

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	November 16, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Reaching Home: Canada's Homeless Strategy Community Homelessness Report 2022-23 (HSC21044(a)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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COUNCIL DIRECTION

Not Applicable

INFORMATION

On April 1, 2019 the Federal government launched Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy which replaced the former Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The Reaching Home program is designed to assist local communities achieve a 50% reduction in chronic homelessness by 2028. An individual is considered to be experiencing chronic homelessness if they have experienced at least 6 months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year. In collaboration with the Indigenous community, the City of Hamilton is required to complete an annual Community Homelessness Report. The Community Homelessness Report for 2022-2023 attached as Appendix "A" to Report HSC21044(a), outlines strategies and actions undertaken to fulfil Reaching Home requirements in Hamilton and HSC23076 '2023 Ending Chronic Homelessness Performance Update (Q1 and Q2)' is a companion report that quantifies Hamilton's performance towards reducing and ending homelessness.

Background

The City of Hamilton is committed to building a proactive community-wide approach oriented around ending, rather than managing homelessness. Approved by Council in 2013, and updated in 2020, the City of Hamilton's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan demonstrated Hamilton's commitment to ending homelessness. In 2019, the City

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of Hamilton launched the Coming Together to End Homelessness Systems Planning Framework to outline Hamilton's homelessness ending strategy. Hamilton's strategy to end homelessness is also laid out in the Reaching Home Homelessness Plan 2019-2024. These foundational documents continue to guide collective action and investments in an integrated system.

Under the Reaching Home directives, as the Community Entity, the City, in collaboration with the Coalition of Hamilton Indigenous Leadership, is mandated to achieve 18 core requirements identified in the Community Homelessness Report by operationalizing and pursuing continuous improvement of the 4 following overarching strategies:

- Invest in a continuum of supports towards preventing and ending homelessness
- Develop and implement a Coordinated Access System to ensure that diverse services are organized and delivered in a coordinated manner to advance reductions in homelessness
- Implement a Homelessness Information Management System (shared database) used by all funded homelessness sector partners
- Collaboration with the Indigenous Community Entity to support active participation of all service providers, appropriate culturally sensitive referrals, and advancement of Truth and Reconciliation goals through Coordinated Access.

Highlights in each of these strategies are outlined below.

Invest in a Continuum of Supports Towards Preventing and Ending Homelessness

Hamilton has fulfilled the Federal requirement to run a Call for Applications to facilitate the delivery of Reaching Home funds. Based on the parameters of the Reaching Home funds, the Call for Applications identified programs that, working together, best align to create a homeless-serving system that ensures homelessness is rare, brief, and non-reoccurring. The Call incorporated funding from multiple sources including Reaching Home funding, Provincial Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, and Home for Good funding which maximized available resources in support of Hamilton's Coming Together to End Homelessness Systems Planning Framework (2019). Successful proponents from the Call for Applications were approved by Council on January 16, 2020 (HSC20004).

Programs included within Hamilton's homeless-serving system include Prevention and Diversion, Housing-focused Shelters, Housing Focused Street Outreach, Rapid Rehousing, Transitional Housing, and Intensive Case Management with dedicated programs for women, men, families, youth, and seniors (see Appendix "B" to Report HSC21044(a) for a current list of funded programs). Hamilton continues to invest a minimum 20% of all Federal homelessness program funding into Indigenous-led housing and homelessness response directed through the Indigenous Community

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Entity. A comprehensive range of supports delivered through Indigenous partners include: an Indigenous drop-in, shelter intervention, mobile street outreach, early intervention, and intensive case management. Indigenous Peoples are also prioritized for homelessness supports, including housing, within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous program streams.

In 2022, Hamilton received an enhancement to Reaching Home funding, bringing the 2023-24 Federal Reaching Home funding from \$7,548,553 to \$9,924,878. This increase enabled the City to engage system partners on investment priorities. Partners submitted business cases for program innovations or enhancements to expand impact and reach of the homelessness sector. New Reaching Home investments were leveraged to improve prevention, diversion, and early intervention programs for an estimated reach of 1,910 additional people and enhancements to case management for approximately 273 people supported to find and retain stable housing. Reaching Home program enhancements made in 2022 were outlined in more detail in HSC23021.

Develop and Implement a Coordinated Access System

Coordinated Access represents a community-wide approach to assessing and triaging the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness to effectively identify and connect them with the right range of supports. This helps move from an approach where people are served by single organizations to one of shared accountability as a sector. The goal is to make sure everyone accesses their right to housing as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Coordinated Access is not a program, it is the process through which we work together as a system to streamline the way people experiencing homelessness access housing support services needed to permanently end their homelessness (see Appendix "C" to Report HSC21044(a) for an overview of Hamilton's Coordinated Access process). Hamilton has achieved the core components of Coordinated Access, building on decades of collaboration across the homeless serving sector.

These achievements include:

- Standardizing intake and assessment through common tools and processes.
- Adopting uniform prioritization policies and coordinating referral processes through bi-weekly case conferencing with all sector partners to match people to the right level of supports.
- Working in partnership to ensure Indigenous values and self-determination are embedded in both non-Indigenous and Indigenous-led service streams.

City staff, the Coalition of Hamilton Indigenous Leadership, and partners work iteratively through formal governance tables to continually identify system challenges,

opportunities, and solutions as well as to share learnings and best practices. Core tables include: the Community Advisory Board (Planning Group and Funding Implementation Group), Coordinated Access Steering Committee, Homeless Individuals and Families Information System Super User Group, Homelessness Sector Check-in Table, and case conferencing with each sub-sector.

