

Region of Waterloo
Community Services
Housing Services

To: Community and Health Services Committee
Meeting Date: December 3, 2024
Report Title: 2024 Point in Time Count Preliminary Overview

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To provide an update on the coordination and preliminary results of the federally mandated Point-in-Time Count conducted in the Waterloo Region on October 22, 2024.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report supports the following strategic priorities derived from the Region of Waterloo's Corporate Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027:

- Strategic Priority 1: Homes for All: We will invest in affordable homes and economic opportunities for all that are part of inclusive and environmentally sustainable communities.
- Strategic Priority 3: Equitable Services and Opportunities: Through collaboration and innovative design, we will provide equitable, accessible services across the Waterloo Region that support the social determinants of health and complete communities as we grow.
- Strategic Priority 4: Resilient and Future Ready Organization: The Region of Waterloo is a great place to work, where everyone is valued, feels they belong and where they have the supports and tools they need to do a great job. We will be prepared for the future by providing a safe space for bold ideas and experimentation that transform services, based on data and other ways of knowing.

4. Report Highlights:

- The 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count found a total number of 2,371 individuals estimated to be experiencing homelessness in the Waterloo Region on October 22, 2024. The number of these individuals who have been chronically homeless will need to be further analyzed and will be reported on early 2025.

- Waterloo Region's fourth PiT Count took place on October 22, 2024, over a 24-hour period. The PiT Count is a community-level, comprehensive measure of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness that provides a picture, or 'snapshot', of individuals experiencing homelessness at a single point in time. It includes both chronic homelessness and temporary or episodic homelessness. This broader scope signifies that while chronic homelessness is a major component of the total, the PiT Count also captures individuals in situations such as emergency shelter stays, temporary housing, or those staying in places not meant for human habitation.
- The initiative is coordinated through the *Reaching Home Program: Canada's Homelessness Strategy*. As part of this agreement, the Region of Waterloo is federally required to complete a PiT Count, which is comprised of two parts: the enumeration (or *count*) and the Survey on Homelessness (see **Appendix A**).
- This year's PiT Count was completed with the support of more than 40 community partner agencies, including three hospitals, two correctional institutions, rural and Indigenous partners, in conjunction with Regional Staff. All seven area municipalities in the Waterloo Region were included, spanning the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Chonnonton and Haudenosaunee peoples.
- Community engagement and coordination efforts heavily focused on making contact with populations that have higher rates of hidden homelessness, including newcomers, Indigenous, veterans, women, and gender-diverse individuals. A list of Target Population Groups was created to supplement efforts towards achieving a more representative and inclusive dataset that captured all populations, and therefore, all dimensions of homelessness in our community. This achieved a robust and far-reaching enumeration and survey achievement, which included both major hospital and incarceration institutions.
- These findings indicate the structure of homelessness has critically increased since 2021, which found an estimated 1,085 individuals experiencing homelessness in the Waterloo Region and is consistent with the warnings issued in the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Key Findings Report.

5. Background:

On Tuesday October 22, 2024, the Region of Waterloo's Homelessness and Supportive Housing team conducted its fourth PiT Count, alongside local community partners, which included service providers, non-shelter service providers (food and meal providers, health clinics targeted to individuals experiencing homelessness), and public systems (hospitals, police, and correctional facilities).

The data from the 2021 and 2024 PiT Counts indicates a substantial expansion in homelessness in the Waterloo Region, specifically rising from 1,085 individuals in 2021, to 2,371 this year. This trend warrants careful analysis to understand the underlying factors and implications faced in our Region.

It is imperative to note that the 2021 PiT Count took place during an active wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several planned engagement efforts were modified and/or cancelled due to Public Health guidelines and measures that challenged in-person engagement and implementation of PiT Count processes. Additionally, staffing was a significant problem across the system, negatively impacting capacity and overall participation in the PiT Count.

The 2024 PiT Count presents itself as a remarkably different landscape since the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, economic fallout from events (i.e., the pandemic) and rising inflation may have had delayed impacts on housing stability and resultingly pushed more individuals into homelessness. Fundamentally, however, the 2024 PiT Count has achieved a more comprehensive and effective coordination and collaboration process involving a higher number of community partner agencies compared to the 2021 PiT Count.

