

## City of Hamilton Submission for Renewal of the Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy

The City of Hamilton's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan ("Action Plan") should be considered part of the City's submission for the renewal of the Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS). The Action Plan sets out 5 outcomes (supply, affordability, supports, quality and equity), a number of specific and measurable targets with 54 supporting strategies which if implemented, will result in achieving the outcomes. Various strategies are referenced as footnotes to this submission.

The City of Hamilton's submission for renewal of the LTAHS focuses on three primary themes:

- Need for more funding;
- Improved coordination of services; and,
- Provincial policy and regulatory changes.

The three themes were featured most prevalently in the City's consultations for the LTAHS renewal, but also during the extensive consultation process in the development of the Action Plan.

### Need for more funding

Every municipality was required to develop a 10-year housing and homelessness plan as a requirement of the *Housing Services Act, 2011*. In order to meet the current and future housing needs of Hamilton residents, significant financial investment is required from the senior levels of government. Available funding is markedly less than is needed for the full and effective implementation of Hamilton's Action Plan. For example, the cost to meet the targets for new rental housing units is \$300 million over the 10-year life of the Action Plan. Additional targets for 2,100 new housing allowances and rehabilitating 3,500 private housing for low-moderate income households would cost approximately \$31.5 million and \$70 million respectively, pushing the cost of implementing the Action Plan to well over \$400 million over its 10-year lifespan.<sup>1</sup>

Responsibility for the social housing stock was downloaded to municipalities in 2001 without adequate and sustainable funding to support future capital repair needs. Utilizing the estimated costs of capital repairs for 10 of the 43 social housing providers in Hamilton that have completed building condition assessments and reserve fund studies since 2009, it is projected that the cost to all of Hamilton's social housing stock

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<sup>1</sup> City of Hamilton, *Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*. Hamilton, Ontario, 2013.

will be \$500 to \$600 million over the next twenty years.<sup>2</sup> There are also a number of social housing units that remain vacant due to the lack of funding for major repairs while the number of households waiting for social housing continues to be high. As an example, one large social housing provider has 21 units in a single building left vacant due to a lack of funds for major repairs. The situation will only worsen without an infusion of funding for Service Managers to manage the social housing stock or alternatively for the province to upload the social housing programs and associated costs back to the provincial level.

Investing in affordable housing is smart economic policy. In the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Province acknowledges that housing investments yield long-term savings in healthcare and help people find and keep jobs. Long-term funding helps to build healthy communities, and stimulates economic growth.

### **Improved coordination of services**

The Action Plan sets out many strategies and targets for improving the system of individualized supports related to obtaining and maintaining housing. One such strategy calls for better integration and improved relationships between the various ministries that work with the populations most in need of housing related supports such as the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.<sup>3</sup> Although the Province is taking positive steps in this regard, continued progress with a more integrated approach to service would enable the City, its partners, and the various Ministries to better understand and support mutual objectives and achieve more significant and meaningful collective results. This topic was raised consistently throughout the City consultation on the LTAHS renewal.

### **Provincial Regulatory and Policy Changes**

A number of strategies in the Action Plan do not require significant financial investment to support the development of affordable housing but rather require legislative, regulatory or policy changes at the provincial level. These include policy changes related to land use planning and the process for divesting surplus provincial and school board lands.

### **LTAHS Consultation Guide**

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing provided a consultation guide to assist in preparing a response to the LTAHS review. The consultation guide is divided into four themes:

- (i) Supply;

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<sup>2</sup> Item 4, Emergency & Community Services Committee Report 14-005 (Staff Report CES14020), endorsed by Council for the City of Hamilton on September 10, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Strategies 3.2/3.3/3.5, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

- (ii) Housing assistance;
- (iii) Co-ordinated, accessible support services; and,
- (iv) Evidence and best practices.

Each theme contains four broad questions. The City response is structured according to the consultation guide and provides context specific to Hamilton where appropriate.

