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

Overview

Following the preliminary results of the 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count shared with Council on December 3, 2024 (see CSD-HOU-24-020), the following appendix provides detailed insights into key enumeration and survey findings.

Background

The 2024 PiT Count is a community-level measure of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness that provides snapshot of individuals experiencing homelessness (both chronic homelessness and temporary or episodic homelessness) at a single point in time.

The PiT Count is comprised of two components: (1) the Enumeration (or "count"), which estimates the number of individuals experiencing homelessness within a determined geographical area on a single night and also identifies the location where they spent the night: in shelters, transitional housing, or unsheltered locations; (2) the Survey on Homelessness, which includes a set of standardized questions that are administered directly to individuals experiencing homelessness. Respondents were able to decline or stop participation at any point in the survey; our quantitative findings are based on the number of respondents as per each question.

These findings are presented in the 2024 PiT Count Infographic (see **Appendix B**). The Survey collects information on the characteristics and experiences of those affected by homelessness and aim to strengthen and supplement current understandings of how communities can better serve individuals experiencing homelessness.

As part of the Reaching Home Program: Canada's Homelessness Strategy agreement with the federal government, the Region of Waterloo conducted its fourth PiT Count as is federally mandated. Its methodology adhered to the national PiT Count prescribed by the federal government to provide a baseline for understanding the experiences of homelessness impacting the most vulnerable in our community.

With the support of more than 40 community partner agencies, including hospitals, carceral institutions, rural, Indigenous, women and gender diverse-specific supporting partners, in conjunction with regional staff, a robust and comprehensive coordination effort was achieved. Findings yield a changed structure of homelessness since 2021, with significant shifts between unsheltered and sheltered populations.

Results of the PiT Count are a critical piece of evidence that reflect the magnitude and evolving nature of homelessness across the Waterloo region. A comprehensive report on the Region's 2024 PiT findings is underway as we prepare a Local Report targeted for completion by July 2025. This report will provide detailed contextualization of trends derived from PiT data through more granular breakdowns (e.g., rural and urban geographic settings, sub-population-specific analysis) to better understand the effects of the deepening homelessness crisis impacting the Region.

Acknowledgements:

The Region of Waterloo gratefully acknowledges and thanks our community partner agencies who contributed their invaluable time, support, and expertise to the 2024 PiT Count. We especially are thankful to all those individuals who are experiencing homelessness and dedicated time towards sharing their personal and challenging experiences with us for this report.

Methodology:

It is critical to note that the methodology of the PiT Count varies year-to-year due to a variety of factors, namely coordination efforts, outreach resources, and the overall availability of support. While the Federal Government (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada) provides expertise and guidance to communities in data collection, analysis, and survey development, the PiT Count methodology is flexible, adapting to the changing landscape of homelessness at the time of each count.

The overarching approach to the PiT Count follows the 'Everyone Counts – A Guide to Point-in-Time Counts in Canada, 4th Edition – Standards for Participation' set forth by the Federal Government, which ensures consistency across communities, while allowing local adjustments to both outreach strategies and survey questions based on the specific needs and circumstances of each community. This adaptability is vital in ensuring that the PiT Count remains relevant and accurate, even as factors such as economic shifts, public health crises, and the availability of resources fluctuate.

The methodology, intended to achieve a measure of the number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a specific day, provides a series of information collected to support communities in the following areas:

- **Identifying over-represented populations**: Pinpoint groups disproportionately affected by homelessness, allowing for targeted interventions (i.e., population-specific).
- **Understanding pathways into homelessness:** Gain insights into causes and contributing factors of homelessness to enhance prevention services.

- **Building collaboration:** Foster cooperation within the homelessness sector and with other areas (such as health and corrections), ensuring resources are directed where most needed.
- **Garnering public support:** Strengthen engagement within community to collectively work towards ending homelessness.
- **Directing resources effectively:** Allocate resources to areas with the greatest need, ensuring a more impactful response.

