pilot) and mental health supports in Housing First and Home for Good programs for individuals with severe and persistent mental health concerns and addictions.

Alternatives Reviewed

There are no alternatives to this report, which has been provided for information. The activities undertaken are funded through the approved budget, as detailed in the Financial Considerations. These activities must be undertaken by Niagara Region as part of its Consolidated Municipal Service Manager responsibilities.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The Homelessness Services activities supports the Council Priority of a Healthy and Vibrant Community and contributes to Council's direction to develop and implement an affordable housing strategy.

Other Pertinent Reports

- CWCD 2021-250 2021-RFP-159 Niagara Homelessness Service System
- COM C 34-2021 Shelter Diversion Pilot Update
- COM C 31-2021 Homelessness Plans for Winter 2021
- COM C 25-2021 Niagara Joins Built for Zero Veteran Cohort
- COM 29-2021 Bridge and Supportive Housing Projects
- COM 20-2021 Bridge Housing Design Phase Operations
- COM 17-2021 Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Report
- COM 13-2021 Homelessness Contract Extension Report
- COM 10-2021 Homelessness Services Report 2020

- CWCD 2021-68 Confirmation of Incremental SSRF Funding - Homelessness
- CWCD 2021-64 Homelessness Services “Niagara Counts” Point-in-Time (PiT) Count
- BRC-C 3-2021 Homelessness Capital Project – Provincial Social Services Relief Funding
- COM 1-2021 Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Investment Plan 2021-22

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