



Hamilton
Community Services

EVERYONE HAS A HOME

A Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness

HOMELESSNESS IS A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM IN HAMILTON

On Any Given Night: Measuring Homelessness in Hamilton, released early in 2006, indicated that in 2004, 399 people used emergency shelters on a given night in November. While this figure has remained relatively consistent since 2001, it is more than double the number reported in 1995. In 2005, 3,795 people stayed in emergency shelters.

In addition, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Hamilton residents to afford a place to live. In 2001, approximately 45% of renter households spent more than 30% of their income on rent and 22% spent more than 50%.

While poverty is the root of homelessness, its effects are worsened by physical and sexual violence, social isolation, addiction, physical disability, mental health issues, immigration status, gender and age. Since homelessness affects many different types of people, unique solutions are required.

What is our aspiration for the future?

Our aspiration is for Hamilton to be a community where everyone has a home.

Principles

- Everyone has a right to housing. As a community, we need to ensure that adequate and affordable housing exists for everyone.
- Safe, healthy, inclusive neighbourhoods and communities are key. Neighbourhoods that include a mix of people with different income levels, abilities and ethno-cultural backgrounds create opportunities for building social capital.
- Everyone has a role to play in addressing homelessness. People experiencing homelessness, governments, service providers, employers, businesses and citizens can help reduce homelessness.
- We must be person-centred in our approach. Services need to be provided in ways that make sense for the people we serve.
- Through true collaboration, which involves communication, openness and trust, better outcomes will be achieved for everyone.

Why is a strategic plan important?

Addressing homelessness is complex. Services such as emergency shelters, food banks, mental health outreach programs and organizations addressing violence against women all work to address homelessness in some way. These services are funded through different sources, which can create ‘silos’ that can make it difficult for service providers to coordinate or plan together.

This is a crucial point in time. With the introduction of the province’s Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program (CHPP), which gives municipalities more flexibility in funding local programs, and with the Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) nearing its end, it is important for us to regroup and consider how we can make the biggest difference going forward.

It is our responsibility to be a leader in addressing homelessness. The City of Hamilton is designated as the service system manager for homelessness. A key role in service system management is engaging the community in system planning. Successful implementation of the plan will require the participation of all levels of government and many sectors of the community.

“Over three years ago I applied... and they still didn’t call. You have to wait too long to get affordable housing.”

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What is the scope of the plan?

This is the three-year strategic plan for Hamilton's service system for homelessness. It outlines strategies to prevent people from becoming homeless or to help them escape homelessness, provides direction for the funding and development of services, and sets a vision for where we want to go as a community.

This plan complements *Keys to the Home*, the City of Hamilton's housing strategy. Achieving the outcomes of this plan is dependent on the work of The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and the City of Hamilton's Social Development Strategy's Affordable Housing and Skills Development flagships. This supports The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction's aspiration that Hamilton be the best place to raise a child.

Who provided input into the plan?

A Community Advisory Group, representing various service sectors, provided input into the process to develop the plan. Many others were involved through a Homelessness Summit involving 90 participants from a variety of sectors across the community, and a planning session for City of Hamilton staff. Community group consultations were also conducted, along with three focus groups and 20 interviews with people experiencing homelessness.

"This is an inspiring plan that enables us to coordinate our response to homelessness. Often times, things happen in isolation, but this plan paints a clear picture of who is doing what. It empowers people, and puts forth a 'community voice' that helps us avoid duplication and focus on cohesiveness."

Suzanne Ross, Member,
Community Advisory Board,
Supporting Communities Partnership
Initiative (SCPI)

Definitions

Affordable Housing

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines affordability as follows: A household is said to be in core housing need if its housing falls below at least one of the adequacy, suitability or affordability standards. An adequate dwelling does not, according to its residents, require major repairs. A suitable dwelling has enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of the occupying household. To be affordable, shelter costs must consume less than 30% of before-tax household income.

Community

It refers to the City of Hamilton, to the neighbourhoods and groups that exist in the city, to the various sectors providing services to people experiencing homelessness, and to the people experiencing homelessness themselves.

Home

A home is more than a physical structure that shelters you from the weather. It is a place where you feel safe and feel that you belong. It meets your needs and it is affordable.

Homelessness

In this document, homelessness refers to the absolute homeless (those living on the street, in an emergency shelter or in a place unfit for human habitation), the hidden homeless (those who are marginally, inadequately or temporarily housed) and those at risk of homelessness (those paying large amounts of income on rent, those experiencing abuse, etc.).

Prevention

There are two types of prevention: primary and secondary. Primary prevention has to do with preventing an initial occurrence of homelessness while secondary prevention relates to preventing someone from becoming homeless on repeated occasions.

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The plan outlines five outcomes and their supporting strategies:

OUTCOME 1

1 Entire community is engaged to address homelessness

Everyone in the community has a role to play in addressing homelessness. It is critical to engage everyone. Community organizations, individuals and people experiencing homelessness need to understand how they can be part of the solution. Neighbourhoods are also a critical part of the equation as there needs to be welcoming, safe places for everyone to call home.

