

Region of Waterloo
Community Services
Housing Services

To: Community and Health Services Committee
Meeting Date: May 6, 2025
Report Title: Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Mid-Year Update

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To provide Council with an update on the progress of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (PECH) pertaining to:

- a. Investment outputs in priority areas that have been realized and/or are underway as a result of the \$10.2M and \$4.6M investments from Council in 2024 and 2025 to-date, respectively,
- b. Planned and implemented equity-focused work in the housing stability system,
- c. Implementation of the All of Community Coordinating Team in 2025, and
- d. Impact of the Point-in-Time (PiT) Count on the forthcoming PECH Data Strategy.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report supports the following strategic priorities: Homes for All, Equitable Services & Opportunities, and Resilient and Future Ready Organization in the Region's approved Corporate Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

Homes for All: Through community co-creation and movement towards system transformation, we continue to work towards functional zero chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region.

Equitable Services & Opportunities: Equity is a key driver to the success of the PECH. We will explore new models of service through community collaboration and partnerships with equity-owned groups will expand our understanding of successful outcomes to be more inclusive of the diversity of needs across our community.

4. Report Highlights:

- With the Regional Council investment of \$10.2M in 2024 and the additional \$4.6M in the 2025 budget (see **Appendix C** for a summary of 2024 investment outputs), Region staff and Community Co-Creators have been working collaboratively to advance the prioritized PECH initiatives across the community.
 - Priority areas for the PECH 2025 (as outlined in **CSD-HOU-24-019**) are underway in collaboration with Community Co-Creators.
- Year-to-date progress includes the implementation of PECH rent supplements, winter warming initiatives, the opening of the YWCA Cambridge Women's Shelter and the revision of current Homelessness and Supportive Housing frameworks.
- Equity across the Housing Stability System (HSS) is a key driver in the success of the PECH. Functional zero cannot be effectively achieved without the intentional and meaningful collaboration with equity-owed groups across the community.
 - New and increased benchmarks for equity in the HSS are forthcoming as the infrastructure of the PECH work continues to evolve.
- In addition to improving social services outcomes, research informing the PECH shows that investing in solutions for homelessness and supportive housing also delivers significant economic benefit.
 - As one example, a 2024 study identified that annual healthcare costs for people experiencing homelessness are six times that of housed people.
- As a critical part of the PECH data strategy, the 2024 PiT Count data (see **Appendix A**) validate the priority areas of the PECH, including the need for increased, sustained investment in ending chronic homelessness and building a more accessible and equitable housing system. A summary of key statistics from the 2024 PiT Count can be seen in **Appendix B**.

5. Background:

On April 9, 2024, Regional Council approved and endorsed the PECH (see **CSD-HOU-24-006**) with a \$10.2M investment to prioritize this work. Further, Council directed staff to return in October 2024 with a comprehensive funding and advocacy strategy as part of the 2024 Regional Budget Process.

Investment Update

In October, the Funding Strategy and Engagement Plans (see **CSD-HOU-24-019**) fulfilled this direction, setting the groundwork for the 2025 tax levy expansion of \$4.6M. **Appendix C** provides a summary of the investment outputs for 2024, and the planned allocations of funding for 2025.

Equitable Access

A priority component of the work of the PECH is to improve accessibility to a more equitable housing stability system. The PECH embeds equity through its initiatives by addressing chronic homelessness through an intentional, equity-driven approach that recognizes systemic barriers embedded within the experiences of homelessness. In collaboration with Co-Creators and the community agencies they represent, the PECH focuses intently on how to build equity within our system. More specifically, as it relates to the prevention of inflow into homelessness, distribution and coordination of the various support needed for those experiencing homelessness, in a collective effort to pave a pathway to exiting homelessness. Without this intentional and equity-focused lens, systemic barriers and service gaps will continue to erode our ability to reach functional zero chronic homelessness.

Examples of ongoing work aimed at bolstering equity across our system include the following:

- **PECH rental supplements:** a co-created, collaborative effort involving 27 community partners focused on the distribution of 151 subsidies across rural and urban settings with particular focus on unsheltered, BIPOC, newcomers, families, older adults, youth, and women.
- **Opening of YWCA Cambridge women's shelter:** In February, 20 emergency shelter beds for women, Two-Spirit, trans, and gender-diverse individuals.
- **Opening of Winter Warming sites in both Kitchener and Cambridge:** improve geographic equity across the community. Establishment of the Cambridge site embraced a safer, gender-responsive space for women, providing easier access to necessary warming supports.
- **Coalition of Muslim Women (CMW)'s first community transitional housing program for racialized women and those with children:** fills a critical gap in the housing stability system. Their dedicated efforts recognize intersectional realities of systemic barriers and the indispensable needs of our community's diverse and racialized populations.
- **Precursory, collaborative community submission for the Federal Advocates Review (Neha review panel):** Neha, which means "our ways" in Kanien'kehà:ka-Mohawk, explores how the Federal government can advance specified housing supports for women. This achievement marked a unique opportunity for cross-community engagement to advocate for resources that support women and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Launching of PECH's revision of policies and frameworks aimed at reaching functional zero chronic homelessness. This work prioritizes the voices and insights of Co-Creators and lived experts by use of an intersectional approach designed for participatory policy development.

Return on Investment in Homelessness

The cost of ending homelessness in Waterloo Region has previously been estimated at \$342M according to the Funding Strategy (see **CSD-HOU-24-019**). It is not unreasonable to assume an increase to that estimation as the crisis grows beyond the municipal scope of control.

A growing body of research confirms that it costs more to ignore homelessness and housing affordability than it does to fix it. For example, a 2024 study identified that annual healthcare costs for people experiencing homelessness are six times that of housed people, even after adjusting for health history and regardless of the income of the housed person (Homeless Hub, 2024).

