



Hamilton

## INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	July 7, 2022
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Adaptation and Transformation of Services for People Experiencing Homelessness Update 5 (HSC20020(e)) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
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<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

### INFORMATION

The City of Hamilton has expanded its emergency shelter response in the family, women, and men's emergency shelter systems during COVID-19, both with additional beds and support services. While hotels spaces have been a critical resource for the homeless-serving system throughout COVID-19, maintaining the current level of response is financially and operationally unsustainable.

Through COVID-19, Council approved actions responding to immediate and ongoing needs for people experiencing homelessness, utilizing specific Provincial and Federal funding to support, including but not limited to: establishment of isolation services; use of hotel rooms for expanded temporary sheltering, including additional on-site supports; expansion of temporary emergency sheltering options outside of hotels (i.e. FirstOntario Centre, Cathedral, West Ave. and Emma's Place); enhancement of drop-in programs; and, funding of an Indigenous Emerging Needs Fund. Appendix "A" to Report HSC20020(e) outlines the extent to which the emergency shelter system, as well as additional housing and homelessness supports have been expanded during COVID-19 using specific Federal and Provincial COVID support funding sources.

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The elimination of hotel use for emergency shelter spaces is a critical priority as we look to decrease reliance on hotel overflow and look to more person-centered approaches to emergency sheltering that are flexible, agile and adaptable, while also being financially sustainable. Housing Services Division has developed an initial transition strategy to work toward ensuring that the City is no longer reliant on hotels for emergency shelter overflow for more than 30 families (a slight increase from the 25 families supported pre-COVID) as of September 30, 2022 and eliminating hotel overflow for single men and women as of December 31, 2022.

This strategy is equally necessary as the funding sources from provincial and federal levels of government that allowed for this expanded capacity as part of COVID-19 emergency response have ended and the City of Hamilton must right-size shelter capacity while balancing housing priorities along the continuum. Over time, admissions to the expanded hotel spaces will cease and the numbers housed in hotels will decrease over the ensuing months to achieve the goal of decreasing reliance on hotel overflow. These actions remain part of a broader strategy to build evidence-based, adequate and ongoing supports within the homeless-serving system to better meet the needs of Hamiltonians, and include the following actions:

Strategy: Work toward ensuring that the City is no longer reliant on hotels for emergency shelter overflow for more than 30 families as of September 30, 2022 and hotel overflow for single men and women as of December 31, 2022.

System-wide actions - summary:

- placing people in more permanent housing and preventing homelessness by leveraging the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB), Housing Allowances and Rent Ready Program to support single women and men, and families;
- further leverage existing permanent housing supports such as Intensive Case Management (ICM), Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and housing-focused case management at emergency shelters to support permanent housing-focused solutions in hotels and shelters;
- continue to support and bring online more sustainable mid-term emergency sheltering solutions (i.e. Emma's Place, Cathedral and West Ave.);
- as other interventions come online, Housing Services Division will continue to monitor occupancy and gradually decommission spaces in the coming months to work toward the goal of ending emergency hotel overflow operations by the identified target dates;
- consultation and analysis in summer 2022 to determine the most appropriate number of shelter beds resourced in each sector (families, youth, women, men, couples) to reduce and eventually eliminate the reliance on hotels;
- recommending interim solutions as required to enable the development of long-term sustainable shelter system capacity; and,

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- ensure that the unique needs and perspectives of Indigenous community members are incorporated throughout strategy development and implementation.

Lessons learned through pandemic response will continue to inform the ongoing hotel and shelter strategy, including exit from hotel overflow and transition to post-COVID capacity, and include: importance of shelter-built form; the need for additional shelter spaces beyond pre-pandemic levels; unprecedented lengths of stay emphasizing the importance of housing placement support in addition to emergency shelter response; and, the ongoing need to further centre the experiences of people with lived expertise in planning and policy direction.