Homelessness Information Management System (shared database)

Hamilton is in the process of implementing a comprehensive Data Reporting Improvement Plan. This plan aims to improve data entry across all programs, upgrade the quality of homelessness information management system software, establish an annual reporting cycle with system-wide key performance indicators. As of October 2023, Hamilton now shares information across 26 different programs within our homeless-serving system in real-time through our shared database (Homeless Individuals and Families Information System - HIFIS).

For a detailed description of Hamilton's Homelessness Information Management System and Data Reporting Plan, see the companion report HSC23076 '2023 Ending Chronic Homelessness Performance Update (Q1 and Q2)'

Collaboration with the Indigenous Community Entity

Addressing Indigenous homelessness in Hamilton requires collaborating with and taking direction from urban Indigenous community leadership. Our collaboration with urban Indigenous leadership spans investment decisions, strategic planning, policy development, and service delivery.

Through several years of intentional relationship building, the City, through the Housing Services Division maintains strong working relationships with Indigenous organizations working in partnership towards ending homelessness. In January 2023, the Coalition of Hamilton Indigenous Leadership and the City of Hamilton were selected by the Federal government, as one of eight communities in Canada, to lead an Action Research on Chronic Homelessness project. The focus of Hamilton's project is to build an Indigenous Cultural Capacity and Accountability Framework for Hamilton's coordinated access system. This project builds on existing community strengths and nationally recognized leadership to further develop structures, tools, and relationships necessary to strengthen shared commitment and action to Truth and Reconciliation through Hamilton's homeless-serving system. This project formally launched in October 2023 and runs through March 2025.

It is important to note that historical funding inequities, housing affordability, discrimination, resource, and capacity limitations impact Indigenous-led solutions and

homelessness reduction goals. These conditions underscore the value and necessity of coordination, partnership, and effective use of resources.

Summary of Hamilton's Progress on Achieving Community Outcomes

Communities across Canada, including Hamilton, continue to see rising numbers of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the face of extremely high housing costs, ongoing disproportionate resources and limited culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous communities, inadequate social assistance, opioid poisoning, worsening mental health crises, strained health system resources, and an increase in refugees accessing the shelter system. Given the range of complex and systemic drivers of homelessness, a coordinated continuum of support programs alone is insufficient to end the crisis of homelessness in any community. It is essential that programmatic supports for individuals experiencing homelessness are embedded within a broader strategy at all levels of government to address the undersupply of affordable housing as well as integration across systems to coordinate supports.

In spite of these challenges, having core components of Coordinated Access firmly in place (common assessment, established referral policies, data-sharing) has facilitated coordination among partners and enabled important successes. Highlights of 2022-23 include:

- Approximately 3,000 people were prevented from experiencing homelessness. Prevention programs include a range of supports, including: temporary and flexible financial benefits, legal and counselling support to prevent evictions, referrals to community resources, financial problem-solving and tax support to access benefits.
- Where homelessness could not be prevented, 4,037 people accessed Hamilton's Homeless-serving system in 2022, with 3,096 individuals spending at least one night in an emergency shelter, 272 interacted with Housing Focused Street Outreach, and 976 were served through drop-in programs to meet basic needs and get connected to housing resources and support.
- In 2022, Hamilton's homeless-serving system worked in collaboration to support 429 households in applying for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit to secure permanent Rent-Geared-to-Income housing.
- Case management programs funded through Reaching home collectively offered 1,193 caseload spaces across Intensive Case Management (347), Rapid Rehousing (676), and Transitional Housing (170) supports. These programs work with people along their housing journey to access and secure appropriate housing and to establish the resources and supports needed to sustain it.
- The City continues to pursue resources to enable direct access to permanent supportive housing for people with complex needs. Efforts include advocacy to the Provincial government as well as health sector partnerships to establish new models of supportive housing. The City has also invested in capital and program

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funding for 73 units of supportive housing for women and gender diverse individuals. The Dorothy Day Centre opened in May 2023 with 15% of referrals made through Indigenous programs.

- Case management enhancements in 2022-23 included a pilot of integrated clinical health supports within the Intensive Case Management program for women, youth, and families. Within four months this program saw increased well-being for clients and staff, improved housing stability, and reduced emergency service usage. While this program was only eligible under Reaching Home through the end of March 2023, the City has committed to sustaining it for another year with Provincial funding in order to demonstrate outcomes and seek long-term funding sources. This is a model that all housing support programs have advocated for over the past three years. This program helps meet the growing complexity of mental and physical health needs that are imposing barriers for people to access stable housing and contributing to staff burnout.

Report HSC23076 '2023 Ending Chronic Homelessness Performance Update (Q1 and Q2)' quantifies Hamilton's performance towards reducing and ending homelessness. The performance measurement framework outlined in that report also represents a significant milestone in capturing reliable data to inform ongoing monitoring and system improvements.

Next Steps

Housing Services Division and the Coalition of Hamilton's Indigenous Leadership are committed to ongoing review and continuous improvement of programs and integration of supports across Hamilton's homeless-serving system. An important goal of 2023-24 is to strengthen alignment and shared resources with adjacent support systems, including health, community services, and connections with affordable housing through the Housing Sustainability Investment Roadmap and Housing and Homelessness Action Plan.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report HSC21044(a): Community Homelessness Report, 2022-23

Appendix "B" to Report HSC21044(a): Overview of Funded Homelessness Support Programs

Appendix "C" to Report HSC21044(a): Hamilton's Coordinated Access Process