

**Region of Waterloo**  
**Community Services**  
**Housing Services**

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**To:** Community and Health Services Committee  
**Meeting Date:** April 9, 2024  
**Report Title:** The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report

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**1. Recommendation**

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo adopt the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report as the official plan to prevent, address, and end homelessness in Waterloo Region as outlined in report CSD-HOU-24-006 dated April 9, 2024.

And that the Regional Municipality of Waterloo direct staff to develop a comprehensive funding and advocacy strategy based on the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Actions outlined in report CSD-HOU-24-006 and deliver it to Council as part of the 2025 Regional Budget process.

**2. Purpose / Issue:**

The purpose of this Report is to deliver the Final Report of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, *Navigating Complexity Together: A Roadmap to Functional Zero by 2030*, to Regional Council to serve as the Region’s official plan to prevent, address, and end chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region.

**3. Strategic Plan:**

This report supports the following strategic priorities: Homes for All, Equitable Services & Opportunities, and Resilient and Future Ready Organization in the Region’s newly approved Corporate Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

- Under Homes for All, we will eliminate chronic homelessness and reliance on traditional emergency shelter models. This includes the launch of a Whole of Community Approach to implement the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, and to partner with community organizations to deliver quality services to our region’s most vulnerable residents.
- Under Equitable Services and Opportunities, we will explore new models of service through community collaboration and partnerships. This includes finding new ways to partner with community organizations to improve service delivery

and developing advocacy plans that support new investments in equitable service delivery. Key performance indicators include an increase in engagement with equity-deserving groups, and new funding to support investments in equitable service delivery.

- Under Resilient and Future Ready Organization, we explore new service models and partnerships to achieve fiscal resilience and better service. This includes supporting staff and the community to drive service transformation that is culturally appropriate, safe and inclusive through co-design, data-driven decision-making, innovative digital tools, and other ways of knowing. Key performance indicators include increase in satisfaction with service experience.

#### 4. Report Highlights:

- The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report, *Navigating Complexity Together: A Roadmap to Functional Zero by 2030*, attached as Appendix A, summarizes and outlines the co-created strategic focus areas and related action items to prevent, address, and end chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region and are outlined below:
  - The number of people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region is unprecedented. Chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region has been increasing at an average growth rate of 28% year over year since 2020 and since January 2020, chronic homelessness in the region has increased by 129%. If this trend continues, the community will have triple the number of residents experiencing chronic homelessness by 2028. This growing community concern and crisis requires immediate community-wide action to shift the trajectory of chronic homelessness.
  - Development of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (PECH) has been underway since early 2023 and the approach used was to develop it in community, by community, and for community. The Plan outlines seven strategic Focus Areas that were established by the community-led and driven co-creator group. These Focus Areas were used to develop the 30 PECH Actions in the Final Report (Appendix A) and the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Actions – Consolidated List (Appendix B).
    - Appendix C outlines and details the Lived Expertise Working Group's Calls to Action, which are attached as a For Information Report.
  - The Plan, in 2024, will establish a Whole of Community Leadership Model that includes Lived Experts, Equity-Owed Groups, System Leaders, and ROW Staff. The goal of establishing community-driven system leadership is

to disseminate system decision-making power to increase transparency and trust and responsibility to ensure that the system is built to respond properly to the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

- The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Investment Plan and Strategy outlines the level of investment required from all levels of government, private and public sector, and system partners (health, mental health and addictions, justice, etc.) to address, prevent, and end chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region by 2030. The Plan details the importance of shifting investments to more permanent solutions rather than emergency-based and reactive responses to homelessness.
  - Preventing, addressing, and ending chronic homelessness is a shared responsibility of all levels of government and both private- and not-for-profit sectors as well as the community as a whole.

## **5. Background:**

The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report is the culmination of more than a year and half of collaborative planning to renew and deepen the local commitment to homelessness prevention. This Plan, and Final Report, were developed in community, by community, and for community. The Final Report details 30 Actions developed by Co-Creators and the Lived Expertise Working Group to prevent, address, and end chronic homelessness.

The Final Report was co-created by more than 40 organizations committed to addressing and ending chronic homelessness. This unprecedented community collaborative process highlights the deep commitment to achieving homes for all in Waterloo Region. While the Final Report marks the end of one community-driven process, it also marks the beginning of a new and challenging community-led process as the community begins to implement the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Actions.

### **Framing the Problem and Historical Context**

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region is unprecedented. Chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region has been increasing at an average growth rate of 28% year over year since 2020 and since January 2020, chronic homelessness in the region has increased by 129%. If this trend continues, the community will have triple the number of residents experiencing chronic homelessness by 2028.

- In February 2024, there were 558 individuals on the Prioritized Access to Housing Supports (PATHS) List, the by-name list of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in Waterloo region. The average number of days

individuals on the PATHS list have been without permanent and safe housing is 1,403 days (3 years 8 months).

- 12% of all chronically homeless individuals on the PATHS list identify as Indigenous. This is an overrepresentation of Indigenous people experiencing chronic homelessness as they make up 1.7% of the total population of Waterloo Region.
- Alarming, youth homelessness is on the rise across Waterloo Region, signalling the need for preventative, upstream strategies. Youth shelters are frequently at capacity and participants are as young as 12 years old. A recent survey from Children and Youth Planning Table showed 13% of youth respondents were experiencing homelessness in 2023.

The current homelessness and affordable housing crisis is a result, in part, due to the retrenchment of both the federal and provincial government's response and approach to community housing, affordable housing development, and homelessness prevention in the 1970s and 1980s. Increasingly, the Region of Waterloo in their role as Regional Government and Designated Service System Manager, is supplementing the lack of investment from other levels of government with the property tax levy. This is an unsustainable use of municipal tax levy dollars and incongruent with the intentionality of this funding source compared to provincial and federal sources.

The current system is not designed or adequately resourced to address the increase in numbers of individuals (volume) requiring support or the increased complexity of needs that individuals have—specifically, those who are precariously housed or experiencing hidden homelessness and those who require deeply therapeutic and supportive housing. In addition, the system must address the lack of lived expertise and equity focus in policy, decision-making, and service-delivery in order to better align with the needs of the diverse community of Waterloo Region and those experiencing homelessness.

### **Development of The Plan and Final Report, Focus Areas, and Actions**

The Plan outlines seven strategic Focus Areas that were developed by the co-creator group. These Focus Areas were used to develop the 30 Actions in the Plan Final Report (Appendix A), which are also found in the Consolidated List of Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Calls to Action (Appendix B).

These Focus Areas are:

1. Create Policy and System Accountability
2. Centre Community Voices
3. Build System Bridges

4. Advance Equitable Housing
5. Focus on Preventing Homelessness
6. Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness
7. Advocate and Collaborate for Broader Change

The Focus Areas and Actions emphasize collaborative, integrative, and preventative strategies in addressing homelessness and housing stability. In addition, the centering of lived and living expertise is critical in the work of developing the Final Report and will be the focus in the implementation work to follow.

One of the key Actions outlined in the Final Report is the development and implementation of an All of Community Approach, which will enhance and emphasize the role of community organizations, leaders, and lived experts in decision-making. The focus of this approach is to create an integrated, inclusive, adaptive, responsive and sustainable ecosystem across the Housing Stability System and community as a whole.

The Lived Expertise Working Group worked alongside the co-creator group to review Focus Areas and Actions and provide invaluable feedback and reflections to the broader work of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. In addition to providing feedback to the Final Report, the Lived Expertise Working Group developed a standalone For Information Report, which is included as Appendix C. This Final Prototyping Report brings forward the voices of Lived and Living Expertise. An important note to consider when reviewing the Lived Expertise Final Prototyping Report is that this standalone For Information document is to be viewed as complimentary to the Final Report but, Council is not being asked to adopt the Actions outlined in Appendix C.

Recognizing homelessness is an equity issue, the PECH Actions and implementation work will prioritize and centre the voices of communities and individuals who are not reflected currently in the Housing Stability System. Homelessness is experienced differently by equity-deserving groups and as such strategies, programs, and housing options must reflect the unique needs identified by these groups themselves.

Critical in this new model, is increasing data-driven decision-making and creating a quality data strategy that focuses on KPIs, predictive modeling and system outcomes. This includes intentional work related to disaggregated data to better understand homelessness trends related to equity-owed populations and strengthening advocacy efforts when collaborating with key system partners (healthcare, mental health and addictions, etc.).

### **The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Investment Plan and Strategy**

To respond to the growing homelessness and affordable housing crisis, the Region of

Waterloo is directing unprecedented investments towards programs, supports, and capital projects to meet the needs across the community. In 2024, the Region will invest more than \$245M into Affordable Housing and Homelessness, from all sources. Of this, 23 per cent is directed towards homelessness and supportive housing programs.

Between 2019 and 2024, the Region has increased municipal tax levy and reserve investment in this critical housing and homelessness service area from \$42M to approximately \$99M, signalling a deep and historic commitment to achieving homes for all in Waterloo Region. This level of municipal commitment to homelessness and affordable housing is unique when compared to other Regional Governments and System Service Managers in Ontario.

To achieve an end to chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region, a deepening of commitment and engagement is needed from all levels of government, public and private sector, and key system partners (healthcare, mental health and addictions, justice, etc.). This shared community challenge is not to be owned or solved by one order of government in isolation.

In 2024, \$56M is being invested into homelessness and supportive housing programs by the Region, a local commitment that cannot be overstated. Despite this significant and encouraging commitment and investment into the local Housing Stability System, currently the majority of funding is dedicated towards reactive and emergency-based responses as the local crisis of homelessness continues to rise at alarming rates. The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness sets out to shift the collective focus towards permanent housing outcomes and upstream interventions so the significant investments being made into the system have a greater return on investment and, most importantly, create permanent housing outcomes for the most vulnerable residents of Waterloo Region.

Staff will be using the PECH Investment Plan to develop specific municipal budget requests and/or service expansions that are within scope and reasonable given current municipal commitments to address, preventing, and ending homelessness. In addition, Staff will create an advocacy strategy to be used to advocate to other levels of government, sectors, and public and private sector partners to address the significant investment required to address this significant challenge. Both these areas of work will be presented to council in Fall 2024 as part of the 2025 budget planning process.

## **6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public**

**Area Municipalities:** Recognizing that preventing, addressing, and ending homelessness in Waterloo region is a shared value and mission felt by all area municipalities, engagement with area municipalities was both integral and critical in the development of The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. Area municipality engagement

started with a pop-up booth at the All Councils meeting on June 23, 2023 to gather input from Regional and area municipality councils. As the project continued through the engagement phase dedicated engagement sessions were facilitated for area municipality staff, and a project update was provided to Regional council and area municipalities through email as outlined in CSD-HOU-23-024. In addition, engagement sessions were held for specific area municipalities in March 2024.

**Public:** The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness was supported by an unprecedented level of public engagement. The PECH was created in community, by community, and for community. For more than one year, the PECH has been co-created by a group of committed leaders from a wide array of community organizations from across the region. The PECH content, including Strategic Focus Areas and related Action Items, were co-created by this broad system leadership group.

As outlined in CSD-HOU-23-024, to support the community engagement phase, a multi-channel communications campaign launched at the end of June 2023 and was open for five weeks. Broad messaging encouraged residents to “Join the conversation”, “Share your voice,” and participate in community engagement activities. The EngageWR project webpage served as a landing page for all traffic. Communication efforts resulted in over 850 social media engagements, 4,000 website visits, and an 80 percent e-news open rate.

In addition, the PECH was supported by the Lived Expertise Working Group. This group of lived experts met for more than one year to develop prototypes to support enhanced integration of lived expertise into the development of this broad systems change document and related Action Items and ensured the centring of lived expertise and community voices. Lived Expertise is deeply incorporated in the work of the PECH development through the direct involvement of people impacted by homelessness and marginalization. Included For Information as Appendix C, is the Final Prototyping Report developed by the Lived Expertise Working Group.

## **7. Financial Implications:**

The 2024 Homelessness Operating Budget of \$56M includes an incremental \$10.2M for the PECH, with \$7M funded from the property tax levy and \$3.2M funded from the Tax Stabilization Reserve. This includes a \$3M capital investment of which \$1.5M is funded from the Homelessness Prevention Reserve and \$1.5M from the Strategic Investment and Affordable Housing Reserve.

It is estimated that a total capital investment in emergency shelter, transitional housing and supportive housing of \$110M will be required. Operating expenditure increases of approximately \$5M - \$8M annually for the next six years in order to fully implement the

Plan can be expected. The range will depend on the extent and nature of capital financing costs required.

Subject to Council approval, staff will develop a funding, capital financing and advocacy strategy to be included in the Preliminary 2025 Budget, which will include some combination of tax levy funding, financial support from community partners, and any subsidy secured from senior levels of government where advocacy efforts are successful.

