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**Subject:** Homelessness Services Report 2018  
**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee  
**Report date:** Tuesday, June 11, 2019

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## Recommendations

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

## Key Facts

- This report provides information regarding Homelessness Services' activities and metrics for 2018 and planned activities for 2019.
- 2018 saw continued efforts to improve services for clients, improve alignment with evidence-informed practices and achievement of performance target outcomes.
- In 2018, Niagara housed 68 additional homeless individuals through Housing First programming, and operated a total of 168 Housing First units (rent supplements plus client supports).
- Home for Good is a permanent supportive housing program for those chronically homeless with complex needs based on Housing First principles. In 2018, Niagara housed 30 homeless individuals through this intensive support program.
- In 2018, approximately 70 homeless households moved into transitional housing to receive supports and help to find permanent housing.
- Consistent with Canadian practice, implementation of a shared federal database (Homeless Individuals & Families Information System (HIFIS)) continued among service providers, to improve and streamline client service, as well as capture client and service use data.
- In 2018, Niagara implemented two pilot programs in emergency shelters to further assess the level of acuity and respond to the complex needs of clients: one for children and families, and one for adults. A third pilot project related to landlord engagement continued in 2018 with promising results.

## Financial Considerations

The activities highlighted in this report were provided within the 2018/19 fiscal funding envelopes. Homelessness Services is primarily funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) (\$8,286,923 - 77.4% (which includes Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and Home for Good funding)), the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (\$714,705 – 6.7%) as well as Regional levy (\$1,703,561 -15.9%).

The limited amount of provincial and federal funding Niagara receives for Homelessness Services remains a concern, with Niagara receiving amounts well below its comparators. Community Services continues to communicate, through its associations and with ministry staff, the ongoing needs of the Niagara community. For example, for 2019-2020, Niagara will receive \$9.2 million in provincial and federal funding, or 35.2% of Hamilton's allocation, (totaling \$26.1 million). For comparison, Niagara's population is 60% of that of Hamilton, and Niagara's social assistance caseload is 83% of that of Hamilton.

Homelessness Services is anticipating a 2020 budget pressure of an estimated \$800,000 to maintain existing service levels as provided during 2019.

## **Analysis**

Community Services operationalizes the Region's provincially mandated responsibilities as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the homelessness system in Niagara. Its key responsibility is service system planning and administration for the homelessness system, and it operates under rules established by the MMAH. The Region also receives federal funding under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (now known as *Reaching Home*) and is identified as the local Community Entity for this funding.

Homelessness services are delivered by 22 community agencies through purchase of service contracts with Niagara Region. The types of homelessness services align with the Council approved priorities of outreach, supported transitional housing, Housing First, emergency shelters, and homelessness prevention, and with approaches recommended in the province's *Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy*.

Service system management includes establishing and maintaining relationships with community agencies and others to set priorities and identify gaps. Administrative responsibilities include allocating resources to meet local needs including setting and implementing accountability structures to manage and deliver an outcome-focused service system.

## **Homelessness Services Data**

The Homelessness Services division and community agencies have been working diligently to improve the availability and quality of operational metrics to better understand local needs and support improved service planning, including continued work to leverage additional data opportunities within the homelessness services system.

Through the continued implementation of HIFIS across Niagara's homelessness services system, staff are seeking to modernize our local system, improving coordinated services for client and supporting the development of an evidence-informed system.

HIFIS is a web-based homeless management information system created by the federal government and is available at no cost to Niagara Region (for the software).

Beginning in 2017, staff at funded community agencies were trained to enter basic client demographics into HIFIS. Following this, emergency shelter staff were trained to capture the admission and stay details of clients in addition to basic demographics. In the past six months, work and further training has been underway to begin capturing all services received by clients through funded projects, as well as housing history (including experiences of unsheltered homelessness, couch surfing, etc.), and further demographics (e.g., income source, highest level of education, etc.). These three phases of implementation are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1.

<b>Phase 1 (complete)</b>	<b>Phase 2 (complete)</b>	<b>Phase 3 (current)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic demographics (e.g., name, DOB, veteran status, Indigenous identity, citizenship)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic demographics</li> <li>• Admissions (i.e. shelter book-ins/book-outs)</li> <li>• Client Assessments (used by Home for Good occupational therapist)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic demographics</li> <li>• Admissions</li> <li>• Assessments</li> <li>• Enhanced demographics</li> <li>• Case management</li> <li>• Housing placement</li> <li>• Client benefits and services used</li> <li>• Safety flags</li> </ul>

With a few exceptions, most client information in HIFIS is shared across providers within Niagara’s homelessness services system, facilitating better coordination of services between staff/providers at different community agencies, as well as with Regional staff.

In addition, HIFIS supports the extraction of raw data and reports, simplifying the collection of data for local service planning purposes and for reporting to funders. These capabilities will be implemented starting in the second half of 2019.

