



## SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT:</b>	<b>Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services</b>
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<b>MEETING DATE:</b>	<b>October 19, 2022</b>
<b>INFORMATION ITEM:</b>	<b>Homelessness Prevention Update</b>

### **BACKGROUND**

On April 20, 2022 Council received a report which provided an overview and update on the temporary congregate care site located at 220 George Street and system-wide shelter statistics. This report furthers the updates regarding local homelessness prevention data and solutions.

At the time of this report, there are over 170 individuals actively experiencing homelessness in Lambton County with more than 50 who have been identified as sleeping rough at some point in the past few months. These numbers should be assumed to be the minimum number of individuals experiencing homelessness, as it does not completely capture those experiencing “hidden homelessness” in precarious housing such as couch-surfing, individuals that have not yet been identified through outreach efforts and is limited to willing participating access points.

Prior to COVID-19, on any given night, approximately 60 individuals were experiencing homelessness such that they required emergency housing. The pandemic severely exacerbated the scope of housing vulnerability in our community as we saw a drastic increase in households experiencing some form of homelessness. For the first time, many households required access to basic needs assistance including shelter and food security supports.

At the outset of the pandemic, the Provincial government provided funding to Service Managers to respond and quickly adapt services to address the housing and economic impacts of COVID-19 in their community through the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF). With early uncertainty regarding COVID-19 and strong awareness of the heightened vulnerabilities for those experiencing homelessness, the County of Lambton was tasked with ensuring the shelter and safety of households experiencing homelessness. This required the temporary rapid expansion of local emergency housing capacity, and many

new collaborative initiatives that aimed to progress households into more permanent housing. In the spring of 2022, the Provincial government provided the last round of funding through the SSRF and asked Service Managers to continue their efforts in shifting towards upstream preventative solutions using existing local resources. This led to the wind-down of the temporarily expanded emergency housing capacity, and the continuation of initiatives identified in our local Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Despite the many successes in local programs the need for housing and homelessness supports remains drastically elevated. The scarcity of affordable, safe housing and the low Social Assistance rates that have not seen an increase since 2017 exacerbate the situation. Further, the opioid crisis and untreated mental health concerns have a cyclical relationship with experiences of homelessness and have compounded the crisis.

Many cross-sectoral and interagency interventions that are informed by the Housing and Homelessness Plan have been introduced to alleviate these crises. It is important to note that tremendous gains have been made in the homelessness prevention sector due to maximizing partnerships in the community with the many agencies participating in the Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee. Community wide efforts are being made to divert individuals from homelessness and to maximize the scarce opportunities for outflow into permanent, affordable housing.

## **DISCUSSION**

Since March of 2020, the shelter system and housing and homelessness initiatives have resulted in the following assistance:

- Over 2,600 shelter stays have been supported through the emergency housing system;
- Over 1,230 unique individuals have stayed in emergency housing;
- 529 individuals have been successfully diverted from entering emergency housing;
- 311 individuals experiencing homelessness have progressed into more permanent housing;
- 268 individuals have been placed into permanent housing through intensive housing case management;
- 158 households were assisted to secure or maintain housing through the Rental Assistance Program.

These initiatives have been the result of strong community partnerships and collaboration amongst shelter providers, social services, local mental health agencies, Lambton Public Health and non-profit service providers. Flexible and fast responses from the above agencies led to significant uptake in vaccinations among those experiencing homelessness, unprecedented diversions from emergency housing, remarkable rates of housing placements, dramatic systemic change towards equity and data-driven decision-making, and ultimately no known deaths among those experiencing homelessness due to COVID-19.

### Emergency Pandemic Funding

Both the SSRF provided through the Provincial Government and the COVID relief funds provided through the Federal Government Reaching Home program, offered Service Managers short-term emergency funding to increase available emergency services, particularly emergency housing, and meet the demands created by the pandemic.