Strategies

- 1.1 The Community Services Department continues to support the work of The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction to educate and mobilize the community to take action on poverty and homelessness.
- 1.2 An advisory committee is struck to provide advice regarding implementation of the strategic plan and management of the service system.
- 1.3 The Community Services Department develops strategies to include new sectors in addressing homelessness. These sectors include, but are not limited to, landlords, healthcare providers, employment development program providers and employers.
- 1.4 The Community Services Department enhances collaboration with community organizations, providing appropriate timelines for planning and consultation and involving affected groups early in program planning.
- 1.5 As a community leader, the City of Hamilton ensures that its statements and actions reflect a positive portrayal of people living in poverty and experiencing homelessness, as a way to fight stereotypes.
- 1.6 The Community Services Department works with the community to develop and distribute evidence-based information for the purposes of education about homelessness and addressing NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard).

OUTCOMES & STRATEGIES

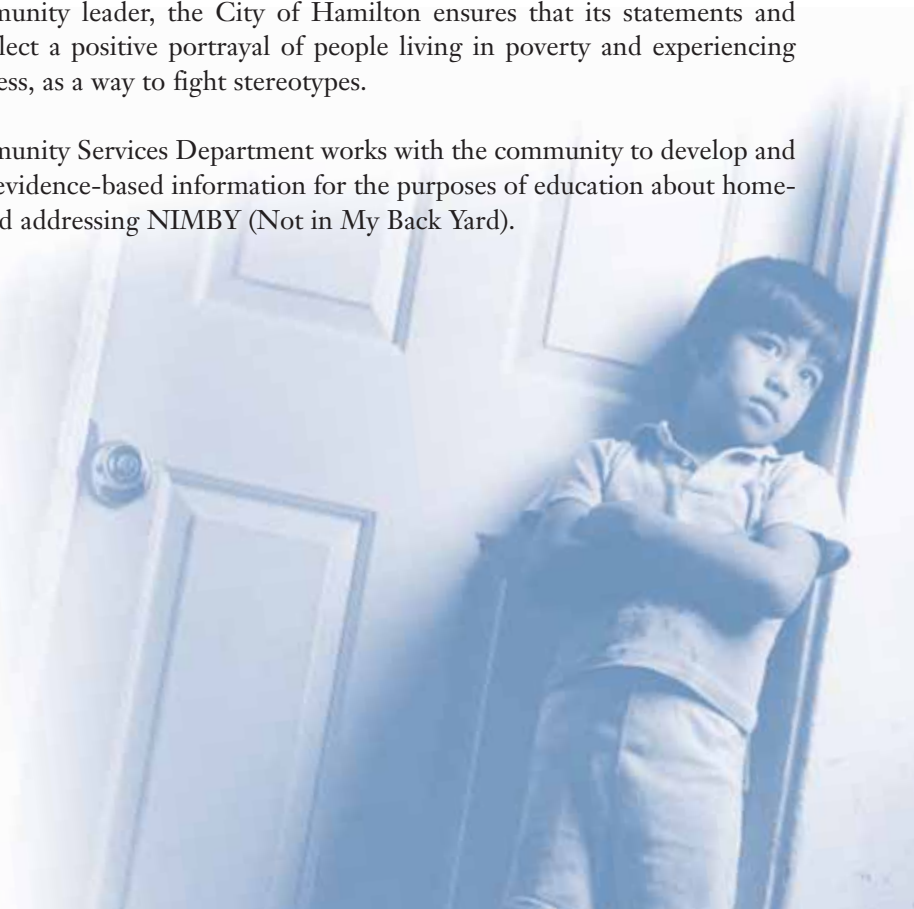
“People need help with their mental health or their whole world would fall apart. Your life can be bad if you don’t have that help... I see a lot of people that need that kind of help.”

“Recognize the humanity in human beings.”

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OUTCOME 2

2 A continuum of affordable housing that helps residents achieve their potential

Housing needs to be affordable, safe and appropriate to one's needs, which may change over time. Providing a continuum of housing from emergency shelter to affordable independent housing is key to addressing homelessness. It can help people achieve their full potential and move through the continuum, as appropriate.

Strategies

- 2.1 Hamilton City Council advocates with the federal and provincial governments regarding their critical role in funding programs to address homelessness at the municipal level.
- 2.2 Hamilton City Council advocates with other levels of government for funding of additional affordable housing units, transitional housing, supportive housing, rent supplements and allowances, and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP).
- 2.3 The City of Hamilton includes in its new Official Plan a statement on inclusionary housing principles and policy direction regarding condominium conversions, the affordable housing continuum, maintaining the city's existing dwelling stock, housing supply targets, residential intensification, accessory apartments and lowering the cost of new housing through alternative development standards.
- 2.4 The City of Hamilton ensures that the existing stock of rooming houses is preserved and improved through licensing and proactive enforcement of standards as recommended in *Keys to the Home*.
- 2.5 Public Health Services, Building and Licensing, Community Services and the Fire Departments work to implement standards for emergency shelters and residential care facilities.
- 2.6 The Community Services Department develops strategies to ensure financial viability of existing units and social housing providers (ie. addressing increased energy costs, limited capital resources, etc.).
- 2.7 CityHousing Hamilton and other social housing providers explore ways to accommodate needs of newcomer/immigrant families.
- 2.8 The Community Services Department and service providers help people move through the housing continuum by targeting interventions to specific groups and more intensively addressing their needs.
- 2.9 The Community Services Department and community agencies develop and implement transitional housing for youth, women leaving abuse (second stage), as well as women and men leaving emergency shelter.

