



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
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INFORMATION ITEM:	Homelessness Prevention Services

BACKGROUND

In October 2023, Lambton County Council received a report which provided an overview of emergency housing in Lambton County, including the re-opening of the Out of the Cold Program. The report described the continued elevated demand for emergency housing services, despite tremendous housing outcomes across the network of community providers that support individuals experiencing homelessness.

This report seeks to provide Council with a further update on a few key initiatives and indicators within homelessness prevention. Overall, the rate at which households are newly experiencing homelessness continues to outpace the intensive and coordinated supports offered by several community partner agencies to divert them from a shelter and progress them into housing. Resultantly, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Lambton County continues to rise, including the demand for limited local resources. As the demand for supports grows, more households will continue to age into an experience of chronic homelessness, where there is a markedly increased risk for social and health harms, further straining local emergency services.

DISCUSSION

Coordinated Access

To maximize the impact of available local resources and programming, in addition to introducing an equitable framework for offering services, Lambton County has introduced a [Coordinated Access system](#) to guide the delivery of homelessness prevention programming (see *Figure 1*). This dramatic shift, including such key steps as the introduction of a real-time information system and development of a quality [By-Name List](#),

are well-established best practices and align with the community's [10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan](#). The many community partner agencies participating in this change have offered their support and expertise in both completed and ongoing quality improvement initiatives. This input also includes feedback from the local lived and living experience committee, known as “A Better Tomorrow”.

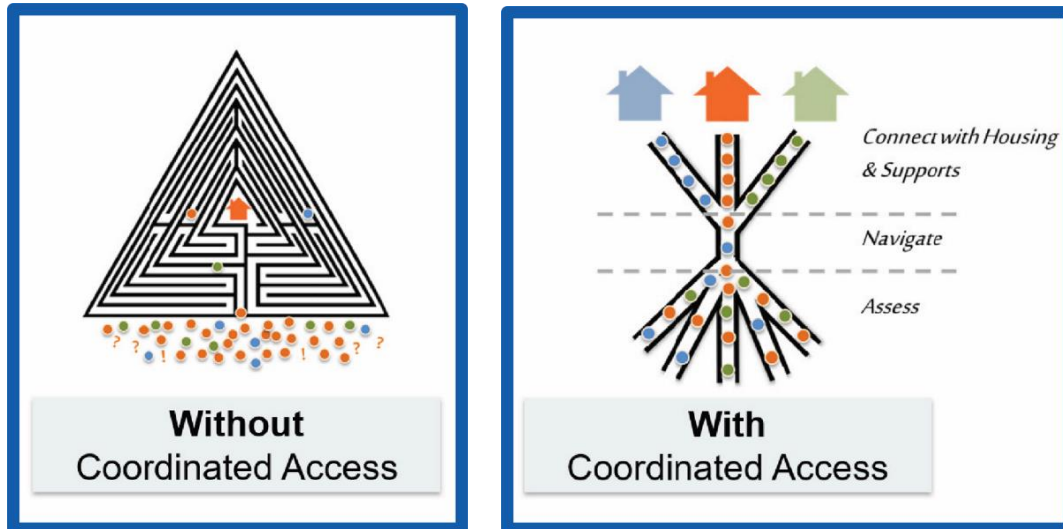


Figure 1

Coordinated Access promotes a “no-wrong door” approach to available homelessness services, prioritization of supports to individuals identified to be most vulnerable by the community, and real-time measurement of trends to inform local decision-making. The use of this approach has allowed priority subpopulations, such as youth and Indigenous households, to be more equitably served through our community network of service providers (see Figure 2), such as through intensive housing case management.

<u>PRIORITY</u>	<u>CRITERIA</u>
1	Chronic Homelessness
2	Indigenous
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth • Families • Tri-Morbidity

Figure 2

A lead table called the Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table oversees the implementation, policy and procedure development, and ongoing quality improvement of Coordinated Access in Lambton County. Facilitated by the homelessness system

coordinator, this is a cohort of managers from community providers that offer housing outflow opportunities through the By-Name List including Sarnia-Lambton Rebound, the Sarnia Lambton Native Friendship Centre, the Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton-Kent, the North Lambton Community Health Centre, the Inn of the Good Shepherd, and the County of Lambton. This group also conducts regular case-conferencing on the households that are the highest priority for our community to find the most suitable, and often unique, solutions and referrals to assist in their life stabilization.

