

Housing Stability System

FACT SHEET



HOMELESSNESS

EMERGENCY SHELTER

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

COMMUNITY HOUSING

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

MARKET HOUSING

The Region of Waterloo believes communities thrive when everyone has a place to call home. In Housing Services, we work with our partners to plan for housing needs and ways to end homelessness. There are a number of programs to help people find and keep a home across the region. These programs have workers that will help people access the right services at the right time, and access to these programs is coordinated. This **Housing Stability System Fact Sheet** shares information and data about:

- Integrating programs and services using the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS 4);
- Help with housing issues;
- Emergency shelter;
- Unsheltered homelessness and street outreach;
- Coordinated access to housing support; and
- Future vision for the housing stability system.



Integrating programs and services using the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS 4)

By using an integrated database like HIFIS 4, service providers in the housing stability system work together across programs and services to share information to help people find and keep a home, including details about referrals, intake and discharge. HIFIS 4 supports the coordination of services on the pathway from homelessness to housing, allowing for the recording of client-interactions in one place by staff across different programs. HIFIS 4 is trauma-informed because it supports communication across the system, meaning individuals experiencing homelessness share their story only once. HIFIS 4 ensures that service providers operate in a unified way toward common goals for the people they serve. It also allows Housing Services to monitor data to understand system strengths, challenges and outcomes, providing information to help with system improvement.



Help with housing issues

The Housing Resource Centres are generally the first point of contact for housing help. They can help problem solve housing issues on the spot, or come up with a longer-term plan. They can offer many types of support, based on each unique situation.

When people are facing an urgent housing crisis, they can also call a Housing Helpline for immediate assistance. A worker can offer prevention and diversion supports to help people problem solve ways to stay housed or explore all safe alternatives to a shelter stay. The rent fund is an emergency resource available to people living with low income that are at-risk of eviction or homeless.





Emergency shelter

Emergency shelter offers a safe place to stay while people work to find housing. It is a last resort for those who have no other safe options and cannot afford to pay for temporary shelter. When this is the case, people are given a warm referral to emergency shelter by prevention and diversion staff. When people call or drop in to a shelter, a worker will discuss their options and will help to start a Housing Plan. A majority of emergency shelter participants have a housing plan, which outlines steps to finding and keeping a home, and helps with deciding what to focus on next. Prior to the pandemic, the shelter system in the region provided 242 spaces across three adult-serving shelters (205 spaces) and three youth-serving shelters (37 spaces). The size of the shelter system has almost doubled to 400 spaces during the pandemic to address health concerns, capacity and winter overflow pressures, and to add sheltering options for those living unsheltered. From March 17 to May 31, 2020, the number of individuals staying in emergency shelter ranged from 256 to 358 per night, averaging 319 per night.



Unsheltered homelessness and street outreach

Street outreach are often the first point of contact for people living rough. They help to problem-solve immediate issues and to connect people to more intensive housing and health services and supports. Street outreach works in flexible, trauma informed ways that build on the ideas and resiliency of people who are homeless. Some individuals have challenges with accessing emergency shelters and some prefer not to go to emergency shelter. In November 2020, street outreach staff were serving 459 unique individuals across the region. Of these individuals, almost half (49 per cent) were staying unsheltered, with 10 per cent having never accessed emergency shelter in the region.



Coordinated access to housing support

A continuum of housing supports are available through the coordinated access system. People with the highest support needs and longest experience of homelessness are able to access housing support through the Prioritized Access to Housing Supports, or PATHS process.

The PATHS process:

- Is organized based on priority, meaning people with the highest support needs and the longest experience of homelessness are the first to be offered housing support;
- Matches eligible applicants with the right housing and in-home support after move-in to help them stay housed;
- Includes real-time information in a by-name list, also called the PATHS list, that is stored and managed in HIFIS 4; and
- Supports the goal of ending chronic homelessness in the region by providing real time access to information about the unmet need for housing support.

Waterloo region is part of a broader network of municipalities who are committed to ending chronic homelessness through Built for Zero Canada. Through the PATHS process and list, Built for Zero Canada has recognized Waterloo region as the first community in Canada with a quality by-name list (2017), and the first mid-sized community in Canada to achieve a quality coordinated access system (2020).

From November 1, 2019 through to the end of October 2020, 174 households found housing and support through the PATHS process, 112 of which were chronically homeless (six months or more of homelessness in the last year). In early November 2020, 266 households were waiting for housing support on the PATHS list.





Future vision for the housing stability system

The Region along with area municipalities are prioritizing actions to address the need for creating affordable and supportive housing in Waterloo region. Every decision made, initiative developed and project funded is anchored in the belief that communities thrive when everyone has a place to call home.

Through strategic investment and the Region's land portfolio, work is underway to fast track the development of affordable housing in the next five years. This work is founded on sustainable regional investments, with support provided through funding streams like the Social Services Relief Funding Phase II and the Rapid Housing Initiative that encourage adding modular housing as an affordable and supportive housing resource to the housing continuum.

Through the lens of health, safety, and infection control, the pandemic has stressed the need to make decisions that prioritize permanent housing solutions. As demonstrated by the *National At Home/Chez Soi Final Report (2014)*, Housing First approaches are a sustainable, person-centered, and cost-effective way to meet the housing needs of people experiencing homelessness. When implemented effectively, Housing First approaches can save money, increase quality of life, and end homelessness quickly. The future vision for the housing stability system is one where the supply of affordable and supportive housing is enough to meet the need, and where homelessness becomes rare, brief and non-recurring.

