



January 18, 2023

City of Hamilton
71 Main St West
Hamilton, ON
L8P 4Y5
[via email]

ATTN: Emergency & Community Services Committee

RE: Improved shelter crisis response and resourcing of the homeless sector

The Women's Housing Planning Collaborative (WHPC) is urging the Emergency & Community Services Committee and Council to take immediate action to remedy the growing capacity crisis in sheltering options for women, trans, gender-diverse and non-binary people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

As organizations with dedicated service to women's/gender-diverse shelters, drop-ins, and transitional housing, WHPC members have been at the forefront of this crisis, witnessing the often dire consequences women and gender diverse people face when unable to access shelter options and adequate housing. As previously recognized by the City, women and gender diverse people have unique experiences of homelessness, facing severe risks to physical and/or mental and emotional safety as a result of severe weather conditions, violence from intimate partners, acquaintances and strangers, and involvement with the child welfare system. WHPC members are committed to driving forward sector-wide solutions to this crisis, but are unable to do so without adequate investment from the City for both existing services as well as new sheltering and permanent affordable housing options.

Gender-specific shelters, drop-ins, and transitional housing have been consistently operating beyond capacity in an effort to meet service demands, but community need has far outpaced the availability of services. According to the City of Hamilton 2021 Point in Time Count, women, non-binary, and trans and two-spirited people made up approximately 55% of the 545 survey respondents, a notable increase from 34% in 2018¹. Over the past year, WHPC members have observed a steady increase in the average length of stay at shelters as well as a sector-wide decline in successful housing outcomes for service users, meaning far too few people have been able to access safe, affordable, long-term housing solutions.

Chronic staffing shortages have also hindered the sector's ability to effectively respond to the growing crisis. Organizations do not have the financial resources to adequately compensate frontline staff who, in the wake of the drug poisoning crisis and Covid-19 pandemic, have been increasingly called upon in a crisis response capacity and to perform health-care related tasks, including administering the life-saving medication, naloxone, without commensurate wage

¹ City of Hamilton, Housing Services Division. (2022). *City of Hamilton Point in Time Connection Results 2021*. https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/2022-10/PIT-2021-City-of_hamilton-Results.pdf

increases. The consequences of the resulting crisis in recruiting and retaining staff is ultimately borne by service users, as organizations are unable to safely provide the same level of service without sufficient staffing.

WHPC members have previously cautioned the City on the mounting crisis in shelters, drop-ins, and transitional housing supporting women and gender diverse people, and offered both immediate and long-term recommendations towards better meeting community need. However, the City's response continues to fall dangerously short, jeopardizing the safety and security of some of Hamilton's most marginalized community members.

WHPC remains committed to working with the City to develop solutions that meet a spectrum of housing needs, and is calling on the Council and City to prioritize the safety of unhoused women and gender-diverse people by providing adequate resourcing to the services they need, including increased investment in shelters, drop-ins, transitional housing, and permanent affordable housing solutions.

Specifically, WHPC recommends that the Council and City take immediate action to:

1. Increase funding for existing shelters, drop-ins, and transitional housing for women and gender diverse people to address sectoral-wide wage pressures
2. Increase sector-wide investment to allow for an expanded number of shelter and transitional beds and accompanying services for women and gender diverse people to meet immediate community need
3. Invest in long-term, affordable housing options that meet a spectrum of housing needs for women and gender-diverse people, and their children

Sincerely,



Medora Uppal, WHPC Co-Chair

On behalf of:

Good Shepherd Centres Hamilton
Interval House Hamilton
Mission Services of Hamilton
St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton - Womankind Addiction Service
The Elizabeth Fry Society – Hamilton
Wesley – Hamilton
YWCA Hamilton