Housing Services Division will continue to engage sector partners to build out an evidence-based transition plan for Hamilton's emergency shelter system through post-COVID recovery, with interim recommendations to be brought back to Council in August 2022, and an ongoing commitment to evolving the shelter system emerging out of COVID-19 to meet community need. Through this work the cost of safe and appropriate shelter operations will be assessed, with a continued commitment to further local efforts to support Indigenous led solutions to addressing homelessness, as well as the enhancement of gender-specific emergency shelter beds for women, trans-feminine, trans-masculine and non-binary adults.

### **Sector-based strategy overview**

The initial strategy to reduce reliance on emergency shelter hotel overflow includes leveraging the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB), Housing Allowances and Rent Ready Program to support single women, men, and families, as well as through a specific allocation for the Indigenous community that is administered directly through the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (HRIC). In 2022, leveraging these additional supports has resulted in:

- an allocation of \$1.872 M in funding to Hamilton for the COHB, a deep portable rent subsidy, with a minimum of 20% of total allowances (approximately 71 allowances) allocated to Indigenous households, 134 to families, 30 to single women, 30 to single men, 10 to youth, and 50 to additional households on the Access to Housing Waitlist;
- approximately \$488,707 expended to support 264 households through Rent Ready (January to June 2022) for expenses such as first month's rent, last month's rent, rental arrears and/or utility arrears (the program is anticipated to be fully expended by September 1, 2022);
- \$94,336.86 or 31.45% of overall allocation (\$300 K) expended through Rent Ready to support Indigenous households (January to June 2022); and,
- improved coordination of housing support programs through common intake, assessment, and referral practices. This includes bi-weekly case conferencing to convene 23 homeless-serving sector partners around an equitable and transparent

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process for matching individuals experiencing homelessness to housing programs best suited to their needs. From January through May 2022, 551 individuals have been brought forward through the case conferencing process to establish a housing service plan, including: 119 youth, 169 women, 171, men, and 92 families.

Housing Services Division has also identified immediate sector-based actions in order to decrease reliance on hotels and transition to a more sustainable model for emergency sheltering that can be taken in the emergency men, women, and family sectors, which have had the most significant expansion of hotel shelter overflow.

Additional actions for each sector will continue be identified, informed by ongoing community consultation, lived expertise, evidence-based research and best practice, in order to support operational planning efforts through the transition to a more permanent state for the emergency shelter system:

<b>Sector-based actions to support strategy:</b>	
Women's System:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maximizing capacity at the Good Shepherd Cathedral temporary women's shelter to 100 by September 30, 2022;</li> <li>the continuation of Emma's Place (15 beds) until December 31, 2022, while exploring the potential permanency of this shelter; and,</li> <li>continuing to work with Good Shepherd to develop the program model for low barrier housing with supports that will house approximately 73 women, transgender and non-binary community members experiencing homelessness from Hamilton's By-Name List by the end of 2022. This project is funded through the Major Cities Stream of the Federal Rapid Housing Initiative and Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy.</li> </ul>
Men's System:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Services Division is working with sector partners to assess the feasibility of capital improvements to improve shelter-built form and provide enhanced capacity and/or flexibility moving forward;</li> <li>building off lessons learned through the experience of utilizing hotel spaces as emergency shelter, including feedback from residents, Housing Services Division is assessing the potential to include a mix of semi-private and congregate spaces, as well as private transitional rooms, in order to allow for flexibility in shelter-built form to adapt space based on potential pressures;</li> <li>working to support the safe increase of Good Shepherd Mary St. men's shelter occupancy to pre-COVID capacity levels; and,</li> <li>assessing impacts associated with making permanent the previously approved temporary emergency shelter beds to increase permanent capacity in the men's system otherwise offset by hotels.</li> </ul>