While the core methodology of the PiT Count remains consistent, the methodology can and should be adapted to reflect the unique context and challenges faced by each community. The flexibility in the approach allows for a more dynamic and responsive data collection process, ensuring that PiT Counts continue to provide valuable insights for improving homelessness service provision and informing policy decisions.

Limitations:

Notably, the 2021 PiT Count data was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, possibly underreporting the actual extent of homelessness at the time. Public health measures, including social distancing guidelines, restricted in-person engagement, and staff shortages, all had a direct effect on participation rates and overall data quality. These challenges made it difficult to conduct outreach and implement the usual processes, leading to limitations in the scope and depth of the data collected. As a result, the 2021 PiT Count coordination and engagement efforts counted 1085 individuals and had 609 completed surveys (a 56% response rate), while the 2024 PiT Count counted 2,371 individuals and had 1,790 completed surveys (a 75% response rate).

The higher count and survey response rate of the Region's 2024 PiT Count illustrates that more individuals experiencing homelessness are engaged in the 2024 PiT Count. This also suggests that the 2024 data may be more reflective of those who were reachable or willing to engage, while 2021's lower participation rate might have missed certain sub-populations or marginalized groups.

The 2024 PiT Count achieved more than twice the data yielded in 2021, suggesting the following:

- Conducting the 2024 PiT Count in a post-pandemic environment benefitted from a more robust and coordinated methodology, aided by the collective efforts of more than 40 community partner agencies, including the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region's (SDCWR) and its Lived Expertise Working Group, whose efforts were specifically targeted to reaching a greater geographic and

population group (e.g., woman and gender-diverse individuals, individuals in hospitals and incarcerated).

- The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, encompassing a variety of considerations, including economic factors such as rising inflation, has exacerbated housing instability and homelessness.
- Staff and support capacity were better equipped to conduct outreach and engagement with individuals experiencing homelessness, benefiting from lessons learned during the pandemic and the enhanced collaborative framework provided by initiatives such as the PECH. This increased collaboration and resource mobilization resulted in a more comprehensive and effective data collection process, which ultimately provides a clearer, more accurate picture of homelessness in the Region of Waterloo.

PiT Data Comparison:

The table below (**Table 1**) compares metrics of the Region's 2021 and 2024 PiT Count data. At this time, we are awaiting the completion and publication of PiT Count data from communities across Ontario, which will allow for extensive cross-comparison of our Region's data with those of other cities. The variation in homelessness data across Ontario communities will highlight the impact of local contexts, including the effectiveness of service coordination, outreach resources, and the specific socio-economic challenges each municipality faces.

The differences in these figures are expected to further inform challenges in capturing an accurate representation of homelessness and underscore the need for consistent and comprehensive data collection methods across communities.

Table 1: Region of Waterloo's 2021 and 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) Counts Comparison		
Metric	**September 2021**	**October 2024**
People experiencing homelessness (total count)	1,085	2,371
Surveys completed	609	1,790
People experiencing Homelessness six months or more in last year	424 (75%)	1272 (78%)
People living in encampments or living rough	412 (38%)	1,009 (43%)
People experiencing hidden homelessness	335 (31%)	353 (15%)
People in emergency shelters	191 (18%)	446 (19%)
People in transitional housing	84 (8%)	221 (9%)
People staying in motels funded by Region of Waterloo	N/A*	153 (6%)
People in institutions (e.g. hospitals, incarcerated, Domestic Violence shelters)	63 (6%)	100 (4%)
Other: unsure or unclear	N/A	89 (4%)

Racialized community	72 (15%)	350 (26%)
Indigenous identity	102 (17%)	305 (17%)
Gender-diverse identifying	17 (3%)	36 (2%)
Served in military and/or RCMP	28 (5%)	84 (5%)
Note: During the Region of Waterloo's 2021 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count, no motel program was in operation.		