## **8. Conclusion / Next Steps:**

The Final Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Report is the culmination of deep, collective community-based work to respond to a growing crisis. The Final Report does not end the collective work of preventing, addressing, and ending chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region. Rather, this is the beginning of a renewed collective focus to create Homes for All for our community's most vulnerable residents. Staff, Co-Creators, and the community more generally are committed to the work ahead and are deeply encouraged and motivated to begin the work of implementing the Plan.

## **9. Attachments:**

**Appendix A:** The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Final Report: *Navigating Complexity Together: A Roadmap to Functional Zero by 2030*

**Appendix B:** The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Actions – Consolidated List

**Appendix C:** Lived Expertise Final Prototyping Report (For Information)

**Appendix D:** The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Presentation

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THE PLAN TO END CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

# Navigating Complexity Together

## A Roadmap to Functional Zero

### by 2030

Waterloo Region  
April 2024

**The Plan**  
to End Chronic  
Homelessness

**IN COMMUNITY,  
BY COMMUNITY,  
FOR COMMUNITY.**  
#ThePlanWR

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# Reading the PECH

This plan is a compilation of content developed by co-contributors including members of the Lived Expertise Prototyping Working Group, members of the Co-Creator Group, and members of the project team. It is rooted in extensive Community Engagement completed during the summer and fall of 2023 and the ongoing work of the Co-Creator Group and Lived Experts Prototyping Cohort.

## Key Report Contributors

### Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Co-Creator Group

Made up of system leaders, service staff and representatives from equity-owed groups. This group grew throughout our process as more members of the community found out about our work and as we developed relationships with key interest-holders through our work

### Lived Experts Prototyping Cohort

Lived Expertise Prototyping is an ongoing process to integrate the experience and wisdom of lived experts into Waterloo Regional operations. This process has been facilitated by the Social Development Centre through 2023 and will continue to the end of 2024.

**Black left margin bar identifies plan content that include Lived Expertise Prototyping Cohort voice.**

## Report Authors



### Region of Waterloo

The Region of Waterloo serves with caring and responsible public service, engages by listening and responding to community needs, and inspires by conducting business with openness to enhance public trust and confidence.



### Social Develop Centre Waterloo Region

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region is a learning organization that supports all voices in creation of community wide solutions ensuring that lived experience is the basis for collective action.



### Overlap Associates

Overlap Associates is a local design consultancy that puts people at the centre of our work and your solutions. Overlap works with organizations of all sizes on problems that matter most to them.

# Co-Creator Membership and Community Support for the PECH

"If we could go back and do it differently,  
emphasize the interlinkages between  
organizations and systems" —Engagement Participant

## PECH Co-Creator Membership

ACCKWA- Housing stability outreach Cambridge	oneROOF Youth Services
Compass Refugee Centre	Porchlight Counselling and Addiction Services
Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness	Probation and Parole
Cambridge Shelter Corp	Ray of Hope
Camino Wellbeing & Mental Health	ROW-Community Services
Cambridge and North Dumfries Ontario Health Team	ROW-Public Health
Canadian Mental Health Association	Sanguen Health Centre
Coalition of Muslim Women	Safe Haven Lutherwood Youth Shelter
Community Care Concepts	Services and Housing in the Province (SHIP)
Community Healthcaring KW	Social Development Centre Waterloo Region
Community Justice Initiatives	Sunbeam Community & Developmental Services
Developmental Services Ontario	Somali Canadian Association of Waterloo
Developmental Services Planning & Advisory Council	The Working Centre
Eviction Prevention (Social Development Centre WR)	The Rural Upstream Collaborative-Engage Rural
Healing of the Seven Generations	Traverse Independence
House of Friendship	Waterloo Region Integrated Drugs Strategy

Immigration Partnership	YWCA -Cambridge
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Marillac Place Women's Shelter	
<b>Community Partners Who Support the Plan</b>	
Langs	Supportive Housing of Waterloo



# Introduction

# Introduction

The Region of Waterloo’s Vision Statement outlines an aspirational future state—*A compassionate community that cares for all people, stewards the land for future generations and where everyone has the opportunity to live a good life.* The work of bringing about this future state is deeply rooted in our efforts to end chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region.

The intention of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (The PECH) is to detail our collective journey to this end goal. **And yet, there is urgency and complexity that cannot be fully expressed in this document**—the depth of human suffering in our community; the need for frank public discourse about the harms of criminalization of the unsheltered (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024); the impacts of the mental health and addiction crisis gripping a growing number of our families, friends and neighbours; and the tangible ways our collective values and apathy perpetuate the cycle of dehumanization (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024) of those who need our care. The urgency and complexity of responding to this challenge means that defining what is in scope or out of scope of the PECH is a difficult task.

Here lies a key tension emerging from our work of creating the PECH—the stated ask and desired outcome from Regional Council, an action plan outlining tangible steps to achieve functional zero chronic homelessness, does not align fully with the stated needs from the community. Community and Lived Experts have highlighted that ending chronic homelessness will require:

- A focus on process rather than product/outcome (the “how” is equally as important as the “what”)
- Recognizing and naming failures and harms caused by contributing systems in our society (including colonialism, the financialization of housing, criminalization of homelessness) (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- It is critical to address the current gaps in service provision and intervene at different levels of systems—branches, trunk and roots—for transformative change within the structures and power systems that maintain the problems (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

**Stated clearly, reaching functional zero chronic homelessness will require significant system transformation beyond simply increasing the same supports that we currently have in place and will require examining systems, incentives, values and mindsets that may seem tangential to the problem of homelessness. The magnitude of the complexities and challenges is beyond the mandate of The Region of Waterloo to solve. The macro forces that have led to the current homelessness crisis must be addressed through collective action. Action that is supported by the**

**broader local community, Area Municipalities and through increased investments from Provincial and Federal governments.**

The resulting Plan to End Chronic Homelessness is a living document infused with the voices of our community and Lived Experts and lays out our proposed approach to achieving functional zero homelessness in Waterloo Region by 2030.

Through our broad community engagement and co-design process it became clear that if we hope to end chronic homelessness we must transform the Housing Stability System to be:

- **Responsive**—allow community voices—including Lived Expertise and Equity-Owed Groups—to drive our decisions (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- **Sustainable**—creating system supports to staffing that addresses capacity, recruitment/retention, training, mental health supports and wellness
- **Integrated**—more efficient and aligned within the sector and with other sectors including but not limited to health, justice, social & disability services, children & youth services and other related service systems
- **Inclusive**—it must be person-centred, ensuring that individuals no matter their circumstance (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024) can access services
- **Adaptive**—expand our current continuum of supports and resources to match the current and future needs of our community. We must take proactive, predictive and preventative action to address the changing demographic of homelessness

**Our vision for system transformation is a Housing Stability System that is an integrated, inclusive, adaptive, responsive and sustainable ecosystem.** The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness articulates how **working in community, by community, for community** will strengthen relationships and build a shared ownership of solutions.

## Methodology and Discussion of Process

Our core intention to co-create The Plan is part of what makes this journey different.

Our aim remains to create a plan that is driven by community identified needs, gaps, and solutions. We will continue to do this by working “in community, by community, for community”.

We are committed to these ways of working:

- Shared solutions and implementation
- Centering the voices of those most impacted
- Transformational relationships and trust building
- Inclusive community engagement

At the outset of this work there were two parallel processes—The SDCWR Lived Expertise Prototyping Cohort and the Overlap-led work to produce The Plan. The

intention of these two processes was the centering of lived expertise and creating time and space for their interpretation and wisdom to influence our process, outcomes and to begin the process of developing meaningful relationships.

This council report is supported by two separate reports/planning documents as for consideration by Regional Council. These reports are separate, but linked, and are intended to highlight the differences in the approach and perspectives between Lived Experts and the more system/politically influenced plan.

Lived Experts have provided input on several key features of our plan including definitions, the analogy and imagery of the Tree as a representation of our problem and solution spaces, Strategic Focus Areas and Actions.

The Plan took shape over the course of monthly Co-Creator Roundtables starting in June of 2023. Co-Creators worked to synthesize engagement data, shape the Strategic Focus Areas and generate Actions. The Actions in this document were summarized from upwards of one hundred projects and initiatives identified by Lived Experts and Co-Creators. These projects and initiatives were summarized for the benefit of the reader as they were highly technical and numerous. The 30 Actions currently living in the document give a tangible overview of the work that will take place to bring about our system vision and reaching our end goal of functional zero homelessness by 2030. The intention is to further explore, prioritize and implement actions based on this original list of projects.

## **Framing the Lived Experts Prototyping Process and Attached Report**

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region (SDC) is a core partner on the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. From this partnership, the Prototyping Process was developed to centre the voices of Lived Experts and innovate solutions with Regional Staff and other interest-holders.

The Prototyping Process began in March 2023 with an initial cohort of representatives from the Lived Expertise Working Group, the People's Action Group, Regional Staff, SDC staff, and outreach workers. This cohort developed a model of communication and collaboration to make prototyping possible. They also conducted Participatory Action Research with current residents in unsheltered communities. From these conversations, they developed language and models about the problem space such as the Tree metaphor at the centre of the PECH. At the end of this initial phase, five areas of further prototyping were identified.

The Cohort has since expanded to over 30 representatives, including Lived Experts, mutual aid group representatives, advocacy group representatives, agency representatives, and an expanded group of Regional and City staff. The Prototyping

Process currently is slated to continue to the end of 2024 with recommendations on how to embed the principles of lived expertise, collaboration and learning in the ongoing work of the Region.

Members of the cohort met intensively for two months to develop the report calls to action included in the appendix. This report includes key terms, legal context for a human rights approach, and 30 calls to action for consideration. The report has deeply informed the development of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.

The partnership with Lived Experts and the Social Development Centre Prototyping Process has added tremendous value and insight into the PECH and the process of creating it.

We have worked throughout the process to create meaningful moments of cross-pollination between the two streams of work. We recognize that these efforts have been successful and yet there is a large amount of work to do to continue building relationships and trust between lived experts, grassroots organizations, advocates and ROW staff and leadership.

Our collaboration has also illuminated the existing contrasting opinions about the approach to ending chronic homelessness in the Region. The attached report—created by Lived Experts—is an example of the differing perspectives and a view of the contrast between the groups. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

# Definitions

# Definitions

We have included a definitions section as clear and consistent language is an important part of the process of finding common understanding as a community. And we acknowledge that language is ever evolving, different groups use different definitions and part of the work is to continually evolve these alongside communities.

- **Accessibility**—Specific features incorporated by design with the goal to reduce or remove barriers to participation or enjoyment by all people. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- **Adequate Housing**—Housing that meets the legal standards for security of tenure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, availability of services, location and cultural appropriateness. In the absence of such, the right to housing is not met. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- **Chronic Homelessness**—Refers to individuals who are currently experiencing visible and hidden homelessness AND who meet at least 1 of the following criteria:
  - they have a total of at least 6 months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year
  - they have recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past 3 years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days)

(*Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy Directives*, 2023)
- **Deeply Therapeutic Housing**—is housing designed to provide support for people with the highest levels of acuity. This includes but is not limited to individuals with significant complex substance use, concurrent mental health needs or who are otherwise medically fragile and are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, or who are considered inadequately housed. This type of supportive housing is a gap in our system identified through community engagement and by lived experts and co-creators. The gap is emerging as our current system is not adequately addressing the needs of people who are deeply unwell. ([Supportive Addiction & Mental Health Housing \(SAMH\), n.d.](#))
- **Equity-owed groups**—These are groups that experience systemic oppression, marginalization, and discrimination often due to the legacies of colonization, slavery, and imperialism. These groups include but are not limited to those who are Black (African and Caribbean diaspora), Two-spirit and Indigenous Peoples

(First Nations, Inuit and Métis), and communities racialized as non-white; persons identifying with a disability/disability communities; members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities; women, trans, and femme-presenting people; and those living in rural areas. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

- **Functional Zero (0)**—A community has reached functional zero (0) of any type of homelessness when the number of people experiencing homelessness is zero, or if not zero, then either 3 or .1% of the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a by-name list, whichever is greater, and sustained for 3 consecutive months. (*Built for Zero Canada Functional Zero Homelessness Question and Answer Document, 2021*)



Figure 1. Built for Zero Definition of Functional Zero Chronic Homelessness

- **Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS 4)**—Developed by the Government of Canada, HIFIS is a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) that is designed to support the day-to-day operational activities of Canadian homelessness service providers. As a comprehensive data collection and case management system, HIFIS enables participating service providers within the same community to access, collect, and share local real-time homelessness data to ensure individuals and families accessing services are prioritized and referred to appropriate services at the correct time.
- **Homelessness**—Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the



immediate prospect, means and ability to acquire it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

- **Human Rights Approach**—People experiencing homelessness are treated as rights holders, where their agency is respected, and where the Region has a duty of care for their housing needs. Region will be compliant with national and international human rights law and ensure it is appropriately prioritized amidst other legal obligations such as those regarding property rights, privacy and liability. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- **Housing First (HF)** Is based in a human rights framework and has two primary components: **housing and support**. It is not housing only.
  - **Housing:** participants are provided access to housing of choice in the community—facilitated by portable rent supplements—that is no more than 30% of their income.
  - **Support:** access to wrap around addiction/mental health supports, intensive case management and other supports aimed at promoting housing stability, recovery, community integration, and achievement of life goals.
    - Housing First is driven by 3 key principles:
      - consumer choice and self-determination
      - recovery (treatment focused)
      - community integration (physically, psychologically and socially).
    - Housing First is an empowerment approach in which the consumer is viewed as the expert on his/her experiences and aspirations; it is critical to begin by asking consumers where they want to live.
    - Recovery is a treatment orientation that refers to a participant's journey of growth and self-improvement in the direction of achieving life satisfaction.
    - The third principle is community integration. Whereas people with mental illness, who are homeless, often experience segregation, exclusion, and stigma. The goal is to help people become physically, psychologically, and socially integrated in the community.

