

Region of Waterloo
Community Services
Housing Services

To: Community and Health Services Committee
Meeting Date: April 9, 2024
Report Title: The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report

1. Recommendation

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo adopt the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report as the official plan to prevent, address, and end homelessness in Waterloo Region as outlined in report CSD-HOU-24-006 dated April 9, 2024.

And that the Regional Municipality of Waterloo direct staff to develop a comprehensive funding and advocacy strategy based on the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Actions outlined in report CSD-HOU-24-006 and deliver it to Council as part of the 2025 Regional Budget process.

2. Purpose / Issue:

The purpose of this Report is to deliver the Final Report of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, *Navigating Complexity Together: A Roadmap to Functional Zero by 2030*, to Regional Council to serve as the Region's official plan to prevent, address, and end chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region.

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 newly approved Corporate Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

- Under Homes for All, we will eliminate chronic homelessness and reliance on traditional emergency shelter models. This includes the launch of a Whole of Community Approach to implement the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, and to partner with community organizations to deliver quality services to our region's most vulnerable residents.
- Under Equitable Services and Opportunities, we will explore new models of service through community collaboration and partnerships. This includes finding new ways to partner with community organizations to improve service delivery

and developing advocacy plans that support new investments in equitable service delivery. Key performance indicators include an increase in engagement with equity-deserving groups, and new funding to support investments in equitable service delivery.

- Under Resilient and Future Ready Organization, we explore new service models and partnerships to achieve fiscal resilience and better service. This includes supporting staff and the community to drive service transformation that is culturally appropriate, safe and inclusive through co-design, data-driven decision-making, innovative digital tools, and other ways of knowing. Key performance indicators include increase in satisfaction with service experience.

4. Report Highlights:

- The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report, *Navigating Complexity Together: A Roadmap to Functional Zero by 2030*, attached as Appendix A, summarizes and outlines the co-created strategic focus areas and related action items to prevent, address, and end chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region and are outlined below:
 - The number of people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region is unprecedented. Chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region has been increasing at an average growth rate of 28% year over year since 2020 and since January 2020, chronic homelessness in the region has increased by 129%. If this trend continues, the community will have triple the number of residents experiencing chronic homelessness by 2028. This growing community concern and crisis requires immediate community-wide action to shift the trajectory of chronic homelessness.
 - Development of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (PECH) has been underway since early 2023 and the approach used was to develop it in community, by community, and for community. The Plan outlines seven strategic Focus Areas that were established by the community-led and driven co-creator group. These Focus Areas were used to develop the 30 PECH Actions in the Final Report (Appendix A) and the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Actions – Consolidated List (Appendix B).
 - Appendix C outlines and details the Lived Expertise Working Group's Calls to Action, which are attached as a For Information Report.
 - The Plan, in 2024, will establish a Whole of Community Leadership Model that includes Lived Experts, Equity-Owed Groups, System Leaders, and ROW Staff. The goal of establishing community-driven system leadership is

to disseminate system decision-making power to increase transparency and trust and responsibility to ensure that the system is built to respond properly to the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

- The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Investment Plan and Strategy outlines the level of investment required from all levels of government, private and public sector, and system partners (health, mental health and addictions, justice, etc.) to address, prevent, and end chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region by 2030. The Plan details the importance of shifting investments to more permanent solutions rather than emergency-based and reactive responses to homelessness.
 - Preventing, addressing, and ending chronic homelessness is a shared responsibility of all levels of government and both private- and not-for-profit sectors as well as the community as a whole.

5. Background:

The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report is the culmination of more than a year and half of collaborative planning to renew and deepen the local commitment to homelessness prevention. This Plan, and Final Report, were developed in community, by community, and for community. The Final Report details 30 Actions developed by Co-Creators and the Lived Expertise Working Group to prevent, address, and end chronic homelessness.

The Final Report was co-created by more than 40 organizations committed to addressing and ending chronic homelessness. This unprecedented community collaborative process highlights the deep commitment to achieving homes for all in Waterloo Region. While the Final Report marks the end of one community-driven process, it also marks the beginning of a new and challenging community-led process as the community begins to implement the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Actions.

Framing the Problem and Historical Context

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region is unprecedented. Chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region has been increasing at an average growth rate of 28% year over year since 2020 and since January 2020, chronic homelessness in the region has increased by 129%. If this trend continues, the community will have triple the number of residents experiencing chronic homelessness by 2028.