Coordinated Housing Case Management

Many funded and partnered service providers across Lambton support households experiencing homelessness to provide housing case management. This includes document readiness work for subsidized housing eligibility, and lowering barriers to access private market units. Upon a successful placement, this also includes ongoing tenancy and life stabilization support, including life skills development. Strong partnerships and shared work across many agencies have led to tremendous successes in facilitating housing placements (see *Figures 3 & 4*).

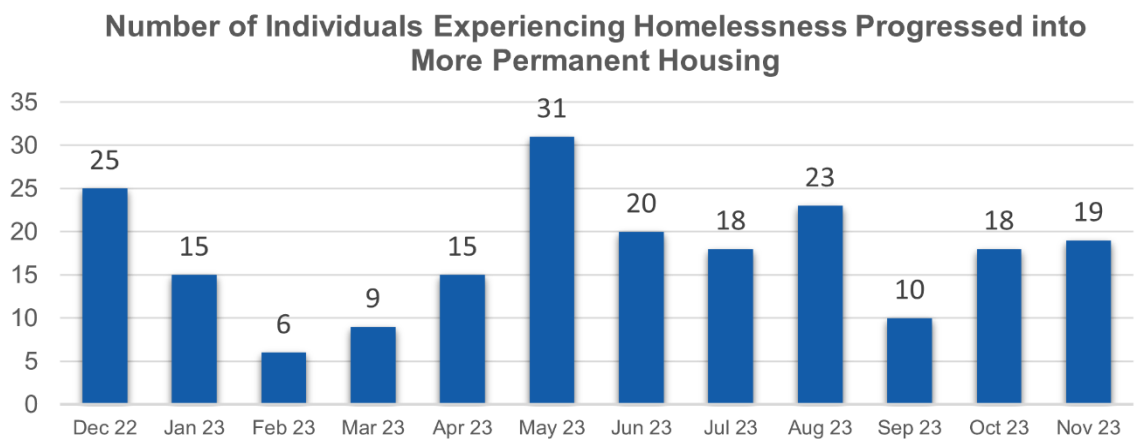


Figure 3



Figure 4

The barriers to accessing housing for those experiencing homelessness can be extensive, particularly for those that have been chronically homeless. The primary barrier is the drastic difference between available income supports and the market cost of rental units in Lambton County. The private rental housing market is largely inaccessible for many of our

most vulnerable households and is worsening with time. Due to significant demand for those scant available units, private market landlords often preferentially choose applicants with the highest income. Through the use of locally and provincially funded housing supplements, our community network of housing case managers are able to capitalize on the scant available private market units to facilitate housing placements. However, many additional barriers often exist for this cohort of households including those related to scarce rental history, including references, credit scores, missing or unavailable documentation, including identification, and more.

Since the advent of the pandemic, our community has heavily relied upon the private market to house those experiencing homelessness. The overwhelming majority of the nearly 600 placements facilitated by local housing case managers from homelessness to more permanent housing have been through private market housing.

Community By-Name List

Despite this steady outflow facilitated by housing placements, the rate of inflow onto our community [By-Name List](#) continues to outpace these gains. Individuals newly experiencing homelessness, and to a far lesser extent, returning to homelessness, are being identified by accessing both the community outreach workers and the Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre. For example, in September 2023 our community had an unprecedented 77 individuals added to the By-Name List.

At the time of the writing of this report there are 313 individuals experiencing homelessness in Lambton County. This includes households that are provisionally accommodated, often referred to as “hidden homelessness”, those accessing emergency or transitional housing, and households experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The proportion of these individuals that are experiencing chronic homelessness continues to gradually increase as demand surpasses the capacity of existing local resources and programming. Currently, 57% of individuals on the By-Name List are experiencing chronic homelessness (see *Figure 5*).

