



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	SOCIAL SERVICES
PREPARED BY:	Valerie Colasanti, General Manager
REVIEWED BY:	Ronald G. Van Horne, Chief Administrative Officer
MEETING DATE:	May 20, 2020
INFORMATION ITEM:	Reaching Home: Designated Communities Stream

BACKGROUND

Every Canadian deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. On April 24, 2020, the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister for Families, Children and Social Development, announced that the Government of Canada designated Lambton County as one of the six new communities selected to receive funding to prevent and reduce homelessness under the Designated Communities Stream of Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy.

Reaching Home provides long-term stable funding to communities that face challenges with homelessness. Funding is provided to a single body, known as a Community Entity, in this case Lambton County, which distributes the funding to support local priorities identified in the community's homelessness plan. All funded programs must support a Housing First model. Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centres on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional supports and services as needed.

In spring 2019 the Federal Government launched a two-step application process to identify new designated communities. To select new communities, the Federal Government considered each community's demonstrated need for homelessness funding as well as their capacity to effectively manage federal investments and improve their local chronic homelessness by 50% by fiscal year 2027-2028. Lambton County was selected to move on to the second phase of the application process in September 2019 and was approved as a designated community in April 2020.

The other five communities selected for the expansion of the Designated Communities stream are: Abbotsford, BC; Cochrane District (Timmins), ON; Cowichan Valley, BC; Chilliwack, BC, and Kenora, ON.

DISCUSSION

Reaching Home, Canada's Homelessness Strategy is a community based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness across Canada using the Housing First approach. It supports the goals of the National Housing Strategy, in particular, to support the most vulnerable Canadians to maintain safe, stable and affordable housing, and to reduce chronic homelessness nationally by 50% by fiscal year 2027-28. Lambton County, through the updated Housing and Homelessness Plan, has an even more ambitious goal of reducing chronic homelessness by 50% by 2024 and to achieve functional zero by 2025. Functional zero is achieved when the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness is zero, or if not zero, then either three individuals or .1% of the total number of individuals reported in the most recent enumeration, whichever is greater for a three month period. The additional funding received through this program will provide the much needed resources to meet these ambitious goals.

The homeless enumeration conducted in Lambton County in 2018 determined there were approximately 345 homeless individuals living in Lambton County. Of those, 36% identified as chronically homeless, meaning they had experienced homelessness for six months or more.

While there are numerous programs within Lambton County aimed at eliminating homelessness and providing support services for those experiencing homelessness, a systems based, Housing First approach that ensures equal access for everyone to the programs is lacking. Under the Reaching Home program, communities have until 2022 to introduce a Coordinated Access System to prioritize people who are most in need of assistance and match them to appropriate housing and other supportive services. This system will help ensure fairness and streamline access within a Housing First model.

As part of this system, the Homelessness Prevention Department will be creating a By-Name List, which is a real-time list of all individuals and families experiencing homelessness within the County. It includes a robust set of data points that support coordinated access and prioritization at a household level and an understanding of homeless inflow and outflow at a system level. The data will be captured using the Federal Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). This data collection and case management system allows multiple service providers in the same community to access real-time data and to increase coordination of services. HIFIS will assist staff in the development of a community portrait on homelessness.

In preparation for the development of a Homelessness Prevention System for Lambton County, a review of the then Social Planning and Children's Services Department was completed and several positions were altered to better meet the Provincial mandates of the programs delivered by the department. At the same time the department name was changed to Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services. Two positions, the Homelessness System Coordinator and Landlord Engagement Support Worker will now both be funded under the Reaching Home funding, which will provide savings to the County budget.

As part of the Governance model for the Reaching Home funding, a Community Advisory Board is responsible for setting direction for addressing homelessness in the community. The Community Advisory Board is expected to coordinate efforts to address homelessness in a community, and is therefore expected to have an in-depth knowledge of the key sectors and systems that affect their homelessness priorities. This board will be a sub-committee of the Lambton County Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee and will align the programs funded through the Reaching Home Stream with the County of Lambton's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. Additional details of the Reaching Home Plan will be presented to Council in a future report once the Community Advisory Board has had the opportunity to meet, develop the Plan and recommend any necessary sub-agreements to implement the approved plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Social Services will receive a total of \$2,154,531 from the Federal Government over a four year period. This includes \$376,116 in 2020-21 and \$592,805 per year until 2023-2024. The Homelessness System Coordinator and the Landlord Engagement Support Worker will be funded 100% from this funding at a savings of \$93,483.00 to the County of Lambton. There is no other financial impact to the County.

CONSULTATIONS

In preparing the delivery of the Reaching Home strategy, staff will consult with Employment and Social Development Canada, the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, and the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014 - 2023.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Delivering the Reaching Home program is consistent with the County's Mission Statement to promote an enhanced quality of life through the provision of responsive and efficient services accomplished by working with municipal and community partners.

The activities of the Department support the Community Development Area of Effort #3, Community Development, in the County of Lambton's Strategic Plan, specifically:

- Advocating in a manner that raises the profile of the County and its needs in order to secure improved government supports, funding, grants, and other resources.
- Developing programs and initiatives that address poverty reduction and promote social belonging.
- Planning for and responding to the ever-changing needs of an aging population, homelessness and retaining young people in the community while supporting their transition to being employed community members and future leaders.

CONCLUSION

The Reaching Home funding will assist in meeting the County of Lambton's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan vision that, "Every person has an affordable, suitable and adequate home." In addition, being chosen as a designated community will provide staff with additional tools and resources to assist with the implementation of the plan.