(Dr. Geoffrey Nelson, Department of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, n.d.)

- **Housing Stability System (HSS)**—The Region of Waterloo is the provincially-designated Service Manager for Housing and Homelessness. In this role, the Region is responsible for program planning, service delivery, distribution of resources, and quality assurance of housing-first services that help people find and maintain permanent housing; this network of services is known as the HSS. The HSS supports individuals and families across Waterloo Region who are experiencing homelessness, at immediate risk of homelessness, and in the recovery stages from homelessness.
- **Indigenous Homelessness**—“Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships” (Thistle, 2017; see also (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012). (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- **Prioritized Access to Housing Supports (PATHS)**— A Coordinated Access System (Coordinated Access) is a systems-level approach for addressing homelessness that provides a consistent way to assess, prioritize and connect people experiencing homelessness to Region-funded housing and supports. Locally, this is referred to as the Prioritized Access to Housing Supports (PATHS) Process.
  - PATHS Process Overview
  - The PATHS process includes four main steps:
    - People experiencing homelessness are assessed for eligibility at defined access points across the system, using a common assessment tool.
    - If people are eligible, they join the PATHS List. The next step is to get offer-ready with support from PATHS Partners (Service Providers that help people to move forward with their Housing Plan while they wait) and Service Navigators (on the PATHS Team).
    - Once offer-ready, people are matched with a housing support vacancy and prioritized for an offer.

- In the final step, Housing Liaisons (on the PATHS Team) support people to transition to their new home.



**“Everybody needs and  
deserves a safe place,  
it's a human right.”**

—ENGAGEMENT PARTICIPANT

# Framing the Problem

# Framing the Problem

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region is unprecedented. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness has risen in numbers and visibility. In the 2021 PiT (Point in Time) count, the Region found that more than 1,000 individuals were experiencing homelessness with over 500 of those individuals estimated to be experiencing chronic homelessness or homelessness for longer than six months.

Chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region has been increasing at an average growth rate of 28% year over year since 2020. Since January 2020, chronic homelessness in the region has increased by 129%. The unprecedented growth in homelessness is compounding existing difficulties both for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and for the services within the system.

In September of 2023, in collaboration with our Co-Creator Group and the Social Development Centre (SDC) Prototype cohort, the PECH Core Team produced a [Key Findings Report](#). This report is an in depth exploration of the problem space rooted in community engagement findings, secondary research and analysis of current system data. Please refer to the report for further context.

## The High-Level Problems we seek to address

- **The current system is not designed (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024) or adequately resourced to address the increase in numbers of individuals (volume) requiring support or the increased complexity of needs that individuals have**
- **Current system leadership and governance approaches are undermining our community's ability to respond to the issue of homelessness.** The current structure of siloed and hierarchical decision-making is creating a lack of transparency and trust within the Housing Stability System and the broader community
- **Lack of Lived Expertise and Equity focus is creating system responses that do not align with the needs of the community and is actively causing harm**—systems need to sense and see themselves (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024) in order for change to occur.
- The Province and the Federal government's retrenchment of building community housing in the 70's and 80's has led to reliance on the private market which has driven a **hyper-financialized capitalist model of housing. Increased housing**

**costs are reducing access to housing for broad groups of our population.**  
(LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

- The prevalence of **mental health and substance addiction alongside the unprecedented crisis of drug poisonings** playing out in our community are intricately tied to the rise in and deepening complexity of experiences of homelessness
- There has been a long-standing issue of unequal access to services and support for individuals who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness in rural and township areas. To access the necessary support, individuals are often required to leave their rural communities and travel to urban centers, which can result in a loss of important community connections and **an increase in demand for urban-based services**. It is important to leverage the supports and services that exist in the rural areas to develop (co-create) a made-in-rural solution.
- The **face of homelessness is changing** (diversity , intersectionality)—This mix of factors is broadening the percentage of our community that is precariously housed, hidden homelessness, and housed in non-market options. This is giving us a skewed perspective of the causes of homelessness and those experiencing it in our communities. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- **There is an increase in people living in encampments**. This trend highlights the growing rate of homelessness and—among many other factors—points to a shortfall in shelter capacity and accessibility, as well as barriers to securing permanent housing. (*Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)*, 2023) (Turner, 2023)

## Key Numbers to Quantify the Problem

Chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region has been increasing at an average growth rate of 28% year over year since 2020. Since January 2020, chronic homelessness in the region has increased by 129%.

- If the 28% annual increase in chronic homelessness continues, the community will have triple the number of residents experiencing chronic homelessness by 2028.
  - As of February 2024, there are 558 individuals on the Prioritized Access to Housing Supports (PATHS) List.
  - The average number of days individuals on the PATHS list have been without permanent and safe housing is 1,403 days (3 years 8 months).

- 12% of all chronically homeless individuals on the PATHS list identify as Indigenous. This is an overrepresentation of Indigenous people experiencing chronic homelessness as they make up 1.7% of the total population of Waterloo Region.
- The supportive housing program across fixed-site and scattered options has a current capacity to support approximately 570 individuals.
- In 2024, approximately \$56 million will be invested into the local homelessness system in various service areas (outreach, prevention, shelter, supportive housing, etc.). Based on current state and future trends, this investment is not keeping pace with the growing need for additional supports to end chronic homelessness.
- Up to 70% of the folks experiencing homelessness or who are precariously housed have screened positive with the HELPs Screener as having an acquired brain injury (ABI) with similar trends in other regions. Often brain injury in the homeless population goes undiagnosed. It is not unusual for addictions and mental health issues to also be factors that impact their ability to maintain housing and also mask brain injury symptoms. Not only do these people require a specialized brain injury worker but additionally, wrap around supports offering all three areas of specialty through an integrated team approach.
- Youth homelessness is on the rise.
  - A recent survey from Children and Youth Planning Table showed 13% of youth respondents were experiencing homelessness (13% of 1867 respondents = 243 youth) in 2023 (*2023 CYPT DATA BRIEF, 2024*)
  - Youth shelters are frequently at capacity and are supporting individuals 12-18 years old. There has been a 20% increase from the previous two years.

## Quotes and Stories Behind the Statistics

These statistics fold out into real living stories from valued neighbours in our community. These experiences represent a history of our systems level failures and the frustration and harm unchallenged systems bring. They also act as motivation and a call for change.

“Some guy beat me up on the street. Yeah, I was in the hospital because of it... I died a few times...Meantime my landlord, he got rid of everything in my apartment and I lost my rent geared to income housing and I ended up



discharged from the hospital and driven to the shelter. “ — Project Willow  
Interview Participant

“ I slept in the parking garage across the street because I wanted to make  
the statement that I do have nowhere to go. And I’m not going back to a  
building that I’ve been raped in. “ — Project Willow Interview Participant

“ You do not know how much actual physical, emotional and financial  
trauma that each one of us have gone through before we’ve even been  
able to have the strength and the courage to walk through these doors.  
Okay, because unless you’ve been through it yourself, then you don’t know  
it. “ — Project Willow Interview Participant


“ Why do we need to wait for someone to be on fire before we give them a  
hose? “ —PECH Engagement Participant

“ The ability to address the mental health and trauma pieces in which lead  
women to addictions and homelessness in the first place is something I  
have always believed to be at the forefront of being a piece of the shelter  
system. Housing, the safety in which one feels when they don’t have to be  
wet and unsafe on the street is only the tiniest fraction of being able to offer  
support to women in this community. A piece of the solution, is addressing  
the fragility of the client in which accesses services. “ — Project Willow Survey  
participant

“ There are no real safe places in the community “ — Project Willow Survey  
Participant



# Key Plan Elements



“Homelessness will never disappear without getting to the root causes.”

—ENGAGEMENT PARTICIPANT

# Key Plan Elements

**End Goal**—To reach functional zero chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region by 2030.

**Vision for System Transformation**—To transform the Housing Stability System to be an responsive, sustainable, integrated, inclusive and adaptive ecosystem.

**System Interventions**—These are major changes we are proposing to the Housing Stability System to bring about our vision

**Strategic Focus Areas**—Large categories of work / activity to bring about our system interventions. These describe the broad areas of work within the PECH.

**Actions**—Clear projects, initiatives or achievements we will work toward that align with one or more Strategic Focus Areas.

**Measurable Outcomes and KPIs**—Outcomes of our Focus Areas that will show us we are make progress towards implementing our system interventions

**Investment Strategy**—strategic investments to stabilize the current system and transform the system.

**Change Management Approach**—These are principles, tactics and methods we will use to bring about our desired vision for system transformation.

# System Overview for Ending Chronic Homelessness

This diagram represents how the PECH will transform the Housing Stability System to End Chronic Homelessness.

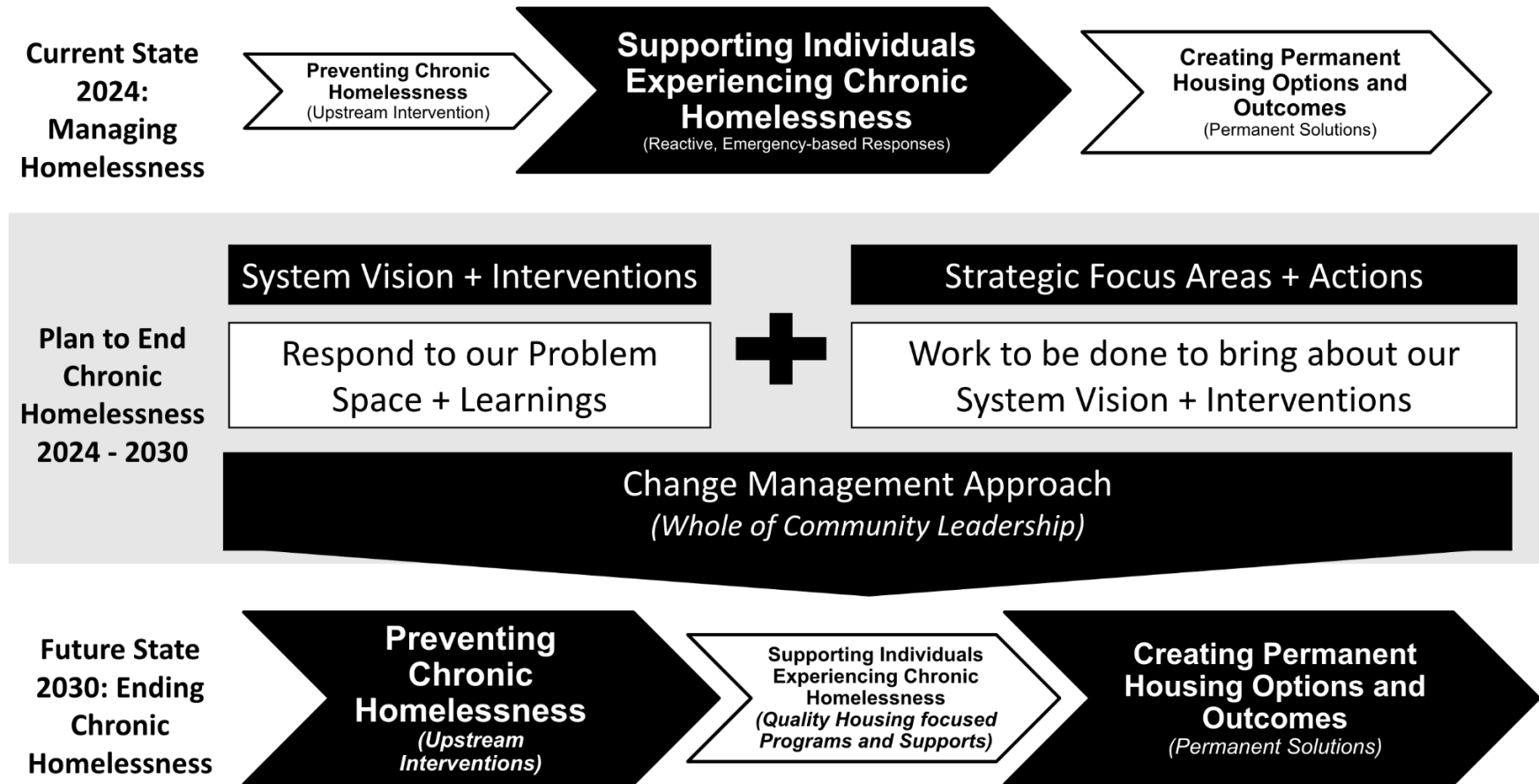


Figure 2. System Overview for Ending Chronic Homelessness

# Inside The Plan—PECH High-Level Structure

## Vision for System Transformation:

Housing Stability System that is a responsive, sustainable, integrated, inclusive and adaptive ecosystem

