



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services
PREPARED BY:	Melissa Fitzpatrick, Manager
REVIEWED BY:	Valerie Colasanti, General Manager Ronald G. Van Horne, Chief Administrative Officer
MEETING DATE:	April 20, 2022
SUBJECT:	Reaching Home Incremental Funding

BACKGROUND

On May 20, 2020 Council received an information report titled Reaching Home: Designated Communities Stream, noting that Lambton County was designated as one of 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 to remain housed.

As part of Budget 2021, the Government of Canada announced incremental funding of \$567.2 million for Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy over two years, starting in April 2022. This funding will help communities extend their response to COVID-19 and provide them with the flexibility to use these investments to meet local needs and priorities, such as:

- Extending COVID-19 measures for those experiencing homelessness;
- Finding permanent housing for those temporarily housed;
- Reducing the inflow into homelessness, including homelessness prevention and shelter diversion activities; and
- Shifting to longer-term housing approaches and solutions that prevent and reduce chronic homelessness.

As a Designated Community, Lambton County will receive an additional \$854,582 in 2022-2023 and \$843,228 in 2023-2024 in incremental funding.

DISCUSSION

Through the Lambton County Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee (HHAC), Social Services Division staff engaged service providers to have meaningful conversations about service provision, lessons learned through the pandemic, identify initiatives that have worked well, and identify areas where needs remain unmet. These discussions shaped the investment plan for the incremental funding.

One of the initiatives that worked extremely well was the collective efforts of the integrated team of staff from the Social Services Division, The Inn of The Good Shepherd, the Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton-Kent, and the Sarnia-Lambton Native Friendship Center. This team worked intensively to assist over 230 individuals move into permanent housing. Many of these individuals continue to experience barriers such as poor physical health, mental health, addictions, lack of income, any of which may hinder their efforts to stay housed. Additional staff to provide tenancy supports will be critical to reduce recidivism into homelessness and ensure individuals remain housed.

Another highlighted success was the strengthening of community partnerships related to providing street level outreach to people experiencing homelessness. An inter-agency response saw health professionals and social services staff working side by side to provide supports to individuals staying in the emergency shelter system or sleeping rough. Street-based outreach assistance provides a critical way to engage individuals/families, build trust, and offer connections to services that assist with obtaining and/or stabilizing housing services and supports. A portion of the incremental funding will be allocated to establish a formalized community outreach model to support individuals who may be sleeping rough or staying at an emergency shelter.

More work is needed to engage the three First Nations communities within Lambton County as we continue with the design and implementation of the homelessness service system and a coordinated access system. It is important to note that a coordinated access system is a requirement of the Reaching Home funding agreement. Intentional conversation and engagement with local Indigenous partners is necessary to build meaningful relationships and coordinate service delivery in order to understand and best meet the needs of Urban Indigenous peoples. A portion of the incremental funding will be allocated for an Indigenous Liaison position.

An identified gap in service provision is for youth who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. Youth are identified as a priority population by both the Province of Ontario and the County of Lambton's HHAC. As youth age out of the Child Welfare system, they sometimes find themselves provisionally accommodated and are at serious risk of becoming homeless. A request for proposals will be released to allow community partners

to submit a proposal that supports youth in up-stream programming to reduce inflow into homelessness and assist youth with securing permanent housing.

Lastly, under the funding guidelines, a portion of the incremental funding will be allocated for the continued implementation and maintenance of a Coordinated Access system including the creation of a communication strategy and knowledge mobilization to ensure the community and service providers are aware of the coordinated access process. Additionally, communities are permitted to claim up to 15% administration cost which will be allocated to hire clerical support for the Homelessness Prevention team and assist in the data reporting requirements of the Reaching Home Program.

The following summarizes the proposed additions to the Social Services Division staff team:

- 1 Permanent Clerical Support
- 1 Permanent Community Support Worker – Tenancy Support Mental Health
- 1 Temporary Community Support Worker – Tenancy Support
- 1 Temporary Community Support Worker - Indigenous Liaison
- 1 Temporary Community Outreach Worker

The incremental funding will be administered through amendments to the Reaching Home base funding agreements. By April 1, 2022, communities are required to submit a revised investment plan that describes how the additional funds will be allocated to support the community's response to homelessness planning and program delivery. Investment plans for the County of Lambton have been reviewed with and endorsed by the HHAC and the Community Advisory Board.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Social Services will receive an additional \$854,582 in 2022-2023 and \$843,228 in 2023-2024 from the Federal Government through the Employment and Social Development Canada branch. There is no financial impact to the County of Lambton. Positions will be funded 100% from the Reaching Home agreement.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultations took place with Employment and Social Development Canada, the County of Lambton Homelessness Community Advisory Board, the Lambton County Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, the General Manager of Social Services, and the Manager of Children's Services and Homelessness Prevention.

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 incremental funding from Reaching Home will assist the County of Lambton's Social Services Division to support individuals and families experiencing and at risk of homelessness. It will assist staff with continuing to meet the goals and objectives of the County of Lambton's Housing and Homelessness Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the hiring of two full-time permanent staff and three full-time temporary staff for a period of two years. These positions include:

- a) **One Permanent Clerical Support**
- b) **One Permanent Community Support Worker with a focus on tenancy supports for those with a mental health diagnosis**
- c) **One Temporary Community Support Worker to provide tenancy support**
- d) **One Temporary Community Support Worker with a focus to work with First Nations Communities**
- e) **One Temporary Community Outreach Worker**