### **Homelessness Services Metrics and Outcomes**

Based on emergency shelter system data, there are on average 22 households, at any given time, with chronic emergency shelter use histories (i.e. more than 180 cumulative days in shelter over the previous 12 months). A further 60 or so households have emergency shelter stays between 100 and 179 cumulative days over the previous 12 months.

While helpful to understand local need, these are under estimates of the real extent of chronic homelessness in Niagara, which should include individuals who have experienced homelessness in addition to, or outside of, the emergency shelter system (e.g. couch surfing, tenting). Results from Niagara’s most recent Point-in-Time Count

(March 2018) indicated that 128 survey respondents self-identified more than 180 days of homelessness in the previous year (excludes those staying in transitional housing on the night of the Count). This year's inclusion of outreach clients in HIFIS will improve the identification of those who are chronically homeless and help in our targeted efforts to support this complex population.

## Housing First

Niagara Region's Housing First (HF) program has been operating since 2014, providing housing placement services, case management supports and rent supplements to support individuals experiencing chronic and/or episodic homelessness to achieve housing stability long-term. Results to date are shown in Table 2. At their six-month milestone, 83% of clients were housed and active in the HF program or had successfully exited Housing First. At 12 months, **this rate was 78%**.

Table 2.

HF Program Status	Outcome		At 6 Months		At 12 Months	
	Active	Still housed	Original placement	149	67%	102
Subsequent placement			20	9%	28	14%
Waiting for subsequent placement		21	9%	12	6%	
Discharged	Exited to homelessness		5	2%	6	3%
	Exited successfully		15	7%	23	12%
	Exited for other reasons		14	6%	26	13%
Total			224	100%	197	100%

Another outcome measured as part of the Housing First program is social and economic participation. To date in the 2018/19 fiscal year, 21 clients increased their income (e.g. they began receiving ODSP instead of OW), 22 clients began paid employment, 30 clients began an education program or participated in job skills, and 54 clients participated in volunteer work, a positive social experience, and/or recreational/cultural activities. **These results are considered to be quite positive within the Housing First model.**

## Home for Good

At the end of 2017, Niagara Region received Home for Good (HFG) funding to add 40 community-based supportive housing placements for individuals experiencing chronic, Indigenous, or youth homelessness, or homelessness following exit from a provincial institution. Clients of this program receive similar but enhanced case management supports, as in Housing First, with a reduced caseload ratio for support workers due to more complex needs, plus the provision of mental health services, addictions services,

and occupational therapy, as needed. Results to date are shown in Table 3. At six months, 19 out of 24 clients (79%) were housed and active in the HFG program.

Table 3.

HFG Program Status	Outcome		At 6 Months	
	Active	Still housed	Original placement	14
Subsequent placement			5	21%
Waiting for subsequent placement		1	4%	
Discharged			4	17%
Total			24	100%

Participants of HF and HFG often have multiple challenges including mental health issues, physical health issues, addictions, and trauma. In many cases, individuals have not been housed for a period of years, and require a multi-level approach to maintaining housing. Niagara Region will be expanding both Home for Good and Housing First in 2019 and 2020 to continue to respond to those with the most complex needs and extensive periods of homelessness.

The Home for Good Program included an assessment for all clients utilizing the VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool). A score of eight or greater (out of 17) means the individual has high and complex needs and is appropriate for supportive housing. The clients assessed for the Home for Good program all scored over 10.

Construction funding was also received under the provincial Home for Good program, for 23 additional purpose-built supportive housing units, with the Port Colborne build completion expected in the fall of 2019 and the St. Catharines build to be complete in the spring of 2021.

Additional homelessness services metrics for the period 2016 to 2018 are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

INITIATIVE	2016	2017	2018
Emergency Shelter – number of unique households accessing shelter	1682	1641	1835
Emergency Shelter – number of unique households where head of household is 50 or over	409	379	428
Emergency Shelter – number of unique households where family size is four or greater	48	49	41
Transitional Housing – number of unique households accessing service	426	444	451

<b>INITIATIVE</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
Housing First – number of unique households placed in year	41	85	68
Homelessness Prevention programs (e.g., housing help) – number of unique households served	1848	1997	2162
Average number of visits by the top 60 shelter users	16.7	18.6	22.2
Average number of days in a shelter by the top 60 shelter users	164.2	181.8	185.1
Number of households visiting shelter 4-6 times	229	160	190
Housing Stability Plan – number of unique households receiving a Housing Stability benefit	N/A	3306	3615
Housing Stability Plan – average value of housing stability benefits issued (e.g., rent arrears, last month’s rent deposit, moving expenses)	N/A	\$705	\$738

### **Homelessness System Continuous Improvements**

In order to further investigate and address specific needs identified within the homelessness system, three important pilot projects were undertaken in 2018. The Social Worker Shelter pilot and the Early Years pilot began in 2018 and the Landlord Engagement pilot continued through 2018, and was extended to March 31, 2020.