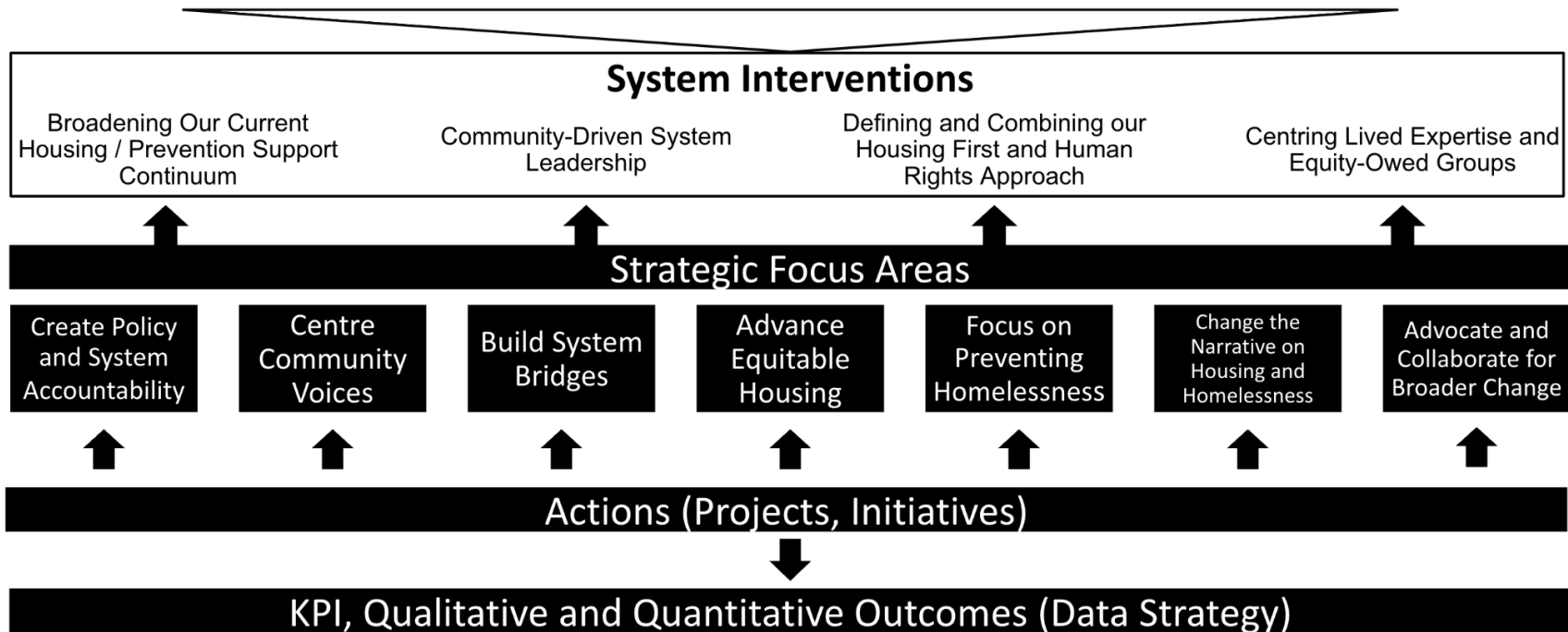



Figure 3. Inside the Plan—PECH High-Level Structure



# Our Vision for Housing Stability System Transformation



# Our Vision for Housing Stability System Transformation

We will reach functional zero chronic homelessness by 2030 by transforming the Housing Stability System to be a **responsive, sustainable, integrated, inclusive and adaptive ecosystem**.

To accomplish this transformation and resulting end goal we must intervene at different levels of our systems and communities. We must respond quickly and over the short-term to "branch-level issues" to reduce immediate suffering in our community and we must do our best to address the "root causes of homelessness" to transform the system over time.

To do this Co-Creators and Lived Experts have pointed to key shifts that we hope will transform the system. These "interventions" are proposed in direct response to our learnings from community engagement and environmental scanning.

# Mapping the Problem Space to Our Solutions

## The Tree Analogy

Early in the process of developing the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, Lived Experts introduced the analogy / imagery of a tree to describe the causes of homelessness in our community. To properly transform our system and end chronic homelessness we must intervene at different levels of our systems and communities—if we do not we will continue to be in a reactionary state, using downstream fixes for upstream issues. For example: focusing exclusively on the branches results in reactive and short-lived actions. While solutions at the branches level are required, they cannot be the only solutions implemented, otherwise we will perpetuate the status quo. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

This tree analogy has since been central throughout the Lived Experts Prototyping and broader plan development process. It now acts as a framework for us to align our Problem Space and Solution Space directly:

# Problem Space and System Interventions

## Problem Space Our Learnings

The current system is not designed or adequately resourced to address the increase in numbers of individuals (volume) requiring support or the increased complexity of needs that individuals have—specifically, those who are precariously housed or experiencing hidden homelessness and those who require deeply therapeutic and supportive housing.

The current structure of siloed and hierarchical decision-making is creating a lack of transparency and trust within the Housing Stability System and the broader community.

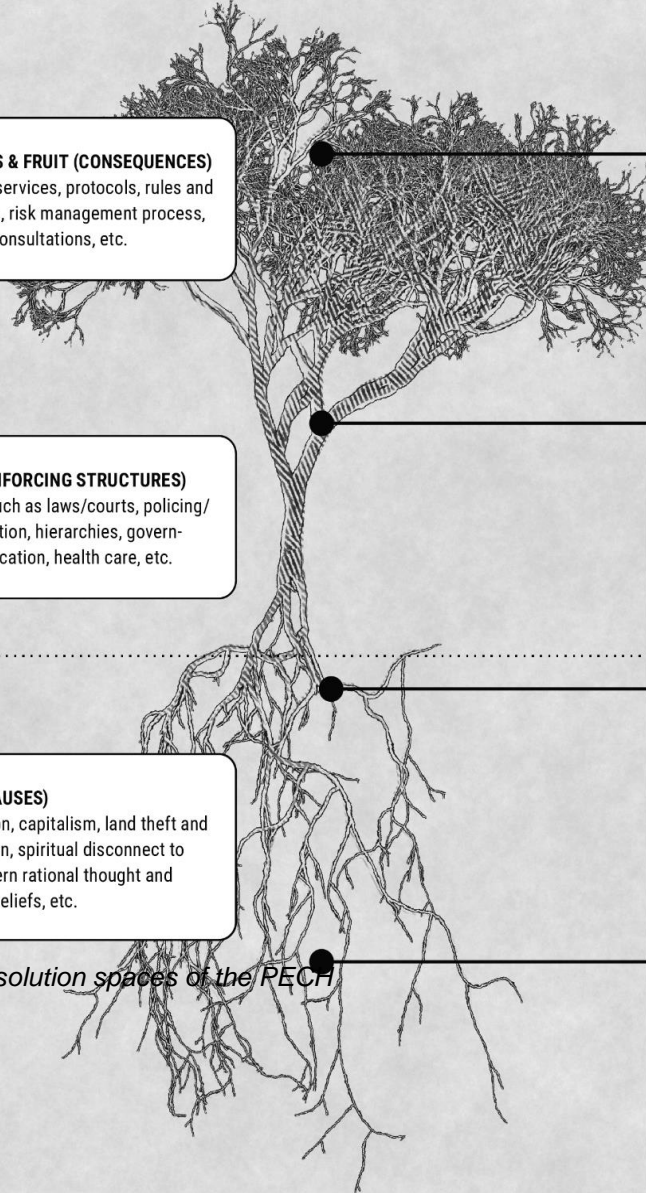
Lack of Lived Expertise and Equity Focus is creating system responses that do not align with the needs of the community and is actively causing harm—systems need to sense and see themselves in order for change to occur.

The Province and the Federal government's retrenchment of building community housing in the 70's and 80's based on the 'rental model' which has driven a hyper-financialized capitalist model of housing. Increased housing costs are reducing access to housing for broad groups of our population.

**BRANCHES & FRUIT (CONSEQUENCES)**  
Access to services, protocols, rules and regulations, risk management process, research, consultations, etc.

**TRUNK (ENFORCING STRUCTURES)**  
Systems such as laws/courts, policing/criminalization, hierarchies, governments, education, health care, etc.

**ROOTS (CAUSES)**  
Colonization, capitalism, land theft and privatization, spiritual disconnect to land, Western rational thought and dogmatic beliefs, etc.



## Solution Space Interventions for Transformation

**Broadening Our Current Housing / Prevention Support Continuum**  
Increased capacity at all levels of current continuum + Broadening the continuum to support deeper level of complexity and to prevent people from falling rapidly into homelessness reducing access to housing for broad groups of our population.

**Community-Driven System Leadership**  
Establishing a Whole of Community Governance Model that will include Lived Experts, Equity Deserving Groups, System Leaders, ROW Staff. Disseminating system decision-making power to increase transparency, accountability and trust.

**Centring Lived Expertise and Equity-Owed Groups**  
Through this the system will better see itself, avoid future mistakes and be better equipped to acknowledge ongoing trauma, loss and death. Striving for Restoration, Reconciliation.

**Defining and Combining our Housing First and Human Rights Approaches**  
Human Rights needs to be a building block of our community approach to housing—alongside Housing First—and should drive our empathy, action and advocacy.

Figure 4: Tree Analogy depicting the problem and solution spaces of the PECH

# Interventions for System Transformation

Responding directly to our articulation of the Problem(s) Lived Experts and Co-Creators identified four (4) High-level System Interventions.

1. Broadening Our Current Housing / Prevention Support Continuum
2. Community-Driven System Leadership
3. Centring Lived Expertise and Equity-Owed Groups
4. Define and Combine our Housing First and Human-Rights Approaches

(LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

These interventions also interact and support each other in different ways. For example, Intervention 1 is outcome driven (the “what”) and meant to react quickly with resources to address current service gaps in the system. However, this continuum of needed housing and supports will shift over time alongside our population and system environment. Interventions 2, 3 and 4 are process-driven (the “how”) and are the methods we use to continuously update and implement in alignment with changing needs in our community.

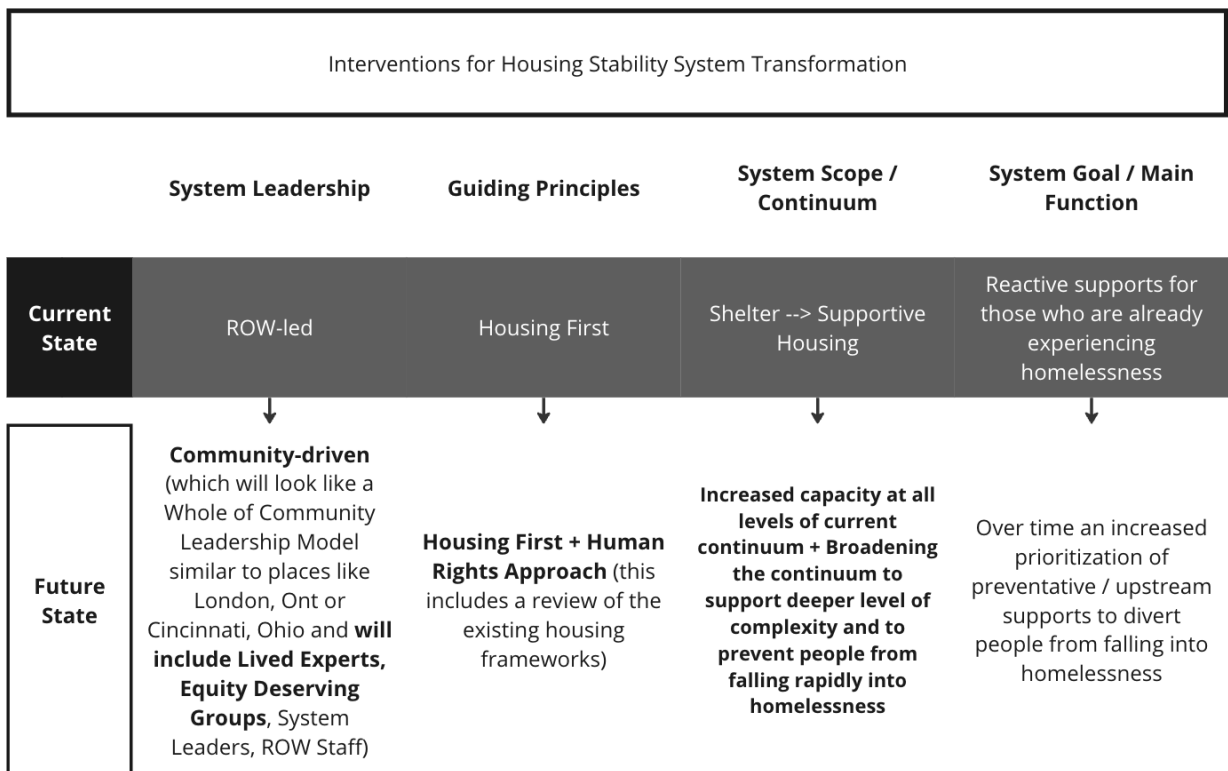


Figure 5. Current State and Future State of Interventions for Housing Stability System Transformation

## Intervention 1: Broadening Our Current Housing / Prevention Support Continuum

We will increase capacity at all levels of current housing continuum and we will broaden the continuum to support deeper levels of complexity and to prevent people from falling rapidly into homelessness.