### **Theme 1: A Sustainable Supply of Affordable Housing**

Increasing the supply of new housing affordable to people with low to moderate incomes is critical to meeting the housing needs of Hamilton's residents. Hamilton's Access-to-Housing social housing waitlist is now at 5,700 households and 20% of all renters are paying more than 50% of their incomes in rent. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) provided Hamilton with specific data that shows vacancy rates in private market rental buildings have decreased substantially from 3.9% in 2013 to 2.3% in 2014. This has resulted in increases to average market rents, a trend expected to continue. CMHC also expects that the trend of migration to Hamilton from the GTA will continue.

Hamilton's Action Plan sets a target of 300 new affordable rental units annually to meet the needs of projected growth. This is in addition to the current unmet need. Hamilton is not meeting either the existing or the projected need. There are very few new purpose built rental units being constructed in Hamilton without public funds. Over the last 10 years, with the help of federal, provincial and municipal programs, 731 units of affordable rental housing have been constructed in Hamilton. This year, through the Investment in Affordable Housing Program and its extension, 82 new affordable rental units are under construction with approximately 100 additional units expected to be built over the next few years.

Another threat to the supply of affordable housing in Hamilton is the poor state of repair of the social housing stock. Currently there are units of social housing that cannot be refilled due to poor condition and the lack of funds to make the repairs. For example, there are 56 vacant units within CityHousing Hamilton's portfolio that require extensive rehabilitation before they can be occupied again. There is limited financial flexibility for social housing providers for these capital repair pressures. Under provincial legislation and operating agreements, social housing providers are required to maintain their portfolios of rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units. This means that the costs of undergoing major repairs cannot be passed along to tenants. As a result, many social housing providers have deferred major capital repairs or investments. Hamilton is at risk of losing more of its social housing stock unless significant additional funds are committed to repair and maintenance.

A comprehensive approach is required to adequately increase the supply of affordable rental housing. This approach includes a strategic combination of new land use planning and regulatory tools, innovative new financial tools and incentives, and increased funding from the provincial and federal governments.

***How can we encourage private investment in affordable housing through planning, financial, regulatory and other tools?***

There are two important land use planning and regulatory tools that could encourage private investment in affordable housing:

- (i) inclusionary zoning; and,
- (ii) conditional zoning.

Inclusionary zoning would give municipalities the ability to pass by-laws that require developers to include a certain number of affordable units as part of a development, or, alternatively, provide cash in lieu of those units that can be used to develop affordable housing elsewhere. The affordability criteria and the number of units could be set out by by-law in response to the unique situation of each municipality. Inclusionary zoning requires an amendment to the *Planning Act*.<sup>4</sup>

With conditional zoning, under Section 34 of the *Planning Act* municipalities have the authority to impose conditions on a specific property owner when processing a zoning amendment. This authority permits "prescribed conditions" to be contractually imposed on an owner pursuant to an agreement. However, there is no current regulation which establishes the "prescribed conditions" so municipalities cannot use conditional zoning. One condition may be the provision of a certain number of affordable units. Municipalities would need a new regulation which establishes affordable housing as a "prescribed condition" to be issued by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Other potentially helpful provincial financing tools and options might include:

- Providing funds to municipalities to develop financial incentives for private owners to bring illegal and unsafe secondary dwelling units and units in houses into conformity with zoning, and Building and Fire Codes;<sup>5</sup>
- Providing funds to municipalities to create and administer a sustainable no-interest (or low-interest) repayable loan and revolving loan fund program specifically for affordable rental housing development by non-profit or private developers<sup>6</sup>;
- Providing tax incentives for the development of new affordable rental housing; and

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<sup>4</sup> Strategy 1.4, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

<sup>5</sup> Strategy 1.9, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

<sup>6</sup> Strategy 1.2, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

- Providing funds to developers for the costs associated with the pre-construction work for affordable housing.

There are other non-financial provincial actions that could encourage private investment in affordable housing. An ongoing struggle for housing advocates and municipalities in promoting affordable housing and infill opportunities is the lack of broad public support and the misunderstandings about affordable housing. Developing a province-wide campaign to promote broader public support for infill and affordable housing would help combat such opposition also known as *NIMBY*-ism (“not-in-my-backyard”).