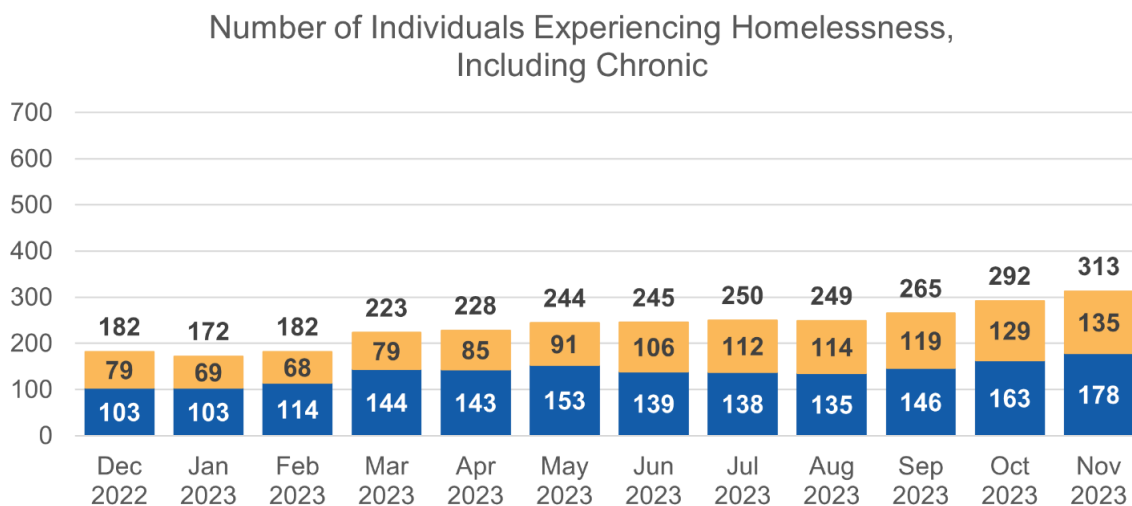


Figure 5

Certain vulnerable subpopulations are overrepresented on the By-Name List. Over 30% of the current By-Name List have identified as having Indigenous ancestry, and almost 15% are independent youth under the age of 25 (see *Figure 6*).

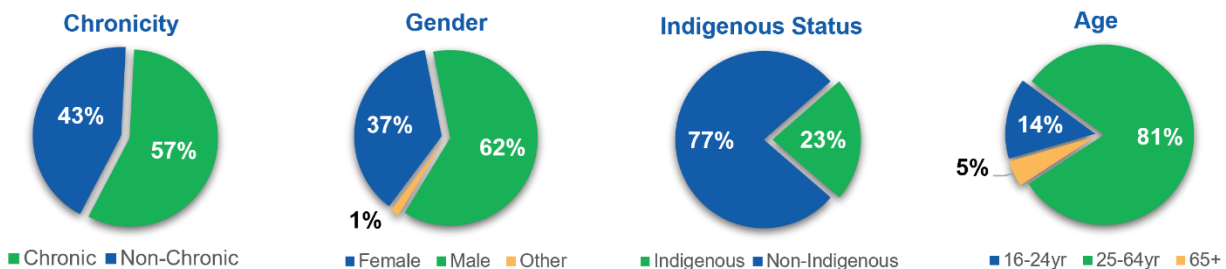


Figure 6

Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre

[The Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre](#) (HHRC) operating from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays at 837 Exmouth St, Sarnia, is a multidisciplinary repurposed church space that offers lower-barrier day-programming for individuals experiencing homelessness. The HHRC opened in June of 2023, and a dedicated report will follow which reviews the successes and learnings from the first months of its operation. The HHRC operates in the same site during opposite hours from the Out of the Cold emergency housing overflow site operated by the Inn of the Good Shepherd as described in the October 2023 report to council. A more accessible and suitable location to host the HHRC is currently being considered, and community consultations will be leveraged closer to any potential move of this program.

Various social and health service agencies support the operations of the HHRC, including the Inn of the Good Shepherd, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Lambton Public Health, North Lambton Community Health Centre, and the Sarnia Lambton Native Friendship Centre. Through a collaborative approach, individuals experiencing homelessness can be supported with basic needs, health services including harm reduction, and primarily housing supports with the central goal of progressing along the housing continuum.