### Housing Continuum



Figure 6. Housing Continuum

### Prevention and Supports Continuum



Figure 7. Prevention and Supports Continuum

“If we can’t fix whatever led them to homelessness, we aren’t going to solve it” –

Engagement Participant

## Intervention 2: Community-Driven System Leadership

We will establish a Whole of Community Leadership Model that includes Lived Experts, Equity-Owed groups, service providers, system leaders, area municipalities and ROW Staff. The goal of establishing community-driven system leadership is to disseminate system decision-making power to increase transparency and trust and responsibility to ensure that the system is built to be accountable to the needs of those experiencing homelessness. We will follow and learn from examples of other communities who have taken a similar approach including London (Ontario), Edmonton (Alberta), and Cincinnati (USA).

We envision this Whole of Community Leadership Model to be built around key governance tables. This new structure would have decision-making power over the implementation of the PECH. The Model will also work toward an integrated systems planning approach. The role of the Region as the Service System Manager remains, but would move from singularly driving these decisions to collaborating and supporting—working alongside the new leadership tables to guide PECH implementation. As diagrammed below, PECH Implementation will be centred on the work of System Interventions and Strategic Focus Area Recommendations. *Also see page 44 - 62 for more details.*



Figure 8. Community-Driven System Leadership Diagram

We are recommending that from April to December of 2024 PECH Co-Creators along with the SDC Prototyping Cohort work to design and implement this Model (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024). This will include activities such as creating a member Terms of Reference, developing policy and procedure for model operation, etc.

**Situating the PECH**

The creation of the Whole of Community Leadership Table will allow us to better intersect and coordinate with other sectors and the system planning table. It will be important to have representation from the following groups to ensure we are creating opportunities for enhanced system integration.

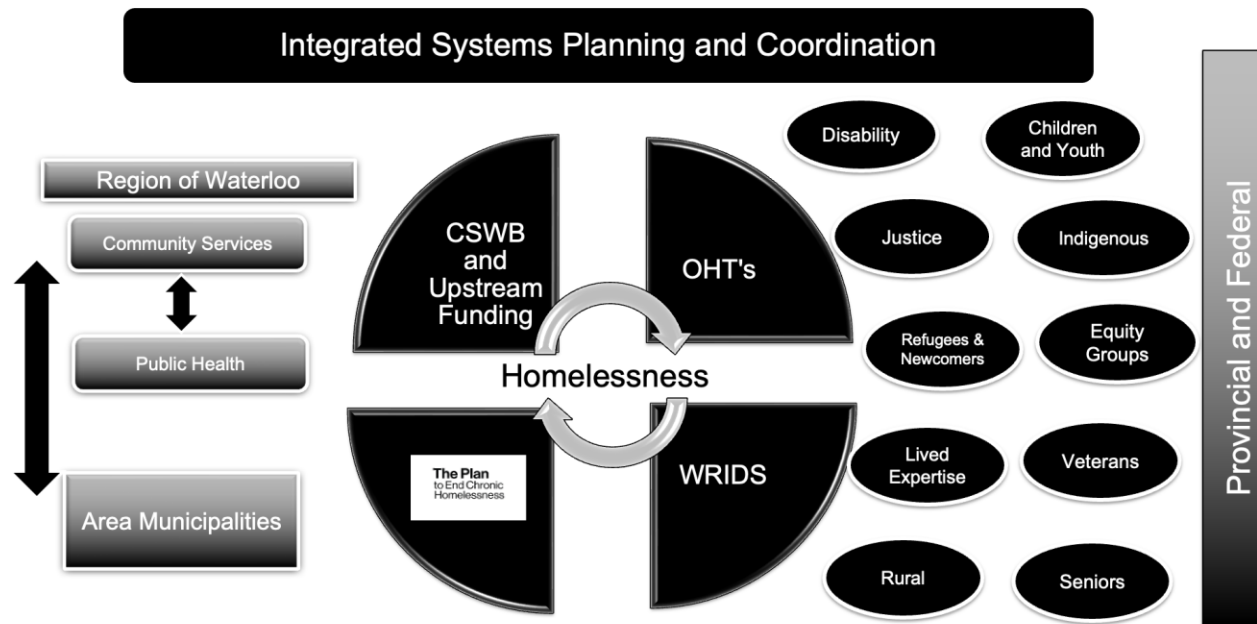


Figure 9. Whole of Systems Coordination Diagram

*“Last time implementation was driven by the Region, power dynamics became an issue.”* —

Engagement Participant

### Intervention 3: Centring Lived Expertise and Equity-Owed Groups

Through this intervention, “the system will better see itself”, avoid future mistakes and be better equipped to acknowledge ongoing trauma, loss and death (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024). There is deep work to do to restore trust with those who have been marginalized. As well, there is acknowledgement that the system must do better with community members of Indigenous, racialized and intersectional groups where reconciliation and equity is owing in order to have systems of support and resources that go further to move towards an equitable and inclusive whole of community. We will do these through a variety of methods including:



Figure 10. Ways we will centre Lived Expertise and Equity-Owed Groups

**“Listen to lived experience.”** —Engagement Participant



## Intervention 4: Defining and Combining our Housing First and Human Rights approaches

Human Rights needs to be a building block of our community approach to housing (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)—alongside Housing First—and should drive our empathy, action and advocacy. **It is important to note that we are not moving away from a Housing First approach, but updating it to match our current context.**

The SDC Lived Experts Prototyping Cohort has defined our Human Rights approach as:

*People experiencing homelessness are treated as rights holders, where their agency is respected, and where the Region has a duty of care for their housing needs. Region will be compliant with national and international human rights law and ensure it is appropriately prioritized amidst other legal obligations such as those regarding property rights, privacy and liability. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)*

There is work to be done as the PECH is implemented and as the Whole of Community Governance Leadership Model is established to validate this and integrate it with our existing Housing First principles.

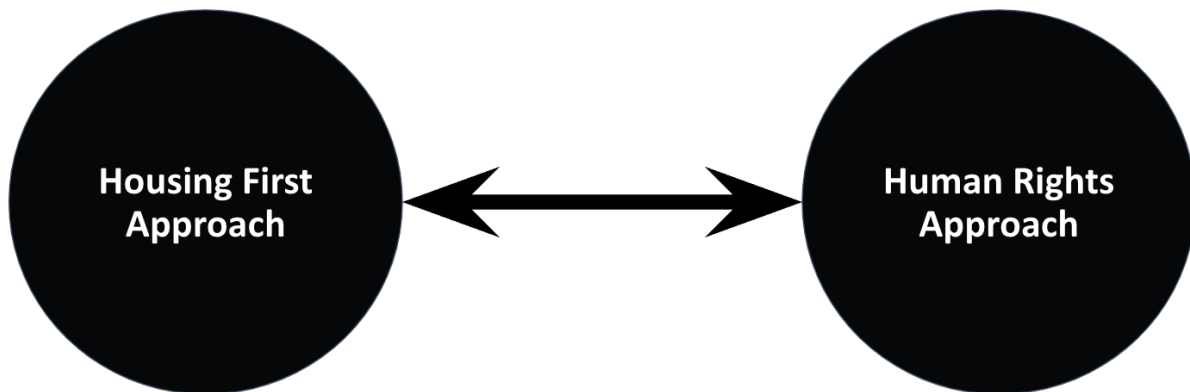


Figure 11. Housing First Approach Integration with Human Rights Approach Diagram

*“To say we’re a Housing First community is ringing less-and-less true given the lack of wrap-around health supports that are inherent to the model and critical to its*

*success.” —Engagement Participant*

# Strategic Focus Areas

# Strategic Focus Areas

The below high-level PECH Focus Areas are in *draft form*. They emerged from our collaborative sense-making activities (of our Community Engagement and Needs Analysis) with the Co-Creator Group in August of 2023 and have been refined several times since. These Focus Areas were used as categories to ideate PECH Actions—tangible initiatives that the PECH will outline.

- Create Policy and System Accountability
- Centre Community Voices
- Build System Bridges
- Advance Equitable Housing
- Focus on Preventing Homelessness
- Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness
- Advocate and Collaborate for Broader Change

## How our Strategic Focus Areas Support our System Interventions

The PECH Strategic Focus Areas, underlying Actions provide tangible descriptions of the work of implementing our High-Level System Interventions. The chart below illustrates how the work of the Strategic Focus Areas advance each for the System Interventions. Black dots indicate where the work of each Focus Area contributes to bringing about each of the System Interventions.

High-Level System Interventions	Strategic Focus Areas						
	Large categories of work / activity within the Plan						
	<b>Create Policy and System Accountability</b>	<b>CENTRE COMMUNITY VOICES</b>	<b>BUILD SYSTEM BRIDGES</b>	<b>ADVANCE EQUITABLE HOUSING</b>	<b>FOCUS ON PREVENTING HOMELESSNES</b>	<b>CHANGE THE NARRATIVE ON HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS</b>	<b>Advocate and Collaborate for Broader Change</b>
Strengthen Policy and System Accountability within the HSS and with Adjacent Sectors	Centre Lived Expertise, Racial Justice, Social Justice and shift power relationships	Increase and Broaden Collaboration Within the Homelessness System and with Adjacent Sectors	Create a Variety of Housing to Meet Diverse Needs	Address Both Economic and Social-Economic Causes of Chronic Homelessness	Foster a Shared Community Response	Coordinate our advocacy efforts to bring about broader changes	
Broadening Our Current Housing/Support Continuum	●		●	●	●		●
Community-Driven System Leadership	●	●	●		●	●	●
Applying an Intersectional Human Rights Lens to all system attributes	●	●		●	●	●	
Centring Lived Expertise and Equity-Deserving Groups	●	●	●		●	●	●

Figure 12. How each PECH Focus Area contributes to the System Interventions

# Focus Area #1: Create Policy and System Accountability

## Strengthen Policy and System Accountability within the HSS and with Adjacent Sectors

We will review and update current HSS programs, policies and frameworks. This work will be facilitated by the Service System Manager in collaboration with the Whole of Community Leadership structure and will be ongoing as the PECH is implemented. This work will include ensuring policies and frameworks are integrated with our Housing First and Human Rights approach, applying a gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) lens to homelessness prevention policy, establishing Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) specific strategies and Indigenous-focused reconciliation strategies. There will also be a focus on creating frameworks and MOUs with other systems (i.e. health, justice, etc).

### Summary:

- Revise Homelessness & Supportive Housing Frameworks to align with Housing First and Housing as a Human Right principles, emphasizing cultural competency, anti-oppression, and GBA+ lenses.
- Implement a housing-focused Street Outreach Framework and Human Rights Based Approach encampment response protocol to aid those experiencing unsheltered homelessness (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024).
- Apply an intersectional GBA+ lens to homelessness prevention policies, targeting equitable housing outcomes for women and gender-diverse individuals.
- Expand the Coordinated Access System (PATHS) to improve integration between critical system partnerships, enhancing service pathways, connections, and permanent housing outcomes. Launch a Housing Stability System Data Strategy to monitor progress and establish data-informed decision-making processes.

