
Subject: Homelessness Services Report 2022

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 4, 2023

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

This report provides an update on Homelessness Services key activities for system transformation, metrics for 2022, and planned activities for 2023. It should be noted that while there is some similar content to Report COM 7-2023 - Homelessness Prevention Plan Investment Plan 2023-24, this report provides additional information on system improvements, community collaborations and key milestones. Significant achievements include:

- Recognized by Built for Zero Canada as the 28th community across Canada to achieve Reaching Home Coordinated Access and the 7th community across Canada to reach the Built for Zero milestone of a Veteran Quality By-Name List.
- Operated a COVID isolation facility for homeless clients until June 2022.
- Conducted an evaluation of Niagara's Diversion Pilot.
- Supported the resolution of 43 encampments through the work of Niagara Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) team.
- Operationalized a 15-bed Bridge Housing program and 25 bed permanent supportive housing program.
- Increased housing allowances to ensure that clients in the Housing First and Home for Good programs are able to find affordable housing in the current housing market.
- Successful funding proposal to establish a 10-bed Recuperative Care Bed program.
- Relocated shelter beds to support individuals in South Niagara (Welland).

Financial Considerations

The activities highlighted in this report were provided within the 2022 approved operating budget. As per the 2022 approved budget, Homelessness Services is primarily funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) (\$8,435,448 – 61.2%) (which includes Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) formerly known as Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and Home for Good funding), and also by the Federal Reaching Home program (\$1,191,084 – 8.6%), as well as Regional levy (\$4,162,986 – 30.2%).

In 2022, Homelessness Services received an additional \$6,698,998 and \$3,292,532 in provincial and federal one-time 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 the Office of Infrastructure of Canada (INFC). Niagara Region also operated in 2022 (in part) 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 three-year 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 Report [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. In 2023, Niagara Region will be developing its procurement approach for the upcoming funding cycle.

Homelessness Services Activities

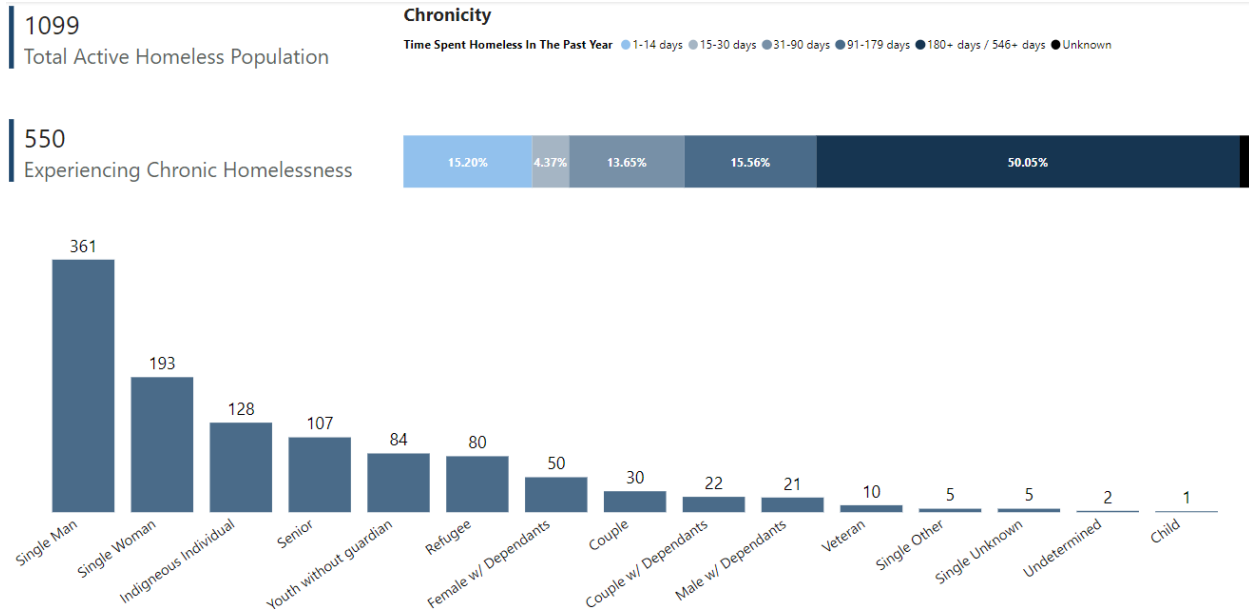
The following are key activities undertaken in 2022 to support continuous improvement within the homeless-serving system and outcomes related to the goal to reduce chronic homelessness. Annually, Niagara Regional staff share Homelessness Services System Metrics for a three-year period. Appendix 1, Chart 1: Homelessness Service System Metrics 2020, 2021, 2022, provides Homelessness Service System Metrics for 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Built for Zero: By Name List and Coordinated Access