The alignment of policy goals among provincial ministries, such as intensification and complete, healthy communities, would allow the policies of all ministries to support the provincial land use planning and housing goals of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. For example, provincial lands held by various ministries, made available to municipalities at a reduced cost would help municipalities develop affordable rental housing.

***How can we better support the non-profit sector (including co-ops, private, and municipal non-profits) in maintaining, replacing, and expanding social and affordable housing?***

The provincial options to support the non-profit sector are largely financial and include:

- Adequately funding social housing capital repairs<sup>7</sup>;
- Funding for social housing providers to have regular building condition assessments and reserve fund studies completed, as well as preparing and submitting regular portfolio management plans;
- Uploading the responsibility for aging social housing stock;
- Increasing funds committed to Investment in Affordable Housing programs;
- Offering appropriate surplus provincial land including surplus school sites to non-profit organizations at no or below market cost for the development of new affordable housing<sup>8</sup>;
- Developing a single funding formula for social housing;
- Investing new funding in the construction of new social housing units;
- Funding programs for making modifications to social housing units and buildings to accommodate persons with disabilities and accommodate diverse household sizes<sup>9</sup>;
- Allowing social housing providers to leverage their assets to secure funds to repair existing units and construct new units<sup>10</sup>; and

<sup>7</sup> Strategy 4.10, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

<sup>8</sup> Strategy 1.8, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

<sup>9</sup> Strategies 4.6/4.7/4.8, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

- Enhancing the available financing incentives for repairs and retrofits, such as forgivable loans through expansion of the federal-provincial Ontario Renovates program.

***How can we improve regulatory and legislative tools to enhance housing affordability?***

In areas that are experiencing rapid growth in rental market demand, it is a struggle to preserve affordability. It is time to review the *Residential Tenancies Act* to look at ways to regulate rent increases for units that become vacant. This could include such considerations as establishing thresholds (e.g. vacancy rates, rate of increase of average market rents) or requiring landlords to submit applications to establish new rents.

It is also time to look at increasing social assistance rates to ensure that social assistance recipients can afford at least the average rent in their local community as well as the costs of utilities.

***What steps should the federal government take to support housing supply, including social housing?***

The Action Plan calls for the federal government to create a national housing strategy with adequate and sustainable funding.<sup>11</sup> As part of its government relations strategy, City of Hamilton staff have met with most of the local Members of Parliament and reiterated the need for a national housing strategy.

With respect to social housing, the ongoing impact of the end of federal operating agreements needs to be addressed through a renewed commitment to funding social housing in Canada. As funding through the federal operating agreements declines, the shortfall in funding falls to cash-strapped municipalities, putting even more pressure on the social housing system. The reduction in federal funding in social housing leaves the City covering the difference from the property tax levy just to maintain existing service levels. In 2015, there will be an estimated additional pressure of \$464,400 on the municipal levy. This figure decreases to \$269,276 in 2016, but increases to a high of \$908,280 in 2019.

Similarly to the province, the federal government should make surplus lands available for the development of affordable housing at no or low cost.

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<sup>10</sup> Strategy 1.11, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

<sup>11</sup> Strategy 1.1, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*.

**Theme 2: A Fair System of Housing Assistance**

Hamilton has high needs for housing assistance, needs that are not currently being met. Important programs, such as the trusteeship program, are ending due to provincial and federal changes to homelessness programs. There are insufficient supportive housing program services, and there are significant gaps between programs. Additionally, significant amounts of resources continue to be spent battling bed bugs rather than providing housing assistance, further exacerbating the shortfall. This theme is closely tied to the 'supply' theme because it is difficult to assist someone if there are not enough units to meet the need. .

***How can we improve access to housing assistance and reduce wait times?***

This question should be considered in the context of Theme 1. Without sufficient housing stock, it is difficult to provide housing assistance and wait times will continue to be long.

The Province could assist municipalities to better understand the needs of people waiting for social housing and to assist them. For example, Hamilton is introducing case management support to people on the social housing wait list.

The Province could review the subsidized housing targets under the *Housing Services Act, 2011* and expand the definition of social housing to include housing allowances. This would allow for a reduction in the number of households on the waiting list as well as the length of wait. Although the time limited nature of current housing allowance programs is a challenge, providing a benefit directly to tenants allows them to find market housing appropriate to their needs. Housing allowances typically provide lower subsidies than conventional rent-geared-to-income benefits but are still successful in enabling people to maintain their housing.