# Focus Area #2: Centre Community Voices

## Centre Lived Expertise, Racial Justice, Social Justice and shift power relationships

We will centre community voices by shifting roles, ownership, and accountability in the HSS. This is more than an “amplification” of voices as that suggests we are maintaining systems of oppression—we need to completely redesign how we include interest-holders in this work. Advancing a Whole of Community approach, where lived/living expertise of chronic homelessness, racial equity, and social justice are central in decision-making, funding choices, and policy creation, will ensure the homelessness system will be culturally competent, inclusive, and proactive in addressing systemic harm. For this to succeed, traditional power holders also need to let power transfer to others. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

### Summary:

- Establish All of Community Leadership Table to oversee chronic homelessness plan implementation.
- Develop Lived Expertise process with regional representation for policy review. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Create partnerships, strategies, and funding streams specific to REDI to enhance equitable homelessness response supports and initiatives.
- Expand partnerships and networks to include Black, Indigenous, and Racialized groups, as well as other marginalized communities with intersecting systemic challenges.
- Implement annual funding for community organizations addressing homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

# Focus Area #3: Build System Bridges

## Increase and Broaden Collaboration Within the Homelessness System and with Adjacent Sectors

We will establish greater system collaboration and integration—within and with other sectors including healthcare, justice, rural, income support and other social determinants of health serving systems. Silos are barriers to access—by welcoming and encouraging more collaboration, we can explore and reduce the duplicity of work and barriers to access to enhance system navigability. This means resourcing and advocating for partnerships in the implementation of the PECH to implement trauma-informed and harm-reduction (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024) solutions that respond to the intersections between the drug and housing crises.

**Summary:**

- Identify surplus/underutilized land for housing, and partner with municipalities, nonprofits, faith-based groups, and postsecondary institutions to create more housing options and address homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Integrate health and homelessness services to coordinate efforts with local health system partners to enhance care integration, involving Ontario Health Teams, Public Health, hospitals, mental health providers, and community health programs.
- Support newcomers experiencing homelessness by aligning initiatives with resettlement organizations to provide support for newcomers facing homelessness across the region. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)



# Focus Area #4: Advance Equitable Housing

## Create a Variety of Housing to Meet Diverse Needs

We will create more variety and quantity of housing offerings that respond to a spectrum of needs—developing an HSS that is accessible and responsive to all including Indigenous led and equity-owed groups. This includes increasing the quantity of our current shelter, transitional housing and supportive housing stock. This is about getting creative with how we create quality housing options for our community—such as repurposing and re-habiting municipal or local structures, developing social enterprises, and establishing community land trusts.

**Summary:**

- Develop Seniors Strategy within PECH, and collaborate on Rural Homelessness and Veteran homelessness initiatives.
- Increasing supportive housing to address the highest complexity of substance use and concurrent mental health needs. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Building capacity for Indigenous and equity-owed groups to respond to the needs of their communities in a culturally appropriate approach. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

# Focus Area #5: Focus on Preventing Homelessness

## Address Both Economic and Social-Economic Causes of Chronic Homelessness

We will address the root causes of homelessness by being preventative and viewing those experiencing homelessness as a whole person (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024). By focusing on upstream action with key populations such as youth, seniors, veterans, newcomers, students, Indigenous people, those who are gender-diverse and those who identify with a disability we aim to prevent experiences of homelessness. Our goal is to shift the main focus of the HSS from reactive with emergency supports to providing preventative and proactive services and programs.

### Summary:

- Partner with municipalities for policies and programs to preserve affordable housing and promote development, reducing chronic homelessness inflow.
- Strengthen eviction prevention via enhanced rent bank and rapid rehousing, aiming for significant inflow reduction.
- Establish a Youth Strategy to address homeless youth needs and prevent future generations' homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Expand multi-service housing hubs for universal access to support and public space availability for people experiencing homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

# Focus Area #6: Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness

## Foster a Shared Community Response

We will change the narrative and increase community empathy and spirit regarding homelessness inequities. This includes a narrative of shared responsibility and action, and a recognition of the many community members of our community currently supporting this shift in narrative and contributing to solutions. Deepening public understanding and providing ways for individuals to see themselves as part of a community approach to ending chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region will create trust, transparency, accountability, and dispel myths and misconceptions about poverty and experiences of chronic homelessness (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)—this about is the social change required to support our goal of systemic transformation.

### Summary:

- Launch comprehensive public engagement and education initiative targeting partners, government, businesses, and residents to raise awareness of homelessness challenges and responses. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Implement robust Housing Stability System Data Strategy to track progress on ending chronic homelessness, inform decision-making, and support advocacy efforts. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

# Focus Area #7: Advocate and Collaborate for Broader Change

## Coordinate our advocacy efforts to influence broader changes

We will combine our advocacy efforts within our community to secure resources and policy changes needed to achieve our goal. To do this we must present a united and coordinated advocacy strategy (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024), which includes working more closely with Area Municipalities, agencies, faith-based organizations and grassroots advocates. Homelessness is a problem that requires alignment with and support from other levels of government—advocating and collaborating strategically will allow us to affect broader change.

### Summary:

- Forge partnerships with schools, universities, and colleges to involve academics in housing strategy development under the Whole of Community Leadership Model. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Integrate PECH activities with local addiction and harm reduction initiatives for holistic support to homeless individuals. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Create and execute an advocacy plan to enhance multi-tiered responses to chronic homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

# Actions

# Actions

Our 30 PECH Actions are clear projects, initiatives, and/or achievements we will work toward. Each Action aligns with one or more Strategic Focus Areas. Below we have grouped Actions by the Focus Group they most strongly align with; however, a key feature of the resiliency and flexibility of our PECH is that progress toward any one Action moves us forward toward multiple Strategic Focus Areas.

**It is imperative that these actions be reviewed with an understanding that further work to prioritize them and assign system accountability is necessary and still to come. No one organization, sector, or level of government can solve the crisis of homelessness in isolation. As such, accountability for leading these actions will lie with community organizations, all three levels of government, civil society, and the community leadership table.**

## Create Policy and System Accountability

- 1.1 Revise current Homelessness & Supportive Housing Frameworks to ensure all Housing Stability System programs/services operate according to Housing First and Housing as a Human Right principles, cultural competency, anti-oppression, gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) lenses and ensure that equity and reconciliation are centred within all system frameworks. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 1.2 Implement a housing-focused Street Outreach Framework and a Human Rights Based Approach encampment response protocol (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024) to better support people living rough/experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- 1.3 Apply an intersectional gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) lens to homelessness prevention policy and strategies to ensure equitable housing outcomes are advanced for women, and gender-diverse individuals and communities.
- 1.4 Expand the local Coordinated Access System (PATHS) to enhance integration and coordination between health, addictions, mental health, acquired brain injury, justice, income support, child welfare, and other critical system partnerships to increase service pathways, service connections, and permanent housing outcomes.
- 1.5 Implement a Housing Stability System Workforce Strategy, across the region, to ensure a professionalized and healthy workforce. We will advance salary and benefit compensation, employee well-being and retention, as well as training and professional development.
- 1.6 Launch a Housing Stability System Data Strategy to monitor and track progress on ending chronic homelessness and establish data-informed decision-making processes.
- 1.7 Implement a User Experience Strategy, across the region, to ensure system service users are supported in all Housing Stability System programs and services. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 1.8 Create a climate and extreme weather protocol based on a human rights approach. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## Centre Community Voices

- 2.1 Establish an All of Community Leadership Table to lead the implementation of The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness recommendations and perform ongoing assessments of activities and progress towards our community's goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2030 . The work of the All of Community Leadership table will be to ensure systems and strategic planning integration that work together to end chronic homelessness. This will include: Ontario Health Teams Strategic Plans, Region of Waterloo Strategic Plan, Waterloo Integrated Drug Strategy, Rural Upstream Collaborative-Engage Rural and the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.
- 2.2 Develop a comprehensive and integrative Lived Expertise process, including establishing a Lived Expert Working Group, with representation from across the region, to support ongoing learning and system reviews of organizational and system policies and processes. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 2.3 Establish REDI-specific partnerships, strategies and funding streams to advance equitable homelessness response supports and initiatives to build capacity.

REDI work is inclusive of not only Black, Indigenous, and Racialized groups, but also groups where there is established systemic intersectionality. These partnerships, relationships and networks are currently lacking and must be expanded to a great extent. Where work is currently underway such as with Black communities, Indigenous communities, communities supporting physical disabilities, developmental disabilities, acquired brain injury, people living in rural areas, as well as, people experiencing criminalization in the Justice system, these relationships must be built out and resourced in order to flourish.

- 2.4 Establish an annual funding application and review process for community organizations, across the region, to support emerging ideas and prototypes to respond to homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)



## **| Build System Bridges**

- 3.1** | Identify surplus/underutilized land(s) with the intention of creating more housing options and respond to unsheltered experiences of homelessness, across the region. We will do this through partnerships with area municipalities/townships, not-for-profits, faith-based organizations, and postsecondary institutions. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 3.2** | Establish specific health-related coordination efforts, processes, and supports with local health system partners to create a more integrated health and homelessness system of care. This includes embedding the work of the PECH within the local Ontario Health Teams, Public Health programs, local hospitals, mental health and addictions providers, community health programs, and other health system programs across the region.
- 3.3** | Align the PECH and related initiatives with local resettlement organizations and services to support Newcomers to Canada experiencing homelessness across the region. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## Advance Equitable Housing

- 4.1 Implement Indigenous homelessness and Indigenous-focused reconciliation strategies, led by Indigenous groups and leaders, to enhance permanent housing outcomes for Indigenous communities and support generational healing, guided by Key Concerns identified through Wellbeing Waterloo, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice, and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- 4.2 Expand on use of existing community housing stock to increase permanent housing outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness; including the use of community housing units to support people who have recovered from their experience of homelessness to leave Supportive Housing
- 4.3 Create new permanent Affordable and Supportive Housing to meet current and future housing needs to end chronic homelessness. This includes deeply therapeutic and harm reduction-focused Supportive Housing to ensure those with the greatest depth of need are supported to stay housed. (Our current 570 Supportive housing units are meeting 50% of our current need) (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 4.4 Create a Seniors Strategy, embedded within the broader PECH, to respond to the unique needs of Seniors experiencing homelessness, including but not limited to addressing lack of social connection and income support for Seniors experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness due to a lack of affordability in the private market and appropriate housing options.
- 4.5 Co-Create with rural based agencies a Rural Homelessness strategy and actions, embedded within the border PECH, to address the unique needs of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in each of the four Townships.
- 4.6 Implement alongside system partners, a housing-focused strategy with dedicated resources to end Veteran homelessness.

## Focus on Preventing Homelessness

- 5.1** Reduce inflow into chronic homelessness by working with area municipalities to implement policies and programs focused on mitigating the loss of affordable housing in the private market, while continuing to incent affordable housing development. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Expand on inflow prevention and eviction prevention work through the expansion of the rent fund, eviction prevention (from all housing including supportive and community housing) and rehousing services to significantly reduce inflow into chronic homelessness.
- 5.2** Create a Youth Strategy, embedded within the broader PECH, to respond to the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness and develop upstream approaches that target youth at risk of experiencing homelessness and end generational experiences of homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 5.3** Expand and create new multi-service agency housing hubs across Waterloo Region to ensure universal access to community-based supports that increase housing stability and for public spaces to be readily available for individuals experiencing homelessness outside of shelter operating hours. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness

- 6.1 Launch a comprehensive public engagement and education strategy for partners, Council, area municipalities, provincial and federal government, businesses, and residents to increase awareness and understanding of homelessness related challenges and responses. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 6.2 Implement a comprehensive Housing Stability System Data Strategy to monitor and track progress on ending chronic homelessness and establish data-informed decision-making processes. This resource will also be leveraged to support advocacy efforts and inform our community of the realities of homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 6.3 Establish an ongoing memorializing process for those lost to homelessness. This includes partnering with interest-holders in the Housing Stability System, Lived Experts, Mutual Aid Groups, Unsheltered Communities, and the Coroner's Office. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## **Advocate and Collaborate for Broader Change**

- 7.1** | Strengthen partnerships with school boards, local universities and colleges to ensure that professors and academics in multiple fields are engaged in developing upstream education programs on the risks of homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- 7.2** | Align the All of Community Leadership Model and PECH activities with existing addictions, substance use, and harm reduction community-led initiatives to ensure integrative supports for individuals experiencing homelessness active in their substance-use. This includes alignment and integration with WRIDS, Public Health, and other community-based services and supports across the region.
- 7.3** | Develop and implement a coordinated advocacy and inter-governmental relations plan to strengthen a multi-tiered response to chronic homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

# Investment Strategy

## 2024–2030

# Investment Strategy 2024-2030

To respond to the growing homelessness and affordable housing crisis, the Region of Waterloo is directing unprecedented investments towards programs, supports, and capital projects to meet the needs across the community. In 2024, the Region of Waterloo will invest more than \$245 million into Affordable Housing and Homelessness, including capital and operating investments, from all sources of funding. Of the approximately \$245 million invested across the housing continuum, 23% is directed towards homelessness and supportive housing programs.