Emergency Pandemic Funding Allocation	Amount
Emergency Services (including emergency housing and supporting costs)	\$8,800,000
Prevention (including diversion, rent relief and arrears assistance)	\$682,000
Housing and related supports	\$750,000
Services offered by partners	\$1,460,000

This comparative cost of emergency services further supports using the strategies outlined in the Housing and Homelessness Plan that focus on shifting from a reliance on downstream expensive solutions such as emergency housing, to upstream evidence-informed interventions that respond to robust local data.

### Lambton County By-Name List

The County of Lambton has been working extensively with Built for Zero Canada, a part of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, to create and maintain a 'By-Name List' (BNL). A BNL is a real-time list of all known individuals experiencing homelessness in our community. This list is maintained within the 'Homeless Individual and Family Information System' (HIFIS) developed by the Federal Government of Canada and hosted locally by the County of Lambton. HIFIS was launched in Lambton County on October 5, 2021 and has since had over 600 unique individuals added and served through the information system. Through the By-Name List, our community can more accurately assess who is entering our homeless system on an ongoing basis, equitably serve households based on community-developed prioritization, and maximize limited local resources available to serve the most vulnerable.

### Partnerships and Expanded Services

Since the last report there have been several new partnerships and expanded services within Lambton County, including:

- Community Outreach County staff: these staff members work closely with clients who are sleeping rough. Not every household chooses to access the available emergency housing solutions available within Lambton County. These staff offer assertive community outreach to these households. During the month of August, there were 52 unique individuals engaged that were identified to be sleeping rough. Of these 52, approximately 88% were on, or agreed to be added to, the community BNL. Further, 8% were youth and 23% were identified as having Indigenous ancestry. There has been a significant increase in the number of households

experiencing street-level homelessness. There are multi-disciplinary efforts being planned and coordinated with partner agencies such as Lambton Public Health and North Lambton Community Health Centre to ensure households are better connected to primary care services, are offered harm reduction tools and services, and can receive supports where they are.

Primary, proximal reasons cited for sleeping rough in August:

Reasons for sleeping rough	Proportion
No available shelter beds	15%
On service restriction from emergency housing	10%
Unaware of emergency housing options	2%
Chose not to stay in shelter, safety	6%
Chose not to stay in shelter, personal relationships	17%
Chose not to stay in shelter, substance use	29%
Chose not to stay in shelter, mental health	13%
Unknown/Declined to answer	8%

- Youth Dedicated Services: there have been three new projects approved for youth-dedicated services through the Reaching Home Strategy.
  - a) Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society (CAS) received funding for a Housing Case Manager with associated supplements to assist youth in CAS care, aging out of service and at risk of homelessness.
  - b) Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton Kent received funding for a youth worker with associated supplements to prioritize all other unassigned youth experiencing homelessness.
  - c) North Lambton Community Health Centre received funding for a part time Nurse Practitioner to assist in supporting youth.
- Expansion of County of Lambton Community Support Workers: three additional Community Support Worker positions have been added to the Social Services team. This includes an increase in dedicated tenancy-support work to ensure recently housed individuals and families can retain their housing. Further, there has been increased prevention capacity through dedicated 'rapid re-housing' staff to meet the increase in households at-risk of experiencing homelessness and promote upstream, preventative solutions.
- Expansion of HIFIS users, agencies, modules, and enhanced capacity to capture hidden homelessness to better ensure that individuals can be identified who are experiencing homelessness, and more appropriately to match them with services.

- The 'A Better Tomorrow' Committee was developed to ensure the inclusion of lived and living experienced voices to service system design and delivery. This committee has so far examined and offered recommendations on such items as local shelter standards which provide guidelines for operating shelters within the County of Lambton.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is no financial impact on the County 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 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**

The County of Lambton continues to invest in upstream solutions to address homelessness, including prevention, wrap-around supports, and the creation of affordable housing. The drastic increase in households experiencing housing precarity or homelessness will persist without a cross-sectoral approach and significant investment from upper levels of government. The most significant barrier of extreme scarcity of affordable housing remains. Our local efforts continue to shift towards evidence-informed, prevention-focused solutions as outlined in the Housing and Homelessness Plan.