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 December 31, 2022, the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness on Niagara's BNL was 1099, with 550 (50%) experiencing chronic homelessness². The following diagram offers a population segmentation of individuals experiencing homelessness, accessing the homeless-serving system and the breakdown of number of days homelessness (chronicity).

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 Region has been using a Quality BNL to move individuals from homelessness into housing programs. Bridge Housing, Buchanan Street Permanent Supportive Housing, Housing First and Home for Good Supportive Housing Programs utilize Niagara’s By-Name List to prioritize and match the most suitable candidates for these community assets. Priority populations for these programs included individuals who have a long history of living unsheltered, are chronically homeless, and who typically do not access traditional shelters due to high acuity of need, youth, seniors, and Indigenous persons.

In November of 2022, Niagara Region was recognized by Built for Zero Canada, as the 28th community across Canada to achieve Reaching Home Coordinated Access. Reaching this goal celebrates Niagara’s approach for addressing homelessness that provides a consistent way to assess, prioritize and connect people experiencing homelessness to Regionally-funded housing and supports using a Quality By Name List (BNL) and based on an individual’s preference and level of need.

In 2022, there were a total of 284 move-ins to housing for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. A return from housing back to chronic homelessness occurred 93 times in 2022. Despite Niagara achieving a steady stream of housing move-ins, 550 (50%) people were actively experiencing chronic homelessness on December 31, 2022. This compares to 422 (or 40%) experiencing chronic homelessness at the same time in the previous year. This increase can be attributed to a competitive housing and rental

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

Niagara Joins Built for Zero (BFZ) Veterans Cohort

Niagara Region joined the BFZ Veterans Cohort initiative and made a commitment to ending veteran homelessness in the community. Niagara Region 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 October 2022, Niagara was recognized as a leading community and the 7th across Canada to reach the BFZ milestone of a Veteran Quality By-Name List. Establishing a Veteran By-Name List means that Niagara Region has solid processes in place to identify and connect veterans to available housing and supports, in partnership with veteran organizations. Niagara Region was also successful in securing funding through BFZ Canada's Functional Zero Veteran Accelerator Fund. This grant allowed Niagara to pilot a case worker, connected to Niagara's Assertive Street Outreach, to focus on veterans' population. As a result of this work, Niagara is on track to achieve functional zero³ for veterans' homelessness by Q2 of 2023.

Niagara Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) and Housing Hubs

The NASO team is a collaboration between Gateway Residential and Community Support Services, The RAFT, Southridge Community Church, and Port Cares. NASO provides outreach services to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. They connect and coordinate access to a range of supports. NASO works in partnership with 211 Niagara to ensure a streamlined approach to accessing services. NASO's role is to engage with the sleeping rough population to provide pathways to more permanent housing, shelter and other community connections.

³ A community has ended chronic homelessness when the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness is zero, or if not zero, then either 3 or .1% of the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness, whichever is greater.

During the 2022 Summer Games, NASO participated in the Summer Games Emergency Response Plan by offering support to Games staff who encountered/was informed of an individual experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Appendix 1, Chart 2: NASO Metrics shows the number of encampments and number of people by quarter that NASO have helped going from unsheltered (e.g. living in encampment, car) to shelter and permanent housing.