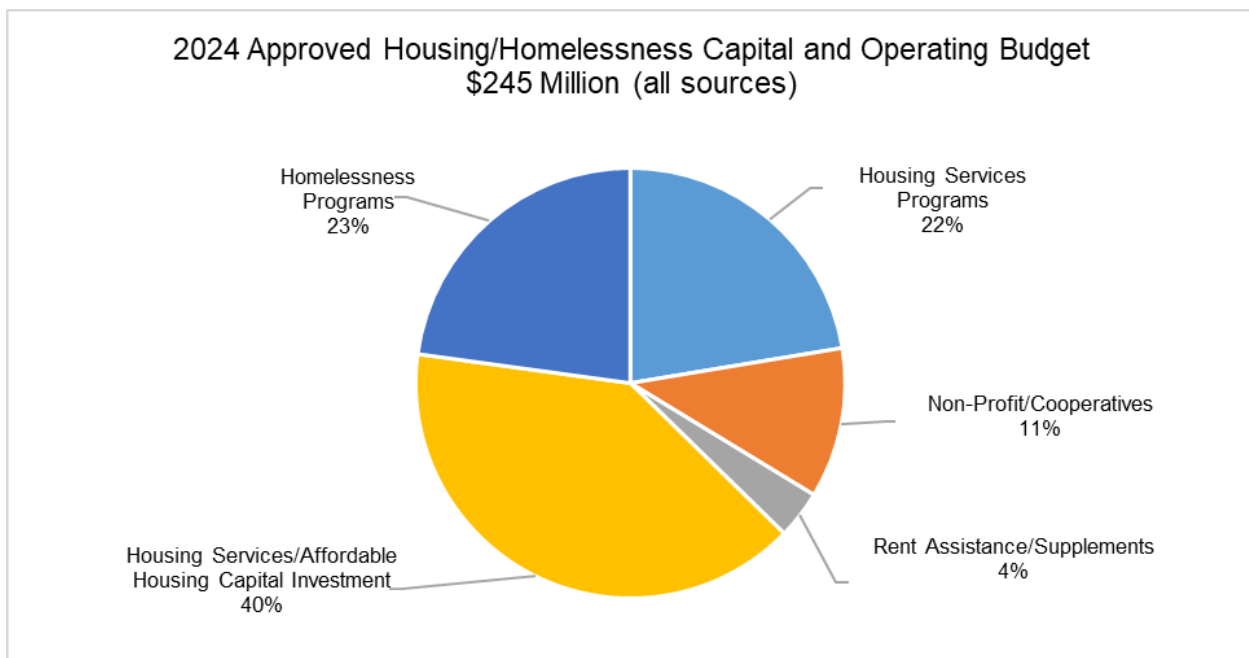


Figure 13. highlights the current investment by the Region of Waterloo, from all sources, in Housing and Homelessness. Of the \$245 million invested in 2024, 23% is directed towards Homelessness and Supportive Housing.

Between 2019 and 2024, the Region has increased municipal tax levy and reserve investment in this critical service area from \$42 million to approximately \$99 million, signalling a deep and historic commitment to achieving homes for all in Waterloo Region. This level of municipal commitment to homelessness and affordable housing is unique when compared to other Regional governments and System Service Managers in Ontario.

To reach a functional end of chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region, significant capital and operating investments are required from all levels of government. It is estimated that a total capital investment in emergency shelter, transitional housing and

supportive housing of \$110M will be required. Operating expenditure increases of approximately \$5M - \$8M annually for the next six years in order to fully implement the Plan can be expected. The range will depend on the extent and nature of capital financing costs required to meet the needs of the community at that time.

The staggering investment needed to address this growing crisis is required from all sectors and levels of government. To achieve an end to chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region, a deepening of commitment and engagement is needed from all levels of government, public and private sector, and key system partners (healthcare, mental health and addictions, justice, etc.). This shared community challenge is not to be owned or solved by one order of government in isolation.

The Investment Plan and Strategy address the immediate community needs and plans for a more stable and outcomes-focused future where every resident of Waterloo Region has a place to call home. This Investment Plan and Strategy shifts the collective focus from reactive emergency-based responses to upstream intervention and permanent solutions. We will shift our collective approach from managing homelessness to ending it.

### **Shifting the Collective Focus: Managing Homelessness to Ending It**

The significant investment into homelessness services and programs cannot be overstated. At approximately 23% of the total investment made by the Region of Waterloo into Affordable Housing and Homelessness, this level of commitment and investment is unprecedented. \$56 million will be invested into homelessness and supportive housing programs in 2024. Despite this significant and encouraging commitment and investment into the local Housing Stability System, currently the majority of funding is dedicated towards reactive and emergency-based responses as the local crisis of homelessness continues to rise at alarming rates. The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness sets out to shift the collective focus towards permanent housing outcomes and upstream interventions so the significant investments being made into the system have a greater return on investment and, most importantly, create permanent housing outcomes for the most vulnerable residents of Waterloo Region.

### **Current State: Managing Homelessness**

Inspiring homelessness prevention and supportive housing work happens on a day-to-day basis across the Housing Stability System and this work cannot be undervalued or overlooked. Since 2019, the Housing Stability System and related investments have been directed towards managing the growing homelessness crisis, including the development of hundreds of emergency shelter beds, increasing street outreach, and hybrid shelter models.



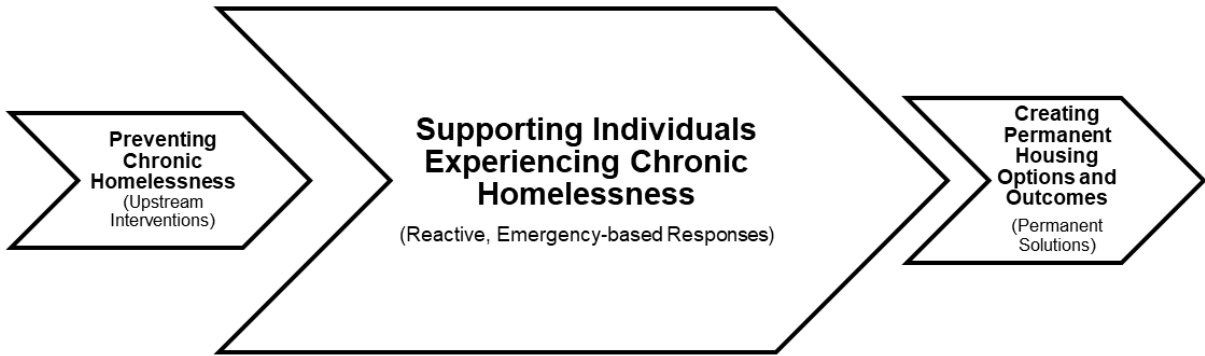


Figure 15. Current state: Managing Homelessness

**Future State: Ending Homelessness**

As the Plan begins to be implemented, the strategic shift that is required is moving towards a system that is focused on ending homelessness rather than managing it. This means investing resources towards preventing chronic homelessness and creating permanent housing options and outcomes. This shift does not mean reducing service standard levels for individuals experiencing homelessness rather, the intention is to strengthen efforts to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness so their experiencing of homelessness can be brief, rare, and non-recurring.

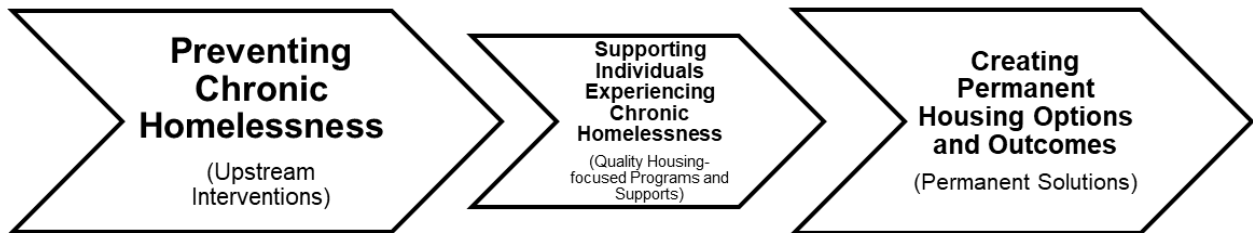


Figure 16. Future state: Ending Homelessness

# Tracking Our Progress

## KPIs, Outcomes, Solutions and Experiences

# Tracking Our Progress—KPIs

As a Built for Zero community (<https://bfzcanada.ca/getting-to-zero/>) we know that the path to ending chronic homelessness is best supported by a data-driven and collaborative peer-learning approach. We also know from other Built for Zero communities that experiencing homelessness is not about having bad luck or the result of individual choices, it is a systems problem that is solvable.

Waterloo Region has achieved a quality by-name list of people experiencing chronic homelessness and a Reaching Home ([About Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy](#)) defined coordinated access system (that works to ensure that those with the greatest depth of need are prioritized for housing vacancies). These are key milestones that work towards ensuring we have the data to understand the scope of the issue, help to make data-informed decisions, and measure progress towards ending all experiences of chronic homelessness.

Establishing and monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs) will be an essential part of the implementation of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, and will be a collaborative responsibility amongst various community and system partners who will make up the All of Community Leadership Table.

We need to set measurable goals and measure progress. We also need to prioritize investments that will help us achieve our goals.

As outlined in the investment strategy, we know that more financial resources and attention need to be put to Preventing Chronic Homelessness and Creating Permanent Housing Outcomes. The more we can invest in preventing experiences of chronic homelessness (Focus Area #5) and accelerate permanent housing outcomes from experiences of chronic homelessness (Focus Area #4), the faster we will achieve our community's goal of Functional Zero chronic homelessness.

Establishing performance indicators and measuring our communities progress towards achieving functional zero chronic homelessness will rest within three areas:

- 1) **Inflow** - Preventing Experiences of Chronic Homelessness: how are the programs, services, and interventions within our community working together to prevent experiences of chronic homelessness to occur?
- 2) **Active** - Supporting Individuals Experiencing Chronic Homelessness: how are the strategies and actions of our community working to reduce the overall number of people experiencing chronic homelessness?

- 3) **Outflow** - Creating Permanent Housing Options and Outcomes: how are investments in permanent housing and permanent housing with supports (Supportive Housing) supporting people to quickly and permanently end experiences of chronic homelessness?

We know that racialized, black, and Indigenous communities are overrepresented amongst people experiencing homelessness. As part of the work to establish community performance indicators, it will be essential to better collect, report on, and act on identity based data. We will need to work alongside Indigenous, black, and racialized communities to better understand and address the disparities and disproportionalities as we work to create equitable systems that work together and serve the housing, health, and human needs of all community members. At the heart of this work will be creating and nourishing relationships with equity-owed groups to better understand their community's experiences of homelessness, and supporting these communities' self-determined priorities and actions to address homelessness within their community.

# Change Management Approach

# Change Management Approach

Our change management approach consists of five elements:

- **A set of Shared Principles for Change**—these principles will guide those working to implement the PECH.
- **An integrated systems planning approach**—this will be achieved through the formation of a Whole of Community leadership Table that includes the Region of Waterloo (SSM), Area Municipalities, community leaders and lived experts and equity-owed groups/sectors.
- **An investment in the Equipping of Community Leaders and ROW Staff** to practise and implement change management, providing a path forward for authentic system transformation.
- **The Two Loops Model of Systems Change** is a nonlinear theory of system change. It provides a useful framework to understand the transformation process occurring within the HSS.
- **Short-term Action Plan and Next Steps** to keep the work and momentum moving forward

# Shared Principles for Change

By following and enacting our **shared principles** to inform our decision-making, guide our behaviour and shape our values as a community:

- Have Lived Expertise Leadership throughout to help the system see itself
- Champion Intersectional Human Rights
- Prioritize Human Well-being Over the Financialization of Housing
- Reform governance and service systems
- Solutions must be for and by equity-owned communities
- Commit to Safe Housing First

(LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## Incorporate Lived Expertise Leadership Throughout

- Through this the system will better see itself (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024) and be further equipped to acknowledge ongoing trauma, loss and death.
- Incorporating lived expertise leadership ensures our past mistakes are not repeated and enables us to try new approaches from a bottom-up approach.
- Homelessness is a wicked problem meaning that it is highly complex. To solve complex problems we must explore, test, and iterate to find solutions. This work requires committing to responsive adaptation and a recognition that "messy is a process." (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## Champion Intersectional Human Rights

- Human Rights needs to be a building block for our community approach to housing and should drive our empathy, action and advocacy. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- There are deep wounds that need to be healed in our community. Restorative conflict resolution offers a possible pathway. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Recognize that everyone involved brings their whole self to this work of reconciliation - by using the mind, heart, body and spirit to take appropriate actions and rebuild communities of care. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Intersectionality must also be a core tenant of our approach as each individual's story and situation is unique and must be accommodated for. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Decriminalize poverty and homelessness – policing, bylaws enforcement, risk management, policies and procedures (e.g., neo-vagrancy bylaws) to be either removed or transformed to benefit the poor and the homeless. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## **Prioritize Human Well-being Over Financial Gain**

- An economic and value shift is required related to our perception of housing. Currently, being over-housed is a measure of success in our current society. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- "Housing is both a human right and a speculative commodity from which to extract wealth. Therein lies the crux of the housing problem. Until we fully reconcile these contradictory roles that housing plays, we will be in a perpetual state of crisis."—(Doucet, Mcdougall and Jay 2023) (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Challenge the appropriation and privatization of the Indigenous land – partner with the Six Nations of the Grand River, Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council, and local First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities and release public lands for alternative housing solutions outside of the private market to Indigenous-led groups, while providing capital funding and capacity building support.