This is one example of how investment in homelessness has an overall fiscal impact on intersecting systems, such as healthcare. According to the 2017 Ontario's Auditor General Annual Report (2017), the "average cost of providing social housing to a single household is approximately \$613 per month" (p. 703).

Comparatively, "a single shelter bed costs \$2,100 per month (more than three times more expensive), while a single correctional facility bed costs an average of \$4,300 per month (seven times more expensive), and a hospital bed costs an average of \$13,500 per month" (Auditor General of Ontario, 2017, p. 703).

As outlined in a recent report published by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) in partnership with Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) facilitated by HelpSeeker Technologies, "Municipalities Under Pressure: The Human and Financial Cost of the Ontario Homelessness Crisis", there are significant financial investments needed province-wide and by all levels of government to address and end chronic homelessness in Ontario.

It is expected that increasing investments will have direct positive impacts on the experiences of homelessness across Waterloo Region. Staff anticipate updated projections on overall investment needed to achieve functional zero as the data strategy is developed and implemented.

The Point-in-Time Count and Data Strategy

On October 22, 2024, the Region of Waterloo's fourth PiT Count took place within the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Chonnonton and Haudenosaunee peoples. The PiT Count was conducted in all seven area municipalities in Waterloo Region over a 24-hour period.

A total number of 2,371 individuals were counted as experiencing homelessness in the Waterloo Region on October 22, 2024, of which 1,790 individuals completed the Survey on Homelessness. Of this number, 78% reported an experience of chronic homelessness, up from 75% in 2021 (see **Table 1** in **Appendix A** for comparison of Region of Waterloo's 2021 and 2024 PiT Counts).

The PiT Count is comprised of two components: (1) the Enumeration (or "count") and (2) the Survey on Homelessness. The Survey collects information on the characteristics

and experiences of those affected by homelessness. Those who participated in the survey were able to decline or stop participation at any point; thus, quantitative findings are based on the number of respondents as per each question. In tandem, the count and survey aim to supplement current understandings of how communities can better serve individuals experiencing homelessness. These findings are presented in the 2024 PiT Count Infographic (see **Appendix B**).

Findings from the 2024 PiT Count reinforce the priorities and recommendations within the PECH (see **Appendix A** for detailed insights into key enumeration and survey findings). The data confirms and reinforces insights from the local Prioritized Access to Housing Support (PATHS) and By-Name List (BNL) data sources, what community partners see and support in the community every day, and what the PECH is working actively to address – that systemic financial and health challenges are driving increases in the number of people experiencing homelessness and the length of time they are experiencing homelessness. The findings of the PiT Count further demonstrate that our local experience is consistent with the recent findings of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) in their report on the provincial homelessness crisis.

As outlined in the PECH recommendations and its Funding Strategy & Engagement Plan, significant ongoing investments are needed to flatten the curve and end experiences of chronic homelessness in the Waterloo Region. Results from the 2024 PiT Count reaffirm local PECH priorities that aim to centre community voices, infrastructural and foundational work to support enhanced programs and services, services that support the urgent needs of people currently experiencing homelessness, and a yearly assessment and prioritization of the work across the community.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities:

Through a Municipal Housing and Homelessness Leads Committee, Region staff remain closely connected with area municipalities in the collective work of addressing housing and homelessness related issues in the region. Staff meet and communicate regularly on housing and homelessness issues, including progress on the implementation of the Interim Housing Solutions, taking into consideration the valuable insights, considerations and resources of area municipal partners. Through collaborative problem-solving, data sharing, and leveraging shared resources, area municipalities are a vital partner in building a healthy and inclusive community for all. Some representatives from municipalities sit as members of the PECH Co-Creators table and further the Co-Creator's monthly roundtable is actively being used as an avenue for engagement on municipal issues impacting the goal of functional zero chronic homelessness.

Public:

The PECH Co-Creators table continues to hold monthly meetings. This collaborative group has 65 active organizations represented by 112 individuals, 25 lived experts, and regional staff. Both Co-Creators and Regional staff continue to lean into improved,

collaborative processes with a shared goal to achieve increased trust, stronger partnerships, improved and more equitable access to a more equitable system, and an overall goal of systems transformation.

7. Financial Implications:

The 2025 Approved Operating Budget allocates \$65.6M million for homelessness initiatives, sourced from a combination of provincial and federal grants, as well as the property tax levy. Within this budget, a \$14.9 million investment is dedicated to the PECH, with the full amount funded through the tax levy.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

Through the remainder of 2025, Regional staff, in partnership with Co-Creators will continue to focus on the priorities as outlined in the Funding Strategy (see CSD-HOU-24-019). The key deliverables that can be expected this year include continued equity work to support a more equitable, accessible housing stability system. Examples of upcoming work include the following:

- A data strategy framework that is structured on the current state of homelessness in Waterloo Region as understood by a variety of data sources including the 2024 PiT, HIFIS, and PATHS data. Further, this framework will consider how to measure the impact of investments on inflow/active/outflow of experiences of homelessness and the system change work committed to by the PECH and all its partners and participants.
- The PECH Coordinating Team continues to move towards operational implementation, with a final team of 9 community representatives and two regional managers expected to be finalized in the first two weeks of May and launched into action shortly after. This team will act as the nucleus that guides the PECH activities and be critical voices in helping us achieve functional zero chronic homelessness.

Staff will return to council with further updates on identified priority work in September, ahead of the Regional Budget Process.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: 2024 Point-in-Time Count Homelessness Data – Insights to Action

Appendix B: 2024 PiT Infographic

Appendix C: PECH Investment Outputs Summary

Appendix D: Presentation

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