The HHRC has supported over 1500 visits from those experiencing homelessness since inception and more than 190 unique individuals. At the time of this report, almost 100 individuals have been progressed from an experience of homelessness into more permanent housing across this span. The low-barrier nature of the HHRC operations have drastically reduced the number of escalated incidents requiring emergency services, including overdoses. Key findings from a survey conducted of program participants include:

- The majority of participant respondents identified the “Staff and welcoming environment” as their favourite part of the HHRC.

- The majority of participant respondents identified the understanding and non-judgmental service as the primary difference in getting help at HHRC, compared to other service locations.
- More than 80% of participant respondents identified that their comfort level to discuss drug use and addiction at HHRC was “comfortable” or “very comfortable”.
- More than 80% of participant respondents identified that their comfort level in discussing drug use and addiction at HHRC was “somewhat higher” or “much higher” than other service locations.

Homelessness Outreach

A small portion of the hundreds of individuals that are served through the homelessness prevention system of care experience unsheltered homelessness. In August 2023, council received a report which provided an overview of the approach and outcomes of the first 10 months of the [homelessness community outreach team](#). In the few months since the August 2023 report, the outreach team continues to see roughly the same rate of unique individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

As part of the coordinated approach to delivering mobile housing case management, the homelessness community outreach team conducts comprehensive daily hot-spot mapping to ensure coverage and coordinated follow-up of unsheltered households. Housing-focused case management, aimed at progressing individuals along the housing continuum, comprises the focus of this intensive work.

Outreach engages approximately 60 unique individuals within each month who experience unsheltered homelessness at some point. Of these approximately 60 individuals, 10 to 15 experience unsheltered homelessness on a daily or near-daily basis, with another 10 to 15 that experience unsheltered homelessness frequently, but less than daily. As with the totality of the community By-Name List, the remainder of these unique households is a dynamic list as many are supported into more permanent housing through various community supports, and others self-resolve, even if only into temporary provisional accommodation (see *Figure 7*).

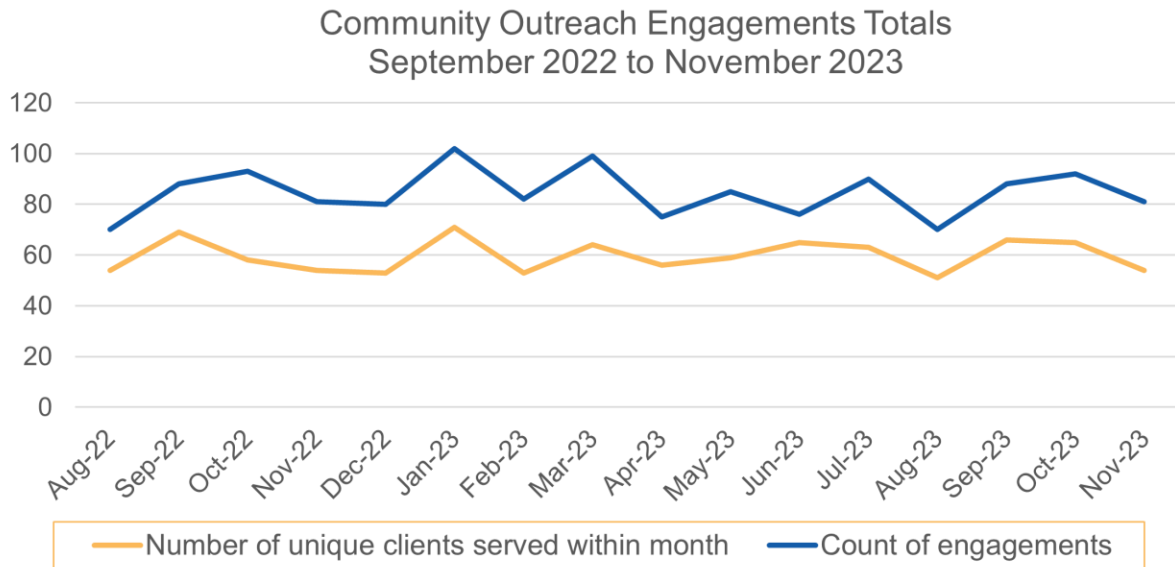


Figure 7

The most common reasons cited for living outside have also remained consistent in recent months. In descending order, the most common reasons are choosing not to stay in shelter due to substance use, choosing not to stay in shelter due to mental health concerns, and being on temporary service restriction from available emergency housing (see Figure 8).