"The development of this plan brought service providers together who are not necessarily connected to one another, and it brought to light what others are doing in the community in a planning sense. It was a forum for acknowledging that all of these services are connected. I think this plan will give us clear direction on where we need to go, moving every agency forward at the same time."

Joanne Santucci, Executive Director,
Hamilton Food Share

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OUTCOME 3

3 Increase supports to help people obtain and maintain housing

A house is not a home unless you feel safe and that you belong. Supports can help people find housing that is right for them. It is important to ensure supports are in place so that people can maintain their physical, mental and spiritual health and remain housed.

Strategies

- 3.1 The Community Services Department collaborates with social housing providers and private sector landlords on the development and implementation of eviction prevention policies and practices.
- 3.2 The Community Services Department and community partners identify people who are staying in emergency shelters for 42 days or more, and provide appropriate supports to help them find and maintain affordable housing.
- 3.3 The Community Services Department collaborates with community partners to develop and implement a system of coordinated case management for people in emergency shelters.
- 3.4 Public Health Services, other levels of government, and agencies increase availability and accessibility of mental health and addiction services, including harm reduction strategies, outreach and treatment.
- 3.5 The Community Services Department collaborates with the provincial government regarding the continuation and enhancement of the rent bank and utility support programs.
- 3.6 The Community Services Department collaborates with the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), healthcare providers and agencies to increase coordination of, and access to, healthcare for those with mental and/or physical health issues that could cause them to lose their housing or limit their ability to move along the housing continuum.
- 3.7 The Community Services Department collaborates with other agencies to promote social inclusion through access to affordable recreation, transportation and other services.
- 3.8 The Community Services Department and emergency food service providers work together to implement the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and analyze the data.
- 3.9 The emergency food sector engages in system planning through the development of a strategic plan.

“Recovering addicts want clean buildings – not [buildings] full of [drug] users when they are trying to stay clean.”

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OUTCOME 4

4 Access to adequate income

Adequate income underpins many issues relating to homelessness. If people do not have adequate income, they cannot pay for food, housing or other basic necessities.

Strategies

- 4.1 The City of Hamilton advocates with the provincial and federal governments that benefits paid by income maintenance programs such as Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) be increased and indexed to reflect the actual cost of living, and eligibility criteria be improved.
- 4.2 The City of Hamilton advocates with the provincial government for an end to the National Child Benefit claw back.
- 4.3 The City of Hamilton explores adoption of a Living Wage policy.
- 4.4 Ontario Works explores opportunities to maximize access to benefits for clients including coordinating with other programs such as ODSP and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for seniors.
- 4.5 Ontario Works increases access to employment supports to help people move along the employment continuum.
- 4.6 The Community Services Department works with the provincial government and service agencies to advocate for trusteeship programs for those who would benefit.

“With such an intimate link between healthcare and housing, we know we need to create a system in which there is better integration of services and better outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness, and for those who are at risk of becoming so. We believe this strategic plan is critical to building and sustaining a network that focuses on the health of these individuals.”

Myles Sergeant, Medical Director,
Shelter Health Network

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OUTCOME 5

5 Efficient and effective use of community resources

It is important to see funds spent to address homelessness as an investment. If funds are well spent, they can reduce costs in other areas. It is also important to use our human and financial resources to the best of our ability. This means finding the answers to the questions, what has worked well and what do we need to do differently.

Strategies

- 5.1 The Community Services Department facilitates discussions with community funders regarding the coordination of funding for homelessness programs.
- 5.2 The Community Services Department works with other funders regarding sustainable funding to maintain key programs.
- 5.3 The Community Services Department and service agencies expand evaluation and monitoring efforts of homelessness programming to ensure that effective programs are funded.
- 5.4 The Community Services Department develops an implementation framework to ensure the strategic plan links to other initiatives such as the Official Plan, The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, Human Services Plan, Social Development Strategy and Vision 2020.
- 5.5 The Community Services Department works to increase coordination between the Ontario Works Program, the Housing Department and the Ontario Disability Support Program.
- 5.6 The Community Services Department provides a strategic plan update in 2009.

“The stigma around poverty and homelessness is huge, I feel awful every day.”



“It’s not [so much] the buildings [we need], it’s the feeling of belonging. We need to belong.”

Next Steps

The next steps involve development of an advisory committee and engagement of the community to develop an implementation plan. For the purposes of monitoring implementation of the plan, indicators will be developed. The indicators will be developed in the areas of emergency shelter use, housing, supports, income and employment, and will measure progress toward the outcomes.

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Quotes from people experiencing homelessness were provided by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton

Photos provided by Photovoice, a Hamilton-based project designed to give people a chance to share their views, ideas, and experiences.

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