

Memorandum

COM-C 10-2024

Subject: Homelessness Services “Niagara Counts” Point-in-Time (PiT) Count 2024

Date: July 9, 2024

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

Niagara’s Point-in-Time (PiT) Count, “Niagara Counts”, is a strategy to help determine how many people in Niagara are experiencing homelessness, found in emergency and domestic violence shelters, on the streets, in transitional housing or in other people’s homes. A PiT Count provides a one-day snapshot of non-identifying data at a specific time through an event the community can rally around. A Count typically focuses on collecting numbers, basic demographics, reasons for homelessness and service use information. The data collected is used to measure trends over the large periods of time between counts, typically every one or two years. A PiT Count is similar to a By-Name List in that they both provide a count of the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Designated communities are mandated by the federal government to conduct a PiT Count as part of the Reaching Home program. Three previous PiT Counts were conducted in Niagara: in 2016, 2018 and 2021. Although previous PiT Counts have all occurred in spring, the Federal government is requiring the upcoming PiT Count to take place in the fall before the end of November 2024. Niagara Counts is planned to take place on October 22, with a contingency date of October 29.

A By-Name List is different from a PiT Count because it provides an ongoing, real-time count of people entering and exiting the homeless-serving system using identifying data. By-Name List data is collected over time, as needed, to assist the system to provide the right amount and types of service to people experiencing homelessness at the right time based on progressive engagement. It also provides actionable household-level data needed for Coordinated Access¹ to offer housing support and provides

¹ Coordinated Access is a systems-level approach for addressing homelessness that provides a consistent way to assess, prioritize and connect people experiencing homelessness to Region-funded housing and supports.

monthly snapshots to use in measuring trends and informing system improvements. Niagara's homeless-serving system has used a By-Name List since 2019 as part of its work with Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) and in line with provincial and federal requirements.

Niagara Counts is a collaborative effort among Niagara Region and social service providers across the region. A steering committee representing a variety of sectors organizes the event. Key partners in planning and conducting the PiT Count include:

- Niagara's Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) team will support with the unsheltered count and surveys, visiting the more remote places frequented by those experiencing homelessness and helping to map routes for street count volunteers.
- Niagara Indigenous Community Advisory Board (NICAB) and Indigenous service providers will lead engagement of Indigenous people and families experiencing homelessness.
- Staff within emergency and domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing, will be conducting the sheltered count and surveys.

Niagara Counts typically relies on community agencies and trained volunteers to conduct the Count. However, due to the pandemic, the 2021 Count was modified and completed by community agency staff only. The 2024 Count will once again provide an opportunity for broader engagement of community members. Broad engagement is important in that it provides an opportunity for community members who are interested in efforts to address homelessness to contribute toward an issue they care about while learning about current efforts, best practices, homelessness programs and successes. The volunteer opportunity will be posted on social media by early September. Volunteer training is typically a two-to-three-hour session that covers who to ask, how to ask each survey question and how to stay safe while conducting the count.

Additional engagement with Indigenous organizations is necessary to provide an accurate picture of homelessness among Indigenous persons and families in Niagara. Many Indigenous people and families experiencing homelessness access supports outside of Niagara's homeless-serving system, and therefore are not reflected in the Region's By-Name List. For the 2024 Count, the Region will work with the Niagara Indigenous Community Advisory Board (NICAB) to gather information about the experience of homelessness among Indigenous people and families. Indigenous Street Outreach and Housing First staff will be available to support engagement and assist with outreach with traditional foods.

Information gathered from the 2024 PiT Count will be available in early 2025, and results will be posted on Niagara Region's Niagara Counts website.

Visit our website for more information about Niagara Counts.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Commissioner, Community Services