



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
PREPARED BY:	Ian Hanney, Program Supervisor
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MEETING DATE:	September 18, 2024
INFORMATION ITEM:	2024 Homelessness Enumeration

BACKGROUND

The County of Lambton Social Services Division is a designated Reaching Home Community and partners with Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada (“**HICC**”) to meet the objectives of this program. The local delivery of the Reaching Home program is guided by a Community Advisory Board made up of local service provider agencies engaged in housing and homelessness prevention. To meet the requirements of HICC, Lambton County will conduct a homelessness enumeration in October 2024, building upon previous enumerations completed in 2018 and 2021. Data collected by HICC will be used to inform a national profile of homelessness issues.

DISCUSSION

The County of Lambton coordinated and conducted a homelessness enumeration in June 2021. The enumeration served two key objectives:

1. Participating in the national and provincial Point-in-Time (“**PiT**”) Count activities as required by both Employment and Social Development Canada (now HICC) and the province of Ontario; and
2. Conducting a Registry Week which significantly assisted in the enhancement of our local By-Name List (“**BNL**”) to better serve households at risk of or experiencing homelessness through real-time data.

The PiT Count provides a snapshot of homelessness in the community which includes demographic information about those experiencing homelessness, using a set of common questions developed by the Federal government.

The Registry week included the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assessment Tool (“**VI-SPDAT**”) that now serves as the common assessment tool in the Lambton Coordinated Access System. The application of the VI-SPDAT required utilization of a consent to enter households into the locally administered Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (“**HIFIS**”), which can produce actionable real-time data such as the BNL.

Building upon the success of the 2021 Homelessness Enumeration, Lambton County introduced a host of improvement projects in strong partnership with many local service providers to achieve a “Quality BNL” and later a “Quality Coordinated Access System” as certified by Built for Zero Canada, a division of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. In practice, dozens of trained specialized staff across many local service providers utilize HIFIS to ensure every individual known to be at risk of or experiencing homelessness, has real-time live information across numerous domains including housing. This quality real-time data enabled through strong local collaboration now serves as the highest standard of information that can be made available to guide homelessness prevention service delivery in Lambton County.

As previously described, and in contrast to the high-quality real-time data in HIFIS, the Homelessness Enumeration only serves as a snapshot of homelessness data. It necessarily describes an underreported level of homelessness when applied. The methodology of homelessness enumeration ensures continuity with previous iterations across Canada, but does not provide the detailed, reliable, real-time data that is enabled by our local Coordinated Access System. The outcomes of the 2024 homelessness enumeration must always be considered the absolute minimum, and the local BNL should instead be used as the more accurate tool for guiding local planning and service delivery.

The 2024 homelessness enumeration will be conducted during the second week of October. During this week, information will be gathered at various fixed-site partner agencies across the County of Lambton, virtually utilizing administrative data, and in-person throughout the community directly with individuals experiencing homelessness. The findings will culminate in a public report, building upon the findings from previous iterations.

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 Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table, the internal Social Services Division team, and numerous social service agencies in the community.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Conducting homelessness enumeration is an initiative mandated by HICC that is in keeping with the County's Mission 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 Division support the Community Development Area of Effort #3 in the County of Lambton's Strategic Plan, specifically:

- Strengthening the County's advocacy and lobbying efforts with other levels of government to raise the profile of the County and its needs to secure improved senior government supports, funding, grants, and other resources to meet emerging infrastructure and service needs;
- Consulting with the community and stakeholders on ways to increase housing options and affordability, and innovative programs and initiatives that focus on poverty reduction and promote social belonging;
- Supporting the development of a variety of affordable housing to meet demand;
- Implementing, monitoring and updating community health and wellness-related plans and priorities, including, but not limited to, the *Housing and Homelessness Plan*, *Community Safety & Well-Being Plan*, the Long-Term Care division's mission, vision, and values, Age Friendly Community Planning framework, Lambton Public Health's strategic priorities, *Lambton Drug & Alcohol Strategy*, *Lambton EMS Master Plan*, and *Child Care and Early Years 5-Year Service System Plan*; and
- Advocating for, and supporting access to, mental health and addiction services.

CONCLUSION

The data collected during the 2024 County of Lambton Homelessness Enumeration using the PIT Count surveys will help to prepare national, provincial, and local profiles of homelessness. This data will be used alongside the more accurate and detailed real-time local data available through our Coordinated Access system to guide local programming to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness within Lambton County. As the Social Services Division continues work on the goals and objectives of the *10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan*, information obtained during enumeration will serve as an excellent resource to inform policy decision making and the impending plan refresh.