Findings from the Region's 2021 and 2024 PiT Counts reveal a marked increase in the scale of homelessness across the Waterloo Region. Specifically, there are more individuals living in encampments, in emergency shelters, and in transitional housing and there is a clear rise in the number of racialized individuals experiencing homelessness. While chronic homelessness remains a significant concern, the Region's efforts to engage with these populations, improve data collection, and expand services are becoming more vigorous, as evidenced by increased participation and coordination in the 2024 PiT Count.

This comparison highlights upward trends in homelessness over the past three years across the Region, reflecting the growing scale of homelessness and demographic shifts, which may be influenced by several system changes over the past three years (e.g., effects from the COVID-19 pandemic over time).

Key highlights of this comparison include the following:

- **Overall Increase in Homelessness**: the number of individuals experiencing homelessness has more than doubled from 1,085 in 2021 to 2,371 in 2024.
    - This substantial rise draws attention to an escalating homelessness crisis, potentially exacerbated by ongoing economic challenges and systemic issues.
- **Increased Survey Participation:** the number of completed surveys also saw a dramatic increase, from 609 in 2021 to 1,790 in 2024.
    - This indicates improved outreach and a more accurate representation of the homeless population, or a greater willingness among individuals to participate in the survey process.
- **Chronic Homelessness:** the percentage of individuals surveyed who have been experiencing homelessness for six or more months has increased from 75% (424 individuals) in 2021 to 78% (1,272 individuals) in 2024.
    - This underscores the persistence of chronic homelessness in the region, with fewer individuals experiencing shorter-term homelessness.
    - This finding, within the PiT Count data, differs from our local By-Name List (BNL) and Prioritized Access to Housing Support (PATHS) data, indicating

that there are individuals experiencing chronic homelessness who are not on the PATHS or Coordinated Access (CA) list.[1]

- **Short-term Homelessness:** The percentage of individuals experiencing homelessness for less than six months has decreased slightly, from 25% in 2021 to 21% in 2024.
    - This decrease reflects the growing number of individuals facing long-term homelessness, which continues to be a critical and persisting challenge our Region faces.
- **Encampments**: a notable increase in the number of individuals living in encampments, rising from 412 in 2021 to 1,009 in 2024.
    - This suggests a rise in visible homelessness and a potential shift in the types of homelessness individuals are experiencing, due in part to a lack of available shelter spaces.
- **Hidden Homelessness:** the number of individuals experiencing hidden homelessness has increased from 335 to 353, indicating that while the problem persists, it remains a significant challenge to fully address the hidden, less visible aspects of homelessness.
- **Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing:** the number of individuals in emergency shelters has more than doubled, from 191 in 2021 to 446 in 2024, reflecting an increased reliance on temporary housing.
    - Similarly, those in transitional housing rose from 84 to 221, highlighting a shift towards seeking longer-term support options but still within temporary or semi-permanent settings.
- **Individuals in Institutions (e.g., incarcerated, hospitals):** the number of individuals in institutions settings has increased slightly from 63 to 100, which may reflect continued overlaps between homelessness and institutionalization.
- **Demographic Shifts:**
    - **Racialized Communities:** An increase in the percentage of racialized individuals experiencing homelessness, from 15% in 2021 to 26% in 2024. This suggests that racialized populations are being disproportionately impacted by homelessness.
    - **Indigenous Identity:** The percentage of individuals identifying as Indigenous remained at 17%, suggesting that while the absolute numbers may have increased, the proportion of Indigenous people within the homeless population has not shifted significantly.

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[1] BNL (individuals experiencing homelessness who are connected to the system, i.e., active in HIFIS), PATHS (individuals experiencing chronic homelessness who are on the CA list awaiting supportive housing), and PIT (individuals who were counted as experiencing homelessness on October 22, 2024).

- **Gender-diverse Individuals:** The percentage of gender-diverse individuals experiencing homelessness decreased from 3% to 2%, which may reflect changing demographic reporting, outreach efforts, and challenges in the visibility of this group.
- **Military and RCMP Service:** The proportion of individuals with military or RCMP service remained consistent at 5%, showing no significant change in this subgroup within the homeless population.