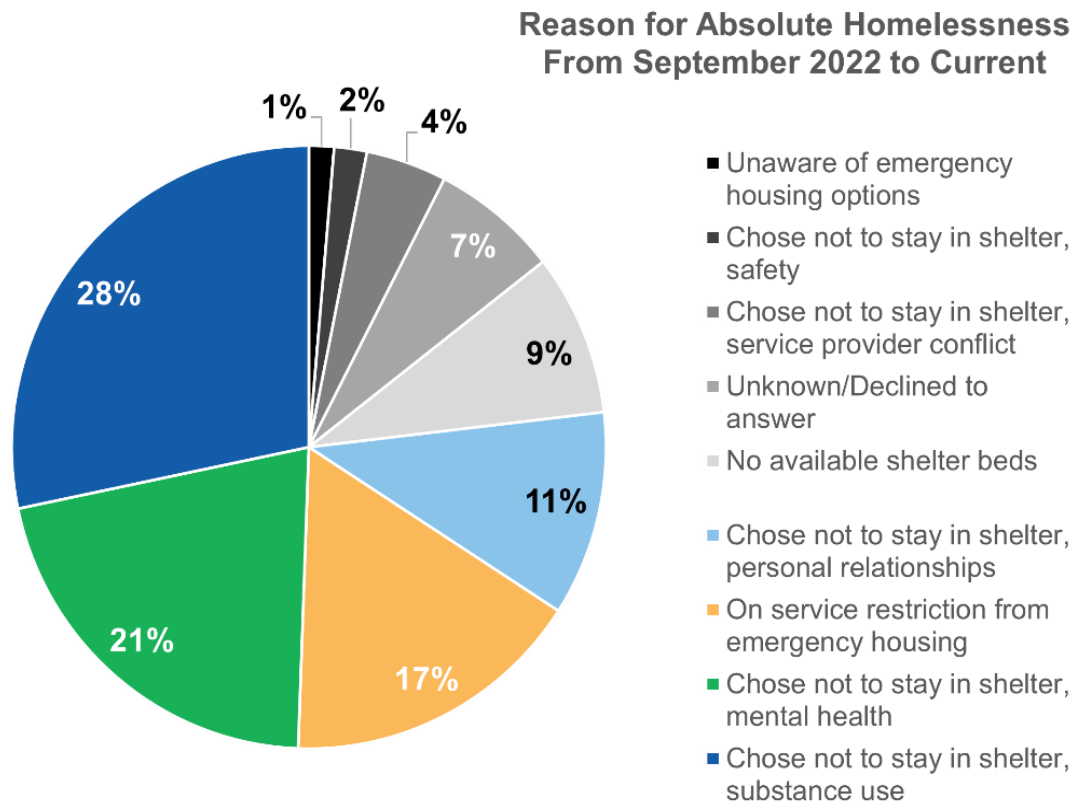


Figure 8

The needs of the individuals frequently or consistently living outside are among the highest of any in our community. These households almost uniformly require rigorous mental health supports, and intensive, multidisciplinary wrap-around supports to maintain any form of housing. These households are prioritized for service and receive all available supports to reduce harm and potentially secure housing. Unfortunately, the nature of the barriers they face to secure any form of private market housing leave scant opportunities to achieve life stabilization.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no financial impact on the County of Lambton Budget as a result of this report.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultations have taken place with members of the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, the Lambton County Community Advisory Board, the A Better Tomorrow Committee, the General Manager of Social Services, internal Social Services Division staff, and numerous social services agencies in the community.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The activities of the Division support the Community Development Area of Effort #3 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.
- Actively pursuing joint opportunities with community partners that contribute to the well-being of the Lambton Community.

CONCLUSION

Despite the success of coordinated direct service delivery across several social service partner agencies, the rate of households newly experiencing homelessness has continued to rise in Lambton County. The worsening housing crisis is disproportionately affecting low-income households, and the opioid crisis is contributing to elevated social and health harms among many experiencing homelessness. While new and ongoing services, including the Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre and mobile community outreach seek to offer lower barrier service, the needs of a smaller number of more

vulnerable households require expanded intensive health supports and permanent supportive housing.