### **Social Worker Shelter Pilot**

Through a partnership with Niagara Region’s Mental Health program, a clinical social worker was hired to administer a number of formal mental health and addictions assessments to shelter clients identified as having at least 60 days of homelessness over the course of the last 120 days. In many cases it was noted that these clients were incarcerated, in treatment, hospitalized, or couch surfing before presenting in a homeless shelter. The goal of this pilot project is to better understand the needs of this population to inform service offerings going forward, identify broader service gaps and to support requests for service enhancements or future funding applications.

While most clients have been very willing to speak with the social worker, developing the rapport and trust necessary to conduct the assessments takes a lot of time. In most cases, the social worker has many interactions with clients before even one assessment can be completed. Assessments are administered to identify symptoms and indications of mental health issues, vulnerability, acuity of need, alcohol and drug history and dependence, previous treatment history, etc. To date, the social worker has completed at least one assessment with 49 individuals, and has completed all assessments with 18 individuals.

This project is providing a wealth of information and insights about clients, over and above their assessment scores. Early indications in the shelter pilot suggest a strong prevalence of concurrent disorders (addictions and mental health disorders) and many

individuals presenting with severe and chronic addiction. It has been observed that there are also higher levels of developmental and personality disorders present.

### **Early Years Pilot**

Through a partnership with Niagara Region Children's Services, a children's resource consultant is on-site, on a part-time basis, within the YWCA's emergency shelters to support positive child and family outcomes of vulnerable families (particularly those with children ages 0-6).

Acting as an integrated case management team, shelter staff, Ontario Works hostel workers, and the resource consultant, work with families and their children to identify housing, income, employment and child development needs/concerns, as well as opportunities to work collaboratively to enable positive outcomes (through sharing of information, case-conferencing, etc.).

Several successes of this pilot have occurred to date:

- The YWCA's Niagara Falls shelters have established designated play areas for children to use while they are staying in shelter.
- The resource consultant has helped shelter clients access licensed childcare and summer camp spaces in 2019.
- A fee subsidy worker is available to go to shelter sites, upon request, to assist families with their childcare assistance applications, eliminating the barrier of having to go to Regional headquarters for an appointment.

### **Landlord Engagement Pilot**

In the context of a very limited rental housing market, the goal of this pilot project is to develop relationships with landlords in order to house more clients from the homelessness system. The primary emphasis was originally on Home for Good clients but the service has also been extended to Housing First and shelter clients, and lately off-site transitional housing programs have started requesting support.

In 2018, the Landlord Engagement Specialist (LES) secured 26 units of safe, suitable housing in good condition, for clients experiencing homelessness. This is a very positive result in the current market, where landlords are receiving numerous applications for any available unit.

Another important focus of this pilot is to support successful tenancies for clients with a history of frequent evictions and substantial episodes of homelessness. This is accomplished by working closely with landlords, tenants/clients, and client case managers (e.g. through eviction prevention, mediation, etc.), as well as through community engagement and education efforts (e.g. landlord / tenant rights and responsibilities, how to engage landlords, etc.).

Since the beginning of this pilot project, only two tenancies receiving LES support were unsuccessful. In both cases, relationships with the landlords were preserved and the housing units were retained for other homelessness services clients.

Other activities undertaken in 2018 to support continuous improvement within the homelessness service system and drive outcomes related to the reduction of local homelessness include:

- Homelessness System Review
- Home for Good capital builds (Gateway eight units and the YWCA 15 units)
- Capacity training for system agencies (human trafficking awareness, Residential Tenancies Act)
- Housing First training through the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH).

Enhancements planned or started for 2019:

- Increase number of Housing First units
- Homelessness Services System Review implementation, including development of KPI's and targets, redesign of outreach services and housing help support
- Case management training
- Enhanced assertive outreach services
- Housing First training/accreditation
- Planning for 2020 enumeration in the form of a registry week (Point-in-Time Count)
- System procurement for the 2020-2022 system contracts
- Youth shelter diversion pilot
- Human trafficking safe house pilot
- Commence implementation of the quality By- Name list (aligned with federal *Reaching Home* requirements)

Commence work on coordinated access system (aligned with federal *Reaching Home* requirements).

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not Applicable.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Not applicable (pending the development of Council's new Strategic Priorities).

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

- COM 15-2019 HHAP Update 2018
- COM 10-2019 Homelessness Services System Review



- COM 01-2019 Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Investment Plan 2019-20
- COM 16-2018 Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Report
- COM 08-2018 Homelessness Services Report 2017
- COM 16-2017 Emergency Shelter Expression of Interest (EOI) Award Results.

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**Prepared by:**

Kristina Nickel, BSc  
Program Evaluation and Data Advisor  
Community Services

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**Recommended by:**

Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE  
Commissioner  
Community Services

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**Submitted by:**

Ron Tripp, P.Eng.  
Acting Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared in consultation with Kayla De Pauw, Program Financial Specialist, and reviewed by Chandra Hardeen, Manager, Homelessness Services and Cathy Cousins, Director, Homelessness Services and Community Engagement.*