- In February 2024, there were 558 individuals on the Prioritized Access to Housing Supports (PATHS) List, the by-name list of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in Waterloo region. The average number of days

individuals on the PATHS list have been without permanent and safe housing is 1,403 days (3 years 8 months).

- 12% of all chronically homeless individuals on the PATHS list identify as Indigenous. This is an overrepresentation of Indigenous people experiencing chronic homelessness as they make up 1.7% of the total population of Waterloo Region.
- Alarming, youth homelessness is on the rise across Waterloo Region, signalling the need for preventative, upstream strategies. Youth shelters are frequently at capacity and participants are as young as 12 years old. A recent survey from Children and Youth Planning Table showed 13% of youth respondents were experiencing homelessness in 2023.

The current homelessness and affordable housing crisis is a result, in part, due to the retrenchment of both the federal and provincial government's response and approach to community housing, affordable housing development, and homelessness prevention in the 1970s and 1980s. Increasingly, the Region of Waterloo in their role as Regional Government and Designated Service System Manager, is supplementing the lack of investment from other levels of government with the property tax levy. This is an unsustainable use of municipal tax levy dollars and incongruent with the intentionality of this funding source compared to provincial and federal sources.

The current system is not designed or adequately resourced to address the increase in numbers of individuals (volume) requiring support or the increased complexity of needs that individuals have—specifically, those who are precariously housed or experiencing hidden homelessness and those who require deeply therapeutic and supportive housing. In addition, the system must address the lack of lived expertise and equity focus in policy, decision-making, and service-delivery in order to better align with the needs of the diverse community of Waterloo Region and those experiencing homelessness.

Development of The Plan and Final Report, Focus Areas, and Actions

The Plan outlines seven strategic Focus Areas that were developed by the co-creator group. These Focus Areas were used to develop the 30 Actions in the Plan Final Report (Appendix A), which are also found in the Consolidated List of Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Calls to Action (Appendix B).

These Focus Areas are:

1. Create Policy and System Accountability
2. Centre Community Voices
3. Build System Bridges

4. Advance Equitable Housing
5. Focus on Preventing Homelessness
6. Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness
7. Advocate and Collaborate for Broader Change

The Focus Areas and Actions emphasize collaborative, integrative, and preventative strategies in addressing homelessness and housing stability. In addition, the centering of lived and living expertise is critical in the work of developing the Final Report and will be the focus in the implementation work to follow.

One of the key Actions outlined in the Final Report is the development and implementation of an All of Community Approach, which will enhance and emphasize the role of community organizations, leaders, and lived experts in decision-making. The focus of this approach is to create an integrated, inclusive, adaptive, responsive and sustainable ecosystem across the Housing Stability System and community as a whole.

The Lived Expertise Working Group worked alongside the co-creator group to review Focus Areas and Actions and provide invaluable feedback and reflections to the broader work of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. In addition to providing feedback to the Final Report, the Lived Expertise Working Group developed a standalone For Information Report, which is included as Appendix C. This Final Prototyping Report brings forward the voices of Lived and Living Expertise. An important note to consider when reviewing the Lived Expertise Final Prototyping Report is that this standalone For Information document is to be viewed as complimentary to the Final Report but, Council is not being asked to adopt the Actions outlined in Appendix C.

Recognizing homelessness is an equity issue, the PECH Actions and implementation work will prioritize and centre the voices of communities and individuals who are not reflected currently in the Housing Stability System. Homelessness is experienced differently by equity-deserving groups and as such strategies, programs, and housing options must reflect the unique needs identified by these groups themselves.

Critical in this new model, is increasing data-driven decision-making and creating a quality data strategy that focuses on KPIs, predictive modeling and system outcomes. This includes intentional work related to disaggregated data to better understand homelessness trends related to equity-owed populations and strengthening advocacy efforts when collaborating with key system partners (healthcare, mental health and addictions, etc.).

The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Investment Plan and Strategy

To respond to the growing homelessness and affordable housing crisis, the Region of

Waterloo is directing unprecedented investments towards programs, supports, and capital projects to meet the needs across the community. In 2024, the Region will invest more than \$245M into Affordable Housing and Homelessness, from all sources. Of this, 23 per cent is directed towards homelessness and supportive housing programs.

Between 2019 and 2024, the Region has increased municipal tax levy and reserve investment in this critical housing and homelessness service area from \$42M to approximately \$99M, signalling a deep and historic commitment to achieving homes for all in Waterloo Region. This level of municipal commitment to homelessness and affordable housing is unique when compared to other Regional Governments and System Service Managers in Ontario.

