

Memorandum

COM-C 10-2025

Subject: Shelter System Data and Trends: 2024 Update

Date: May 6, 2025

To: Public Health and Social Services Committee

From: Cathy Cousins, Director, Homelessness and Community Engagement

At the Public Health and Social Services Committee meeting held on March 4, 2025, the following Councillor Information Request was made:

“Provide information respecting the impact of shelters including the length of time individuals spend in shelters, the effectiveness of shelters and the lessons learned.”
Councillor Witteveen.

Niagara Region, the Agencies and the front-line staff that support individuals experiencing homelessness have demonstrated great success and resilience in supporting individuals on their journey to housing. Niagara has seen an 8% decline in homelessness at the end of 2024 over 2023, with a further 7% decline in the first two months of 2025. However, chronic homelessness within that overall population continues to increase, drawing attention to the increasing complexity of those who seek service.

By-Name List of Those Experiencing Homelessness:

| | Dec 31/23 | Dec 21/24 | Feb 28/25 |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Total | 1229 | 1136 | 1057 |
| Chronic | 594 | 629 | 629 |
| Non-Chronic | 635 | 507 | 428 |
| Chronic % | 48.3% | 55.4% | 59.5% |

Within the total homeless population, 102 individuals are youth aged 16 to 24, of whom 54 are experiencing chronic homelessness. There are currently 65 families experiencing homelessness, of which 33 are chronically homeless. The senior population includes 126 individuals aged 55 to 64, of whom 74 are chronically homeless, and 32 individuals aged 65 and older, with 24 of them classified as chronically homeless. In addition, the Point in Time count survey results and data indicated that 39% of adult individuals experiencing homelessness had their first experience of homeless prior to the age of 18, as well as demonstrating that the fastest growing demographic of homeless is seniors. This highlights the need for a family strategy and greater focus on addressing the senior population.

The shelter system continues to serve individuals with growing acuity and complexity of needs, which contributes to the rise in chronic homelessness. In 2024, 82% of intakes at funded housing-focused shelters were repeat intakes, up from 78% in 2022, reflecting a steady increase in both acuity and chronicity of those seeking shelters. A total of 1,915 intakes were recorded in 2024, with 319 involving Level 4/5 restrictions related to violence and safety concerns, an increase from 289 in 2023 and 262 in 2022. This emphasizes the growing complexity of individuals accessing shelter services and the correlation with the rise in chronic homelessness.

In addition, in 2022, the average length of stay was 32 days, which has since decreased to 23 days in 2024.

Efforts to divert individuals from shelters reflect the increasing in needs and acuity. In 2024, 12.21% of intakes involved a diversion attempt, with a success rate of 28.03%. In early 2025, the diversion attempt rate increased to 45.6%, with a success rate of 20.79%. Diversion investments are being increased to provide for dedicated support to all shelters effective Q2 2025.

The percentage of shelter intakes resulting in housing exits has declined over the past two years, from 24.71% in 2022 to 15.18% in 2024, although this still equates to 700 individuals securing housing. This decline can be attributed to rising living costs, inflation, insufficient social assistance rates, and a shortage of affordable and supportive housing options. However, 173 housing exits were recorded in January and February 2025 alone, driven by targeted Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit investments and enhanced outreach resources focusing on transitioning individuals from encampments and shelters to stable housing. Returns to homelessness remain a challenge, with 25% of shelter intakes in 2024 involving individuals who had previously exited a shelter to housing, a steady metric since 2022.

Where individuals experiencing homeless have been housed from the range of programs offered by the Region, the 6 month sustained housing rates are as follows:

| Remained Housed 180 days (%) | 2023 | 2024 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|
| Emergency Shelter | 76% | 77% |
| Bridge Housing | 78% | 90% |
| Housing First | 88% | 94% |
| Home For Good | 80% | 97% |
| Transitional Housing | 91% | 96% |
| Outreach (NASO) | N/A | 85% |
| Prevention (Rapid Rehousing & HELP) | 100% | 94% |

Niagara Region in partnership with homeless serving agencies regularly review outcomes, key performance indicators and trends. The data and conversations at various planning tables is in alignment, showing the need to focus on solutions that are targeted to address the growing complexity of homelessness, with a particular focus on chronic homelessness, family homelessness, and the senior population.

The Homelessness team has established divisional priorities for 2025 around a family homelessness strategy and a senior homelessness strategy. Staff have applied to the Canadian Alliance to end Homelessness Innovation fund to support the commencement of work to further understand and respond to seniors homelessness. Work from these two priorities will be leveraged in the supportive housing strategy where appropriate, as well as shared with Committee and Council to support advocacy and future investments.

Respectfully submitted and signed by,

Cathy Cousins, CPA, CA

Director, Homelessness Services and Community Engagement
Community Services