Outreach Housing Hubs

In partnership with Gateway Residential Community Support Services, a pilot program of Outreach Housing Hubs located in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, operated from August to October 2022. With the aim of increasing the number of individuals moving from homelessness to housing, the Hubs offered a dedicated space for NASO workers to engage with individuals in housing focused activities instead of on the street or in a car where it can be challenging (e.g., poor weather). The housing-focused program supported 290 individuals actively living on the street and successfully moved 17 directly into housing.

Service System Transformation Efforts

Housing Focused Shelter

In housing focused shelters, helping individuals and families towards safe and appropriate housing, is the primary goal through which all work is done. In Q4 of 2022, Niagara Region began developing new shelter standards to be implemented across the system in 2023. These housing focused standards implement best practice guidance from OrgCode and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' Shelter Transformation Network. Training in housing-focused approaches was secured in 2022 and will be provided to all staff in Niagara's shelter providers in Q2 of 2023.

Enhancements to Temporary Seasonal Shelter (formerly Out of the Cold)

In planning for the 2022-2023 season, the Start Me Up Niagara Seasonal Shelter sites in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls, implemented new practices to align with a housing focused approach. Bed spaces in both locations were increased to 55 in St. Catharines and 40 in Niagara Falls. A daytime pre-registration process allowed for a streamlined approach to access service. Staff also engaged in conversations with service users to connect them with supports and/or alternative safe and appropriate housing solutions.

Salvation Army Expansion and The Hope Centre Transition to Welland

Niagara Region partnered with Salvation Army Booth Centre (St. Catharines) to create six (6) additional shelter beds, increasing shelter capacity from 20 beds to 26 beds.

In the fall of 2022, Niagara Region and The Hope Centre worked to transition shelter operations from Niagara Falls to Welland. Moving from 15 beds to 18 beds, this motel-based shelter continues to advance, adopting best practices and housing-focused principles to serve south Niagara.

Homelessness Prevention

Prevention refers to interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness by ensuring that people do not lose their homes and that their housing situation is not precarious. Prevention can stop people from entering homelessness or reduce the likelihood of a return to homelessness after exit.

Future State of Homelessness Prevention

In Q3 of 2022, Niagara Region initiated the development of a Prevention Framework. The goal was to develop a clear vision with realistic goals, objectives, and performance measures for the future state of Niagara's Homelessness Prevention Services. The project included a review of current state, engagement with internal and external partners, front line staff and individuals with lived expertise, a review of best practices and of service delivery gaps and opportunities to maximize investments. The final Prevention Framework will be completed in Q2 2023.

Shelter Diversion Evaluation and Expansion

Led by the RAFT, this pilot provided two dedicated shelter diversion staff serving three emergency shelters. This program supported individuals presenting to shelter to access alternate safe and appropriate housing options, where possible, instead of a shelter stay. In 2022, the rate of successful diversion was 34% for youth and 10% for adults.

In Q2/Q3 of 2022, an evaluation of the Diversion Pilot was undertaken to review current diversion practices and recommend a proposed approach to scale up diversion services across key access points within Niagara's homeless-serving system. The evaluation revealed both opportunities and where Niagara's model is a leader in the homelessness sector. In 2023, Niagara Region and its partners will develop an action plan based on

recommendations. As an initial response, another full time diversion worker will be funded to integrate diversion practices across all Niagara funded shelter providers and enhance system wide diversion training.

Additional Supportive Housing Programs

Bridge Housing

Bridge Housing is an intensive short-term (six (6) to eight (8) months), low barrier accommodation (15 beds) that helps bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing. This site offers residents a safe place to stabilize their health and wellness while accessing on-site support staff who will connect them with services (financial assistance, mental wellness, addiction supports) with the goal of securing permanent housing. Residents in Bridge Housing are those experiencing chronic homelessness and may have a number of concurrent and complex barriers including, mental illness, physical challenges, chronic diseases, substance use disorders.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing – Buchanan Street offers housing with support services to meet an individual's complex needs. This new 25-unit location has staff on-site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, offering a low barrier, harm reduction and trauma-informed approach to service. Drawing from the By-name list, this asset prioritized individuals with high acuity, and a long history of homelessness. Specific units were designated for population groups including individuals with Indigenous identity, youth (16-24), seniors (55+) and Veterans, as well as family units for couples and survival partners.