Since 2001 when social housing was downloaded to the municipalities, there has been no supporting information technology platform or software system for Service Managers to manage the social housing system. The City of Hamilton is part of a consortium of eight municipal Service Managers who have recognized the need for a solution. This common database will streamline social housing administration, data storage, financial oversight, and Provincial reporting requirements. It will also improve data integrity, increase information access and reporting capacity. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is supportive of the initiative. Although the participating municipalities are sharing the costs of the common database, ongoing costs should be uploaded to the province.

Additional Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) funding could be used to support successful tenancies for people living in either social or private market housing. An example is the case management component being introduced to social

housing applicants while they wait for a social housing unit. The wait may take years and case managers will work with the applicant to meet their needs, not only related to housing, but also employment, income benefits and broader social supports.

One of the ways to increase the supply of social housing stock and reduce wait times is to support social housing providers in increasing their stock of units. There are social housing providers with vacant land that could be built on and assets that could be leveraged to increase supply.

***How can the systems of housing assistance be improved – for clients and service providers?***

Increasing and indexing the amount of shelter allowances for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program would help those on income assistance better access market rate housing. The 2014 average market rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Hamilton was \$744, but the shelter allowance for a single person on Ontario Works is \$376, and for a couple is \$602. For the Ontario Disability Support Program the shelter allowance for a single person is \$479 and a couple, \$753.

A housing affordability benefit issued either directly or as a tax credit could be used to assist low income households to help bridge the gap between annual market rent paid and 30% of gross income. This approach to assisting households is person-centred and easier to administrate than current rent supplements or housing allowances. This approach would allow tenants to access a rent subsidy program without the knowledge of private or social housing landlords and would offer a greater range of choice for tenants.

Minimum wage increases and indexing for cost of living were good policy decisions. Further and continued increases to the minimum wage will help to close the gap between the minimum and a living wage.

***What non-financial programs and supports help to maintain successful tenancies?***

Encouraging and facilitating case conferencing and improved information and data sharing protocols between ministries, agencies, housing providers and service managers would enable better coordination of supports for tenants who are struggling with mental illnesses such as hoarding, addictions, and other issues. Provincial clarity about privacy legislation and the ability to case conference with other government agencies, housing providers, and support providers would be helpful to support successful tenancies and prevent evictions.



Sharing best practices with social housing providers and private landlords will assist them to help tenants remain housed. The vast majority of evictions are economic in nature, involving some form of rent non-payment. Hamilton's Eviction Prevention Best Practices Tool Kit is an example of practical tools to assist in eviction prevention efforts.<sup>12</sup> The Province could adopt Hamilton's Eviction Prevention Policies as a best practice.

A wide-range of supports is needed to help people remain housed, but current funding to provide these supports is far from sufficient. It is cost effective to provide the supports necessary to keep people housed. Providing appropriate supports will increase the numbers of individuals who are able to remain housed in affordable housing and not in substantially more expensive hospitals, long-term care facilities, or assisted living facilities.

The supports that individuals experiencing homelessness require after they are housed are well documented. When a homeless individual or family is re-housed, client-centred supports are vital to restore their stability and secure the means to maintain their housing. Skilled case management support is central to providing these supports. While some individuals may require only a little support to become stabilized in their new home, others may require periodic, modest support while others will require robust ongoing support in order to avoid becoming homeless again. Case management is needed to help individuals access and navigate support systems including employment or assistance benefits, mental health and/or addictions treatment, counselling, financial assistance, skills training or other service and resources.

The province can play a role in encouraging systems that are more targeted to individual needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. This would mean ensuring that the right levels and types of supports to remain housed are provided for each client. Investments in common assessment practices (e.g. the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) and a common data management system will help ensure that individuals are connected to supports in the most efficient and effective way.