Furthermore, the foundational work of The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (PECH) has brought in more community partner agencies and service providers, increasing overall involvement in this year's PiT Count. Namely:

- Number of locations and services has increased, strengthening staffing experience and trusting relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness and receiving support,
- Outreach support has significantly expanded in both numbers so full-time staff and more established partnerships with partners like Sanguen, Traverse, Community Healthcaring, and others,
- COVID-19 is no longer a significant concern; community members and individuals accessing social services and/or experiencing homelessness are moving more freely than in 2021.

The results of this year's PiT Count demand attention to resource needs and inform shifts related to homelessness since the 2021 PiT Count. The 2024 PiT Count highlights the urgent issue of homelessness in the Waterloo Region, with numbers indicating that while chronic homelessness is indeed rising, the overall increase in homelessness is broader. This calls for comprehensive and emergent actions to reduce chronic homelessness and address the increasing number of individuals in our community facing homelessness.

Furthermore, as emphasized in the PECH, investment from both public and private sectors, key system partners (healthcare, mental health and addictions, justice), and all levels of government is required to respond to, and address this growing crisis impacting our community; otherwise the Plan risks just becoming an idea. Efforts to address homelessness must consider both long-term solutions for chronic homelessness and more immediate strategies to prevent or intervene in episodic homelessness.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities and Public: The nationally-coordinated PiT Count approach includes Core Standards for the methodology that guide how the enumeration and survey are conducted in participating communities, supporting a consistent data collection process across communities and over time. Aligned with Core Standards 2 and 3, the 2024 PiT Count was conducted in collaboration with community partners' feedback and engagement throughout the planning, coordination, and implementation of the PiT Count.

The scope of the 2024 PiT Count was determined by the extensive collaboration and involvement of approximately 40 PECH partner agencies, including rural and Indigenous partners, in conjunction with Regional Staff. Key interest holders included: individuals with lived experiences, shelter providers, corrections and health services, Waterloo Regional Police Services (WRPS), and non-profit service providers, across all area municipalities (Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich). Area municipality staff will continue to be invited to engage in the co-creation and implementation of the PECH.

7. Financial Implications:

The 2025 Draft Operating Budget includes \$60.9M for homelessness initiatives. This is funded from a combination of funding sources including provincial grants, federal grants and the property tax levy. The Draft Operating Budget includes a \$10.2M investment in the PECH of which the full investment is funded from the property tax levy.

The 2025-2034 Draft Homelessness Capital Program includes \$5.9M in 2025 with a 10-year capital budget through 2034 of \$19.0M. This program is funded from the Facilities Lifecycle Reserve (\$1.0M), Homelessness Prevention Capital Reserve (\$2.8M) and regional debentures (\$15.2M).

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

The number of people experiencing homelessness in the Waterloo Region is unprecedented. Chronic homelessness across the Region has been increasing at an average growth rate of 28% year-over-year since 2020. Homelessness has most certainly and critically risen in numbers and visibility, exacerbating existing difficulties for individuals experiencing homelessness, and the services within the system.

With the development of the PECH, the current national momentum to support housing needs, and growing public concern about homelessness, there are unique opportunities for our Region to achieve a more responsive, integrated, inclusive, and equitable system.

As we work towards ending chronic homelessness by 2030, it is imperative to make use of the data from this year's PiT Count to inform service planning and delivery in the Waterloo Region. Data analysis, including analyzing disaggregated data and meaning-making, will take place with Co-Creators and Lived Experience Consultants as part of the implementation of the PECH. This process of compiling and organizing large amounts of data will yield valuable information that warrants careful consideration and contextual analysis to understand the underlying factors and implications of homelessness in our Region.

It is our intent to return to the Community and Health Services Committee in the new year to share these results and analysis of this data.

It is also our goal to compare and contrast this data with current data sources to validate and improve real-time data. This will also inform the PECH Funding Strategy and Engagement Plans, closely reflecting all seven Strategic Focus Areas of the PECH. Regional staff, in partnership with the forthcoming All of Community Leadership Table, will continue to collect and use outcome data, including upcoming benchmarks in equity work across the system and housing outcomes. It is our priority to continue ensuring that all work related to the PECH aligns with the common goal of ending chronic homelessness.

It is the hope of this report, along with learned experiences during the 2024 PiT Count, that a reflective foundation of the needs of our community's most vulnerable be brought to the attention of all.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: 2024 PiT Count Survey

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