Housing First and Home for Good

Housing First program focuses on moving individuals experiencing chronic homelessness into affordable, permanent housing with intensive case management supports. In 2022, clients faced increased challenges because of the pandemic. In response, Niagara moved 30 units from Housing First to Home for Good to offer a suitable option for higher acuity clients who benefit from enhanced supportive housing programming. Currently there are 170 Housing First units. In 2022, 46 individuals successfully exited the Housing First program.

The Home for Good (HFG) program provides support services (intensive case management plus mental health and/or addictions supports) and an available rent

supplement to individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with complex issues. Clients are supported with home visits, addictions and mental health supports, and referrals to community-based services. Niagara currently has 113 HFG units. In 2022, Niagara Region enhanced addictions supports by increasing service through CASON. In 2022, five (5) individuals successfully exited the Home for Good program.

In 2022, additional funding for housing allowances in these programs allowed clients to more successfully secure housing in the current housing market.

Recuperative Care Beds Program

Late 2022, Niagara Region Homelessness Services received funding from the Ministry of Health for the operation of a 10-bed Recuperative Care Bed program for individuals experiencing homelessness. This program is an intensive short-term, low barrier accommodation that helps to fill the service gap between hospital and shelter. The program supports people who are absolutely homeless after being discharged from the hospital to recover and access care from an interdisciplinary team. The program is co-located in the Bridge Housing facility and is supported by Home and Community Care Support Services and REACH Niagara.

Homelessness System Pandemic Response

Niagara Region and its homelessness partners continued to delivery essential services during the transition from pandemic to endemic for COVID-19. The following are some examples of how Niagara Region, Public Health and its partners supported individuals experiencing homelessness and the homeless-serving system in 2022.

- Supported 221 individuals experiencing homelessness with a safe place to isolate and receive onsite testing. The COVID isolation site closed on June 30th of 2022.
- Supported emergency shelters in the development of outbreak management plans.
- Through the efforts of Public Health, Community Health Centres, REACH, Family Health Teams and Niagara Region Homelessness Services approximately 450 doses of the COVID-19 vaccinations (first, second, and booster) were provided to clients experiencing homelessness.

Other Planned Activities

Key activities planned or started for 2023:

- Develop an encampment strategy taking into consideration human rights, legal rulings, community expectations and client needs.
- Establish a procurement process for contracts coming to end March 2024.
- Enhance the effectiveness of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and improved data quality.
- Develop and seek opportunities to engage more fully with Indigenous partners.
- Initiate Fort Erie Transitional Housing Capital Build and procurement of an operator.
- Enhance Homelessness Services data strategy and KPI's to measure progress.
- Continue to implement system transformation in the areas of housing-focused shelter, prevention, and transitional housing.

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

- COM 1-2022 Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Investment Plan 2022-23
- COM 2-2022 Homelessness Services COVID Response - Temporary Seasonal Shelter Procurement Approval
- COM 5-2022 COVID-19 Emergency Shelter Procurement Approval
- COM 10-2022 Homelessness Prevention Program Investment Plan
- COM 11-2022 Budget Adjustment – Homelessness Services
- COM 12-2022 Homelessness Services Report 2021
- COM 14- 2022 SSRF4 Budget Adjustment – Homelessness Services

- COM 15-2022 Homelessness Services COVID Response – Assertive Outreach Procurement Approval
- COM 29-2022 Homelessness Services - Temporary Seasonal Shelter Procurement Approval
- COM 30- 2022 Homelessness Services Shelter Contract Amendments
- COM C 11-2022 Homelessness Plans for Winter 2022/23
- CWCD 2022-224 Niagara Achieves a Veteran Quality By-Name List

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