The significant increase in the Region's total and chronic homelessness figures from 2021 to 2024 illustrates a growing crisis in the Region influenced by economic factors, housing instability, and an evolving landscape post-pandemic. The disparity in chronic homelessness between Waterloo and preliminary data from other regions, such as London, suggests that Waterloo is facing more severe and long-term homelessness issues, which may be linked to systemic gaps in housing and support services. PiT Count data can enhance operational considerations, namely maintenance of BNL and Coordinated Access (CA) data by validating and complementing these other data sources.

BNL and CA data, such as the PATHS list, is collected by community partners through the shared Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). HIFIS is used daily by direct services staff who are supporting the needs and housing plans of people experiencing homelessness. PiT Count data is distinct from BNL and PATHS data as the engagement and survey of people experiencing homelessness through the PiT Count reaches individuals who are not yet connected to community organizations and HIFIS.

Challenges to Accessing Housing:

The Survey on Homelessness asked participants what challenges or problems individuals experienced when trying to find housing (respondents were able to select more than one response).

The top five challenges individuals experience when trying to access housing were:

- "Low income" (1425 individuals; 80%)
- "Rents too high" (1382 individuals; 78%),
- "Addiction" (591 individuals; 33%),
- "No income assistance" (564 individuals; 32%)
- "Poor housing conditions" (559 individuals; 31%).

Comparatively, the Region's 2021 PiT Count also found that systemic barriers such as low income and lack of income assistance, high rent, poor housing conditions, and addictions challenges where the top reasons people cannot access permanent housing.

To a great degree, PiT Count data from both 2021 and 2024 emphasize the challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness as exacerbated and driven by systemic financial barriers, particularly low income and high rents while social and structural issues (e.g., addiction, lack of income assistance, and poor housing conditions) remain significant contributors. Despite the increase in the 2024 survey sample size compared to 2021, the shifts in reported barriers highlight growing trends, including the rising impact of addiction and inadequate social support systems.

2024 PiT Count and The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (PECH):

The PECH Key Findings Report for Waterloo Region presents an in-depth examination of the current state of homelessness in the Region, with specific actions for ending chronic homelessness. The 2021 PiT Count revealed that over 1,000 individuals were homeless, with more than half enduring chronic homelessness, while the Region's latest, 2024 PiT Count, found this number to have more than doubled. While the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue, increasing both the visibility and number of individuals facing homelessness, the 2024 PiT Count emphasized the urgency that demands attention to resource needs and an improved understanding of the rise of chronic homelessness and increasing number of individuals facing homelessness across the Region.

Effort from both public and private sectors, key system partners (e.g., healthcare, mental health and addictions, justice), alongside all levels of government are required to address homelessness in our Region. This crisis demands attention to consideration of long-term solutions for chronic homelessness and more immediate strategies to prevent and intervene in the face of episodic homelessness.

The PECH report emphasizes that to address this crisis, a comprehensive and equity-focused approach is necessary, with particular attention to the voices of those with lived experience. The creation of the PECH aims to use this lived experience as a central element in devising sustainable solutions, including addressing the diverse needs of specific populations such as veterans, refugees and newcomers to Canada, Indigenous peoples, women and gender-diverse individuals, and individuals living with disabilities, such as acquired brain injuries (ABI).

When compared to the 2021 PiT report (see CSD-HOU-24-020), the current climate highlights the need for ongoing innovation and system-level changes to reduce chronic homelessness. The intention behind the PECH plan is to leverage community-driven initiatives and cross-sector collaboration to create long-term stability for vulnerable

populations in the region. This includes addressing systemic gaps in housing and support services, with the goal of reducing homelessness and improving housing stability for those in need.