<b><i>How can we better support people who are homeless to become stably housed?</i></b>
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A critical first step to better supporting people who are homeless to become stably housed is to establish a clear goal to end homelessness in Ontario. There is much to be learned from the process and results of the Province of Alberta's strategic approach to end homelessness. Just eight years after the establishment of a provincial Secretariat for Action on Homelessness and seven years after the development of a 10

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<sup>12</sup> Strategy 3.7, *City of Hamilton, Housing and Homelessness Action Plan*. Hamilton, Ontario, 2013.

Year Provincial Strategic Plan to address homelessness, one city in Alberta has managed to end chronic homelessness.

The various policy and investment commitments undertaken in Alberta provide a useful foundation and lessons learned which the Province of Ontario can build upon. For example, establishing and providing methods for improved data and best practice sharing between governments, ministries and service providers is critical. At the local level, consistent ways of collecting and analysing data using defensible and reliable methods provides the basis for important information including: the number of people experiencing homelessness; factors contributing to their homelessness; their entry into the homeless-serving system; strategies most effective in serving distinct sub-populations (youth, women, men, the Aboriginal Community, LGBTQ, etc.); recidivism rates; and, how resources can be most effectively allocated. Effective data collection and investment in research leads to better information about homelessness and contributes directly to identifying solutions, refining best practices, and informing planning efforts. Sound and current data directly supports efforts to successfully re-house individuals and families experiencing homelessness and allows Service Managers to track progress towards ending homelessness. The Province has a stewardship role to play in ensuring that municipalities across the province are collecting data in consistent ways.

Hamilton's focus on Housing First requires a system of care in which organizations coordinate to ensure that no matter where a client experiencing homelessness comes into contact with the system, he or she is rapidly moved to permanent housing and effectively connected with appropriate supports. Given the number of provincial services accessed by individuals experiencing homelessness (e.g. health care, corrections), a higher degree of coordination between provincial and municipal systems is required.

Coordinated, strategic financial investment is needed to provide emergency response to individuals and families who fall into homelessness and to help re-house these individuals and families – together with the support required to achieve housing stability. Coordinated case management is needed to ensure that provincial institutions (e.g. hospitals, corrections) work with local homeless-serving agencies so that no one is ever discharged into homelessness.

### **Theme 3: Coordinated, Accessible Support Services**

Hamilton acknowledges the Housing First approach as a best practice in ending homelessness. However, when not fully supported, this approach creates some additional local challenges. Housing First providers are expected to broker, liaise and coordinate services for their clients with existing programs in the community. Local challenges arise in connecting people who are experiencing physical or mental health

challenges to community health supports and connecting criminalized homeless men and women to appropriate corrections supports. These are supports primarily administered by different levels of government and Housing First providers would be better able to connect people to these services with additional coordination support from senior levels of government.

Success under the Housing First model depends on addressing the challenge of finding available and affordable housing stock. These challenges would be eased with access to dedicated funding for rent subsidy such as what was successful in the “At Home – Chez Soi” project.

The At Home Chez-Soi project demonstrated that a flexible and comprehensive ‘basket of supports and services’ personally tailored to the individual is successful in Housing First. While the intensive case management model is useful for many, others may benefit from connecting to more specialized case management services, such as an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team.

Hamilton’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy annual program funding allocation of \$4.2M has remained unchanged since 1999. Over the past 16 years, inflationary pressures such as increased wages and costs related to program delivery have had a significant adverse impact on the ability to maximize the positive results from our unchanged allocation. Hamilton is concerned that the government of Canada has no formula in place to measure or address these increased program costs to meet local demand. Hamilton is also concerned the Provincial government has not provided any dedicated funding for Housing First programming.

<b><i>How can the Province, Service Managers, community agencies, and housing providers work to improve Ontario’s supportive housing system?</i></b>
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Ontario’s supportive housing system is underfunded and insufficient to meet the growing need. Additional resources are needed, with the understanding that greater investment in the supportive housing and supports systems will reduce provincial expenditures elsewhere (i.e. health care, corrections, income assistance, etc.).

Investments should be made recognizing that investment in the support services of one ministry can reduce the need for spending in another, such as investments in supportive housing reducing health-related and corrections spending.