To achieve an end to chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region, a deepening of commitment and engagement is needed from all levels of government, public and private sector, and key system partners (healthcare, mental health and addictions, justice, etc.). This shared community challenge is not to be owned or solved by one order of government in isolation.

In 2024, \$56M is being invested into homelessness and supportive housing programs by the Region, a local commitment that cannot be overstated. Despite this significant and encouraging commitment and investment into the local Housing Stability System, currently the majority of funding is dedicated towards reactive and emergency-based responses as the local crisis of homelessness continues to rise at alarming rates. The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness sets out to shift the collective focus towards permanent housing outcomes and upstream interventions so the significant investments being made into the system have a greater return on investment and, most importantly, create permanent housing outcomes for the most vulnerable residents of Waterloo Region.

Staff will be using the PECH Investment Plan to develop specific municipal budget requests and/or service expansions that are within scope and reasonable given current municipal commitments to address, preventing, and ending homelessness. In addition, Staff will create an advocacy strategy to be used to advocate to other levels of government, sectors, and public and private sector partners to address the significant investment required to address this significant challenge. Both these areas of work will be presented to council in Fall 2024 as part of the 2025 budget planning process.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities: Recognizing that preventing, addressing, and ending homelessness in Waterloo region is a shared value and mission felt by all area municipalities, engagement with area municipalities was both integral and critical in the development of The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. Area municipality engagement

started with a pop-up booth at the All Councils meeting on June 23, 2023 to gather input from Regional and area municipality councils. As the project continued through the engagement phase dedicated engagement sessions were facilitated for area municipality staff, and a project update was provided to Regional council and area municipalities through email as outlined in CSD-HOU-23-024. In addition, engagement sessions were held for specific area municipalities in March 2024.

Public: The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness was supported by an unprecedented level of public engagement. The PECH was created in community, by community, and for community. For more than one year, the PECH has been co-created by a group of committed leaders from a wide array of community organizations from across the region. The PECH content, including Strategic Focus Areas and related Action Items, were co-created by this broad system leadership group.

As outlined in CSD-HOU-23-024, to support the community engagement phase, a multi-channel communications campaign launched at the end of June 2023 and was open for five weeks. Broad messaging encouraged residents to “Join the conversation”, “Share your voice,” and participate in community engagement activities. The EngageWR project webpage served as a landing page for all traffic. Communication efforts resulted in over 850 social media engagements, 4,000 website visits, and an 80 percent e-news open rate.

In addition, the PECH was supported by the Lived Expertise Working Group. This group of lived experts met for more than one year to develop prototypes to support enhanced integration of lived expertise into the development of this broad systems change document and related Action Items and ensured the centring of lived expertise and community voices. Lived Expertise is deeply incorporated in the work of the PECH development through the direct involvement of people impacted by homelessness and marginalization. Included For Information as Appendix C, is the Final Prototyping Report developed by the Lived Expertise Working Group.

7. Financial Implications:

The 2024 Homelessness Operating Budget of \$56M includes an incremental \$10.2M for the PECH, with \$7M funded from the property tax levy and \$3.2M funded from the Tax Stabilization Reserve. This includes a \$3M capital investment of which \$1.5M is funded from the Homelessness Prevention Reserve and \$1.5M from the Strategic Investment and Affordable Housing Reserve.

It is estimated that a total capital investment in emergency shelter, transitional housing and supportive housing of \$110M will be required. Operating expenditure increases of approximately \$5M - \$8M annually for the next six years in order to fully implement the

Plan can be expected. The range will depend on the extent and nature of capital financing costs required.

Subject to Council approval, staff will develop a funding, capital financing and advocacy strategy to be included in the Preliminary 2025 Budget, which will include some combination of tax levy funding, financial support from community partners, and any subsidy secured from senior levels of government where advocacy efforts are successful.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

The Final Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Report is the culmination of deep, collective community-based work to respond to a growing crisis. The Final Report does not end the collective work of preventing, addressing, and ending chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region. Rather, this is the beginning of a renewed collective focus to create Homes for All for our community's most vulnerable residents. Staff, Co-Creators, and the community more generally are committed to the work ahead and are deeply encouraged and motivated to begin the work of implementing the Plan.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report: *Navigating Complexity Together: A Roadmap to Functional Zero by 2030*

Appendix B: The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Actions – Consolidated List

Appendix C: Lived Expertise Final Prototyping Report (For Information)

Appendix D: The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Presentation

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