The PECH Priority Actions for 2025:

The PECH, which serves as the Region's official plan to prevent, address and end chronic homelessness by 2030, outlines seven strategic focus areas and 30 actions. These areas emphasize a comprehensive, equity-driven approach that centers around a collaborative Co-Creator model with members, including those with lived experiences of homelessness. Findings from the Region's 2024 PiT Count demand the need for systemic change, emphasizing the rise in homelessness across the Region. While the PECH emphasizes its central goal of reducing chronic homelessness by 50% in 2025, the 2024 PiT Count shows homelessness has doubled since 2021.

As the PECH continues to work alongside area municipalities, Co-Creators, lived experts, and Regional staff in implementing its recommendations, data from the 2024 PiT Count may be used to inform and support its strategies. For example, as analysis progresses in preparation for the Local Report, preliminary PiT Count data reflects a significant portion of our homeless population face barriers to housing stability due to systemic gaps (e.g., affordable housing, mental health support). The PECH addresses these gaps by calling for increased access to housing and wraparound services, recognizing that supportive services (such as mental health care and addiction services) are crucial for long-term housing stability.

Furthermore, both the PiT Count and the PECH are data-driven, relying on both quantitative and qualitative information to shape policy and interventions. As the analysis unfolds for the Local Report, we continue to work alongside the PECH partners and collaborate with key interest holders (i.e., corrections and health services) to inform the data derived from the 2024 PiT Count. For example, the SDCWR supplemented Regional PiT Data by investing resources and capacity into qualitative semi-structured interviews in addition to conducting the PiT Count Survey on Homelessness. This engagement focused on hidden homelessness and warrants careful analysis to further contextualize and improve understandings of the Region's homeless landscape.

Outlined in the PECH's 2025 Priority Actions, one of its collaborative priority areas includes launching a data strategy to monitor and track progress on ending chronic homelessness and establishing data-informed decision-making processes. This area aims to leverage support and advocacy efforts as well as inform our community of the realities of homelessness.

PiT Data - Local Report & Municipality Profiles:

Homelessness impacts both urban and rural areas, while the latter is often overlooked in social support areas concerning investment into appropriate service support. The PECH details an urban-rural strategy in partnership with The Rural Upstream Project – Engage Rural community partner agency. In collaboration with eight health and social service agencies spanning the four rural townships, the PECH aims to map services and strengthen understandings of the multifaceted challenges facing rural townships.

The Region's 2024 PiT Count found 2% of individuals experiencing homelessness in rural settings, and 98% of individuals in urban settings. Specific examination into urban and rural PiT Count data is currently undergoing analysis and will be detailed in the Local Report being developed alongside Co-Creators as part of the implementation of the PECH. This analysis, along with sub-population specific data briefs, will be shared with the Community and Health Services Committee by July 2025 in an in-depth Local Report.

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDCWR) complimented the quantitative PiT Count by conducting in depth qualitative interviews with people experiencing homelessness. During the week of the PiT Count, members of the Social Development Centre's Live Expertise Work Group team met with over 80 individuals who were without a home, to explore their narratives and experiences. Using these stories as qualitative data and by including Lived Expertise Consultants in the development of the Local Report, the SDCWR will function as a collaborator for the 2024 PiT Count's meaning-making process, as well as help amplify the voices of some of the most vulnerable in our community.

AMO Initial Findings & Influence Over PECH Actions:

As a Service Manager, the Region of Waterloo participated in the data collection conducted by HelpSeeker for the Association of Municipalities of Ontario 2025 report *Municipalities Under Pressure: The Growing Human and Financial Cost of Ontario's Homelessness Crisis*. Using the data submitted by staff and additional internal data, staff are currently undertaking a comparative analysis to understand how our investments in housing and homelessness programs stack up to provincial averages. The data tracked and submitted for the province-wide report includes PATHS and BNL data, so discrepancies should be expected as methodologies vary. Further, anticipated outcomes of the PECH are tracked against PATHS and BNL data. Overall, local PiT Count findings reinforce both provincial trends and PECH projections of increases in experiences of homelessness. Additional findings in comparing to provincial trends include:

- Of the total 81,515 Ontarians experiencing known homelessness, approximately 51% are considered chronic.
    - In the Waterloo Region, according to PATHS and BNL data, the local chronicity rate is slightly below the provincial average at 45%.
        - This suggests that the impact of the heightened investments to end chronic homelessness is positive, as previously projected in the PECH Funding Strategy.
- While the Ontario rate of households in Core Housing Need (CHN) is at 12.1%, Waterloo Region sits at 9%, slightly lower than the provincial average.
    - There are approximately 20,018 (1 in 11) households in Waterloo Region in CHN.
        - Comparatively, 1 in 25 households in Waterloo Region are on the Community Housing waitlist.
    - The number of Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) units both provincially and locally has remained stagnant for several years based on similarly stagnant funding models.
        - Improved data and analysis are needed to understand the waitlist data to determine who is not accessing this resource.
        - Continued work with community partners and divisional program areas will occur to better understand what this data represents and what can be done to alleviate CHN through Housing Programs as an upstream solution.
- Across the province, municipal contributions to homelessness have doubled between 2020 and 2024. Locally, municipal investment in homelessness has increased by 38%.
    - This increase in investment is tracking against positive outcomes in local data, compared to projections of stagnant investment. As presented in the PECH Investment Strategy, increased investment continues to be critical to improved outcomes and reaching functional zero by 2030.

While the scope and methodology of the AMO report and local comparator data is significantly different than that of the PiT count, findings in the analysis of both sources maintain the increased need in investment to resolving chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region. The 2025 PECH priorities as presented in CSD-HOU-24-19 hold against these patterns. Continued tracking of the impact of the PECH actions will be critical to ensuring that actions and priorities set by co-creators and staff meet community needs.

Funding Key Messages

The 2024 Homelessness Operating Budget of $56M included an incremental $10.2M for the PECH, with $7M funded from the property tax levy and $3.2M funded from the Tax Stabilization Reserve.

The $10.2M for the PECH accomplished the following:

- 98 additional PATHS participants housed out of experiences of homelessness.
- 150 net new portable affordability rent supplements.
- 18 youth shelter beds stabilized.
- 20 women's shelter beds.
- 44 supportive housing units stabilized.
- 3 additional Unsheltered Support Workers to build capacity in the system.
- Funding for approximately 30 spaces for families in need of Emergency Shelter, and up to 50 single adult spaces in motel rooms for people who cannot access emergency shelters.
- Stabilization of staff supports across the Emergency Shelter system.
- Stabilization of tenant support to over 300 fixed-site Supportive Housing units.

In 2024, 192 individuals transitioned from chronic homelessness into housing through the PATHS program. This indicates that community efforts to support people into permanent housing are making progress. Despite this progress, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness continues to grow: the system is struggling to keep up with the increasing number of people who need support.

The pace of homelessness is exceeding available resources; as chronic homelessness continues to grow, the system is unable to scale quickly enough to meet the demands of our most vulnerable community members. The variance between the need for housing and the system's capacity to respond underscores the urgency for enhanced resources, infrastructure, and solutions to address homelessness effectively.

Conclusion:

While the Region of Waterloo's 2024 PiT Count represents a significant increase in individuals experiencing known homelessness in Waterloo Region, there are encouraging points of note. Increased partnerships across the community, through the efforts of the PECH, enable staff and partners to connect with more communities who previously were not connected to systems. This means that while the numbers increase, the ability of programs to better serve the community also increases. Regional staff and the PECH Co-Creators will continue to track closely the impact of funded efforts through the PECH and Housing Services broadly.

As we work towards completing our analysis of the Local Report, we will continue working in collaboration with the PECH partners, key community partners, including those with lived experiences of homelessness, to ensure our data from the 2024 PiT Count is well-informed. We aim to publish a cogent analysis of these findings in a Local Report by July 2025, utilizing additional data sources such as the PATHS and BNL to ensure that actions prioritized by, and funded through the PECH, are evidence-based and contextualized by the needs of our community.