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Family System:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• supporting a staged wind down of the hotel overflow program for families by pausing all new intakes and reducing capacity to no more than 30 families by September 30, 2022, as prior to the pandemic the interim family emergency shelter hotel overflow program addressed emerging needs and the number of spaces never exceeded 25;</li><li>• support ongoing family-focused case conferencing in order to match people to housing resources best suited to meet their housing needs and preferences;</li><li>• prioritizing families in shelter and hotel for the COHB, of which there are enough COHB subsidies available to support every family currently in the emergency shelter system;</li><li>• continue to collaborate with CityHousing Hamilton Housing Officers to target households with Special Priority status in hotel overflow and Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters; and,</li><li>• Housing Services Division will continue to advocate to MCCSS in order to attempt to garner additional support for families in our local context.</li></ul>
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**Ongoing consultation**

Housing Services Division staff continue to consult with a range of sector partners on post-pandemic service levels required to meet both the short- and long-term needs of individuals and families at risk of and experiencing homelessness in Hamilton. Through this, collaborative work with local Indigenous leadership continues to be prioritized in order to further develop connections to housing and supports that are culturally appropriate, rooted in the spirit and actions of reconciliation that recognize the values of autonomy and self-determination

Recently, the Housing Services Division convened an Emergency Shelter Coordination Table, created through two facilitated planning sessions on June 16 and 22, 2022. The Emergency Shelter Coordination Table and Coordinated Access governance structure will continue to support transition from emergency response to systems planning.

Housing Services Division has also contracted with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) to support a review of post-pandemic emergency sheltering needs and recommendations, focusing initially on the optimal number of emergency shelter spaces for women, youth, men and families, with options for responding to couples. This process will be informed by data and the expertise of sector partners and will allow for the development of recommendations on size of the emergency shelter system, to be brought forward to Council in August 2022, to strengthen a housing-focused response in Hamilton. Critical to these efforts, beyond the size of the system to

next steps around how the system is shaped and organized, will be the perspective of people with lived expertise.

**Next steps: service system design and planning**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency shelter system in Hamilton was not designed or resourced to ensure a bed was always available and, with the ending of specific pandemic-related response funding sources, this is expected to be the case moving forward. Given the demonstrated level of need within our community, which suggests the need for additional emergency shelter spaces and a review of shelter-built form, it is anticipated that additional emergency shelter capacity beyond pre-COVID service levels will be required in 2023 and beyond.

We remain committed to adapting the emergency system to enable flexibility to meet ongoing needs where possible, while also enhancing prevention, diversion and permanent housing placement supports. Through this, it remains critical that we continue to invest in and enhance a diversity of housing-focused interventions, grounded in a Housing First philosophy and a rights-based approach to housing, in order to shift from emergency response to long-term approaches to ending homelessness.

The creation of the Emergency Shelter Coordination Table and establishment of the Coordinated Access governance structure are both critical elements to support transition from emergency response back to systems planning. This work will be strengthened through a review of emergency shelter operational directives, centred on the vision, core values and shared procedures for the emergency shelter system in Hamilton. Service system design and planning initiatives must be inclusive, while specifically aiming to ensure:

- that the unique needs and perspectives of Indigenous community members are incorporated throughout strategy development and implementation; and,
- consideration of, and response to, the needs of marginalized communities through an explicit commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion that incorporates and includes the expertise, interests and concerns of people or experiences that may not be present in traditional consultation and engagement methods.

Emergency sheltering remains one component of a well-functioning, integrated system of care for people experiencing homelessness, and investments in housing placement support would ideally occur in a 4:1 ratio alongside investment in emergency shelter. Recognizing the impacts of trauma on individuals, families and communities and the complex mental health, addictions, and system involvement background of many individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness, there remains a critical and persistent need to support those experiencing chronic homelessness with complex

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needs through a permanent supportive housing intervention, combining housing, intensive case management and clinical health services. Staff continue to explore strategies and actions to address persistent mental health and additions issues for those seeking emergency shelter and housing supports, while also continuing to advocate for additional investments from other levels of government to adequately support those with complex needs in our community.

Housing Services Division will report back to Council in August on an evidence-based transition plan for Hamilton's emergency shelter system through post-COVID recovery, including post-COVID service levels, with full costing and implementation details, including potential Levy impacts.

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix "A" to Report HSC20020(e): Expanded Homeless-Serving System Interventions During COVID-19