Improved coordination and integration of the supports system, defined broadly, is necessary. This includes coordination and role clarification among governments, ministries, Service Managers, community support agencies, and housing providers. The Province could support the necessary coordination and integration work through the provision of forums, collection and dissemination of best practice information (both

programs and improvement of integration), and the standardized collection of data. This section needs to be considered with the housing supply theme. Strategies such as *Living Longer Living Well* and Housing First will only succeed if there is sufficient and appropriate stock available.

Additionally, the provincial government, the healthcare sector and the Local Health Integration Networks need a better understanding of affordable and social housing from which to implement and coordinate aging at home and other programs and services in a way that meets the needs of all.

***What changes would make the system easier to navigate for people? What access and intake systems work best for people with complex needs?***

A system of coordinated intake and access to support services and formalized case conferencing could help ensure the most appropriate (and efficient) supports are provided to each individual. A coordinated intake and access system would facilitate the integration of and case conferencing for housing supports, other community supports, and health sector supports, which is critical to improving access to Ontario's supports systems as well as their efficiency. While many people are underserved, some are overserved because a more appropriate level or type of service is either not available or accessible. Supports are sometimes duplicated by multiple sectors and multiple agencies who do not communicate with one another. Housing, community, and health supports must be coordinated.

A successful initiative in Hamilton that helps people find community assistance is the Social Navigator Program (SNP). It addresses the needs of "at-risk" populations with high levels of police interactions by connecting them with suitable community supports. Clients are considered to be successfully "navigated" once an agency takes the lead on providing support or care, in addition to a reduction in negative police contact. Expansion of this type of initiative would help individuals and families.

***Are there opportunities to encourage innovation and reduce administrative burdens?***

Municipalities and regions need both the flexibility to serve the unique needs of their communities, and the support and structural frameworks to better coordinate and integrate services across agencies and sectors. There are efficiencies to be found in matching the most appropriate supports to the need regardless of which organization or sector identifies the need, but the current structural and funding frameworks do not always encourage coordination and integration.

Discussions about better coordination and integration are occurring in Hamilton, but there are barriers created by the funding and governing structures of the Federal and

Provincial governments. For example, funding for health-related supports is typically separate from funding for other types of supports. Often the same people are supported by a number of different agencies which can lack efficiency. Supports and resources could be provided to municipalities to specifically facilitate coordination and integration processes.

The housing and health systems provide intersecting services for many mutual clients, including frail seniors, persons with physical disabilities, and persons with mental illness and/or addictions. At present, the health, support services and affordable housing sectors are fragmented.

There is no clear mapping of how these systems integrate. While information on retirement homes, supportive housing, long-term care facilities and hospitals can be found, there is no overarching framework that oversees what is currently available, who operates that housing, how it is accessed and how much it costs. One solution is to have all housing related policies, programs and funding currently with Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the Ministry of Community and Social Services centralized with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

<p><b><i>How can we better co-ordinate housing and supportive services?</i></b></p>
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As discussed under the previous questions within this theme.

#### **Theme 4: Evidence and Best Practices**

<p><b><i>What outcomes should social and affordable housing programs focus on achieving?</i></b></p>
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Hamilton's Action Plan already sets out five key outcomes and associated targets. To support the outcomes and targets, 54 specific strategies were developed that have broad social benefit beyond the outcomes and established targets, such as reduced hospital visits, reduction in poverty and household wealth creation. The outcomes and some key targets are outlined below.

*Outcome #1: There is more affordable rental and ownership housing in Hamilton to meet the need and demand.*

- Target: 300 new affordable rental housing units per year.

*Outcome #2: Increase people's housing affordability, stability and choice.*

- Target: Reduction in social housing waitlist by 50% by 2023;
- Target: 2,100 new housing allowances by 2023.

*Outcome #3: People have the individualized supports they need to help them obtain and maintain housing.*

- Target: No one is discharged into a shelter or onto the street from an institutional setting.
- Target: 100% of the social housing providers in Hamilton adopt eviction prevention practices by 2014.

*Outcome #4: People live in housing that is good quality, safe and suitable to their needs.*

- Target: 3,500 residential units are rehabilitated by 2023

*Outcome #5: People receive respectful, quality service within a “user-friendly” system and experience equity in housing.*

- Target: Uncontested eviction hearings decrease to 25% by 2018

There are other important broad outcome areas such as reduction in poverty, a decrease in Ontario Works applications, a decrease in emergency services calls, and a decrease in interactions with police.

<b><i>How can we support Service Managers and housing providers to achieve outcomes?</i></b>
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Hamilton's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan established a number of specific and measurable targets and provided the cost estimates for achieving the targets. Adequate funding by way of a comprehensive and strategic funding plan with senior levels of government is needed for full, effective and meaningful implementation of the strategies within the Action Plan. For example, the goal of adding 300 new rental units per year to the existing rental stock is estimated to cost \$30M annually. Other costs include \$2.5M annually over 10 years to meet the target of establishing 2,100 new housing allowances and \$7M annually to meet the target of rehabilitating 3,500 units of existing housing stock. While the City appreciates Investment in Affordable Housing and Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative funding, it is inadequate to meet targets.

With the addition of the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, came added flexibility for municipalities to administer services and supports. Added flexibility is great – it brings the potential for innovative solutions to old problems but it also means less standardization in service delivery across municipalities. Standardized data collection across the Province could facilitate the collection of evidence and the exchange of best practices for service provision and system integration.

It would be helpful to establish consistent annual targets to address housing affordability such as reductions in the percentage of Ontario tenants spending 30% or more of income on housing and the number of Ontarians in homeless shelters. These could become considerations for all policy decisions the local and provincial level.

***What opportunities exist for sharing housing data with partners and the public?***

A provincial clearing-house of information on best practices in Ontario, such as the role the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation plays in data collection and analysis at the federal level, could promote the development and sharing of evidence-based best practices. This work could be undertaken in house by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing or through a partnership with OMSSA, but any such endeavour would have to be adequately resourced. A major gap is the lack of infrastructure and a single coordinating body tasked with gathering/sharing/comparing information specific for homelessness prevention. Currently, both the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing share these roles.

The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation might have the ability to enhance its data collection and reporting on the secondary rental market such as numbers of units, types of units, condition of units, average rents, and vacancy rates. Municipalities do not have the resources to undertake this level of data collection but this information would greatly enhance municipalities' ability to improve housing supply related policies and strategies.

***How do we enhance service provider capacity to access evidence on best practices?***

To better understand the state of homelessness in Ontario, a major step forward would be the establishment of a standardized data management framework similar to the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) model that has proven to be effective in Calgary. HMIS is an electronic database that collects and securely stores information about the homeless population throughout the full system of care. It allows service providers to better understand people's longitudinal homeless experiences by tracking the services they receive throughout the duration of their homeless episode(s) and enable agencies to better meet clients' needs by improving service co-ordination, determining client outcomes, providing more informed program referrals and reducing their administrative burden. It also yields evidence that supports improved research for evidence-based decision making, such as program design and policy proposals; and

may help shorten the length of time people are homeless by directing them through the system of care more efficiently and with more understanding.<sup>13</sup>

Canada has traditionally measured housing affordability based on the shelter cost to income ratio (STIR) as well as “Core Housing Need” (CHN) which is based on data available in the census. Core housing need captures the number of households who cannot access adequate or suitable housing without spending more than 30 % of income on housing. CHN is reliant on data from the long form census, which for the 2011 census was voluntary for the first time. Since it is difficult to obtain data at the local level, the census data is often used because of its reliability. This gap adds to the existing void in the already limited data and information about housing best practises. We need to collectively advocate for the return of the long form census.

One way to increase access to information about evidence based practices is to participate in research efforts. Hamilton is one of four municipalities that is part of the GTA West Health and Housing Study which is led by Dr. Jim Dunn at McMaster University. The study aims to answer the question, “How does housing affect your health?” It is the first study like this in Canada and it will inform housing policy and program directions. Developing and maintaining such partnerships with local post-secondary institutions or Social and Planning Research Councils will increase the capacity of service providers and service managers to better understand best practices.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://calgaryhomeless.com/what-we-do/oversee-hmis/>, accessed May 28, 2015.