## **Reform governance and service systems**

- Requires a redistribution of power and resources to lived experience groups, equity-owed groups, and community-based entities for the irreplaceable work they do alongside service providers. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- ROW/SSM role/responsibility for systems accountability/coordination and funding allocations will also include backbone support to the community systems table rather than singular decision-maker through the Whole of Community Leadership Model.
- By focusing at the trunk and root levels of this issue we will create change—funding sustainable prevention, committing to continual and intentional evaluation of solutions and leveraging data and evidence to inform our decisions and discussions (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## **Rebuild communities and involve the capacity of the whole community**

- Redirect/invest resources to equity-serving organizations that are doing this work and are led by deserving groups to ensure a “for them, by them” approach is taken for increasing service system capacity. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Homelessness is an equity issue, as such we need to include non-traditional partners, systems and voices in decision-making. By leveraging the collective intelligence and experience in our community we will solve this community problem. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)



- View residents, support groups, advocates, and activists as a part of the continuum of care that reaches from informal to formal system supports, with both types of support complementing each other. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- A collaborative or co-design solutions approach is imperative to build trust with those in the community most impacted by homelessness and for others in the community to see themselves as a part of solutions. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

### **Commit to Safe Housing First**

- Housing First (HF) will remain an important foundation to our Community Approach to Housing, however it needs to be reviewed/refined with a Human Rights approach. HF must be updated to match our current context and to ensure it is not perpetuating harm to individuals we are trying to support. The application of HF currently prioritizes permanent and supportive housing solutions, flexible wrap-around supports, and integration of health supports. To further implement HF alongside a Human Rights approach requires self-determination and choice to be upheld during experiences of homelessness and for this to continue once someone is housed. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Rethink public land both as a source of housing and reframing it as a health support. Right now, anybody who is rendered homeless has nowhere to be legally. Which directly impacts their health. How might we integrate those two possibilities to consider a lack of housing as a health issue fundamentally? (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- Tailoring solutions to housing (i.e. integrated health supports that address social determinants of health) that meet a specific need is integral to keeping people housed.

## **Whole of Community Leadership – Integrated Systems Planning**

The creation of a Whole of Community Leadership structure is a key element in the change management process for PECH. The change management goal is to transform the way in which the work of ending chronic homelessness is done in Waterloo Region. This structure will empower the community to have greater input and influence into prioritizing investments and actions needed to transform the Housing Stability System to achieve the vision set out in PECH.

At present this is a conceptual model that will be co-developed. The community leadership model would include the following:

- Membership will include the ROW as the Service System Manager(SSM), Area Municipalities and leadership from key sectors and groups that represent the diversity of the community voices that are needed to provide guidance into the implementation of the PECH.
- The role of the SSM will continue to oversee their mandated responsibilities for funding allocations and ensuring accountability to the system frameworks and outcomes.
- Moving to a community systems leadership mode will require more work to be done in defining the distinct and respective roles and responsibilities through a terms of reference. This work will be done in collaboration with the members of the current Co-Creator Table while continuing to invite broader representation from the community that will reflect the context of Waterloo Region.
- Establishing a community systems leadership model will ensure that the implementation of PECH will maintain an adaptive and inclusive leadership that is needed to respond to the current complexities and future challenges of chronic homelessness.
- Dedicated change management process will be required to help table partners to identify the differences of power and influence that they represent. The process must address cultural understandings and lived experience of community partnership that have been hindered by legacies of power and privilege. The goal is to create a new approach and collaboration that both respects the roles and responsibilities ascribed with embracing transparency for change and inclusion on the work to end chronic homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

## Whole of Community Leadership Conceptual Model

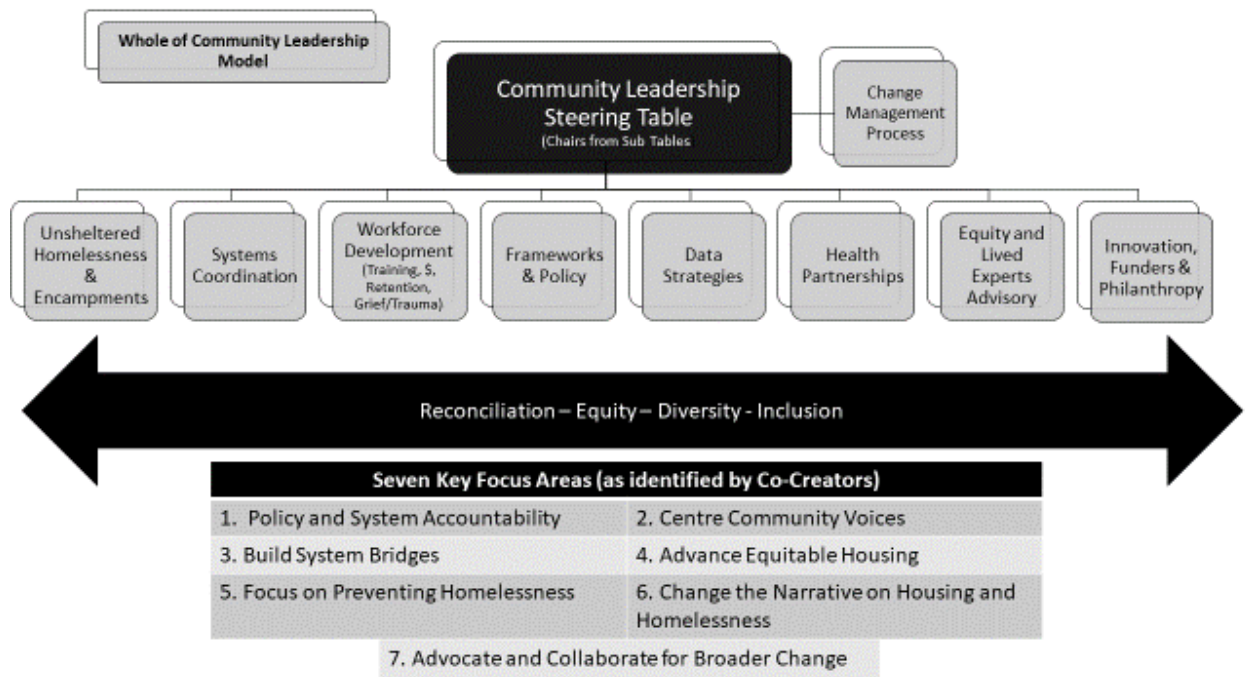


Figure 17. Conceptual Community Leadership Steering Table

## An Investment in the Equipping of Community Leaders and ROW Staff

An investment in the Equipping of Community Leaders and ROW Staff to practise and implement change management, providing a path forward for authentic system transformation.

“**Nothing changes unless people do.**” concluded Scott Keller and Bill Schaninger when their 2019 research indicated that around 40% of change management failure is related to employee resistance and almost 35% to management behaviours that didn’t support change. *This is* a staggering display of how much people affect the outcome of change. 70% of change programmes fail. A large part of this sits with the leadership team and their ability to develop themselves and their people throughout the change. This is about seeing leaders as enablers of change rather than change agents, where their focus needs to be on creating an environment that encourages and facilitates change.” (Short, 2021)

The SDCWR Prototyping community of practice, which engaged marginalized voices with lived experience as well as SDCWR and ROW staff, discovered:

- That we as leaders, “get to go first” and model a way forward for others. There are no shortcuts.
- That this work is first and foremost relational work, requiring that we are present to ourselves, compassionate with one another, and passionate about finding and activating the best way forward for all. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- The importance of the ongoing investment of time and energy in creation of the conditions that encourage and facilitate adaptive change. This year long investment resulted in the evolution of prototypes which sought to address the problem of chronic homelessness. Prototype groups continue to adapt as they learn and respond to changing contexts and unanticipated challenges. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow are credited with developing the *Adaptive Leadership* framework. The framework distinguishes between technical fixes and adaptive change. When the problems we are seeking to solve overwhelm us, we often seek technical fixes, rather than placing ourselves on the necessary path of adaptive change. Change management requires us to appropriately transition from the application of shorter-term technical fixes to longer-term work of adaptive change. Technical issues rely on protocol, procedures, rules and regulations to solve them. Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, depend on dynamic, people-focused solutions. Responding adaptively is long-term, relatively simple and challenging to maintain over time. These ideas are based on the following quotes.

*“The most common leadership failure stems from trying to apply technical solutions to adaptive challenges.”*

The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World, Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, Alexander Grashow, 2009, Harvard Business Review Press

*“We look for solutions that are complex, easy, and quick when mostly they are simple, difficult, and long-term.”*

ALL: CHANGE - Unlocking Kingdom Potential in a World We Weren't Prepared For, Rich Robinson, to be released Sept 2024, 100 Movements Publishing

As part of the implementation of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, leaders must apply an *Adaptive Leadership* approach to guide housing stability system transformation. Along with addressing immediate concerns through technical fixes, they must also attend to the adaptive challenges which most often arise in crises, do not respond to previously applied solutions, and require multiple parts of a system to engage what are often competing perspectives and priorities.

Figure 18, describes the shift from *Technical* to *Technical and Adaptive* and eventually to *Adaptive* Challenges. The final row, describes the problem definition, solution and locus of work in a system that is wholly proactive and able to fully adapt. At this point in time, PECH will require both technical fixes (reactive) and respond to adaptive challenges (proactive).

We have started this work/approach through the SDCWR PECH 2023 community of practice. It will need to continue and expand to other leaders in order to implement the plan. Community and ROW leaders who implement change management must be well equipped to know when and how best to apply a technical fix and to know when and how to respond adaptively. Reaching Functional 0 Chronic Homelessness in Waterloo Region is an adaptive challenge while sub-elements of the challenge may be Technical and Adaptive. This means that a learning mindset is important throughout and that the locus of work should be with interest-holders. (*Adaptive Challenges*, n.d.)

<b>Technical vs Adaptive Challenges</b>			
<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Problem Definition</b>	<b>Solution</b>	<b>Locus of Work</b>
<b>Technical</b>	Clear	Clear	Authority
<b>Technical and Adaptive</b>	<b>Clear</b>	<b>Requires learning</b>	<b>Authority and Interest-holders</b>
<b>Adaptive</b>	Requires Learning	Requires Learning	Interest-holders

(*ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP*;, n.d.)

The only way to ensure that the PECH will result in long-term, sustainable change, is to equip community leaders and ROW staff to practice and implement change management; or else we’re at risk of collectively creating results that no one wants. Any leader who holds responsibility for PECH results, must invest with others to tend to both the individual leadership awareness and to strengthen their change management competencies. To not invest in leaders for the well-being of our community puts them at risk of being out-of-step and blocking the results we’re collectively wanting to achieve. The work of transformational change, to move from current state to the desired future state, will often be met with moments of challenge that can feel “messy”. It is critical that leaders understand this is part of the journey of learning and is not an indication that the approach is wrong or failing. It is rather an indication that change is happening.

**Investment in the equipping of Community Leaders and ROW Staff must include but not limited to:**

- Community Leaders and ROW staff who have primary decision-making responsibility.
- Participation in a community of practice over the next 18 months that is intentional, rhythmic and sustainable over time (ie. a commitment of two hours per month, with the expectation that this community of practice is part of each leader's responsibility and role).
- Attention to interior work of leaders, inviting self-awareness and clarity of intention. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
- attention to strengthening the competencies required to manage change well, ensuring that leaders have the requisite knowledge and ability for their particular role (e.g. PROSCI Change Management training might be a helpful starting point)
- a robust and accountable "action-reflection" cycle, which reinforces the increase in leaders nurturing adaptive responses to problems, rather than technical fixes.

Otto Scharmer, senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and co-founder of the Presencing Institute notes that all systems thinking starts with distinguishing the symptoms (above the surface) from the root issues (below the surface). A leader needs to do more than just react against symptoms, they seek to understand the root issues in order to drive awareness-based systems change.

Otto summarizes this with four principles:

- *You can't understand a system unless you change it.*
- *You can't change a system unless you transform consciousness/mindset. You need to address all symptoms and root issues.*
- *You can't transform consciousness unless you make a system see and sense itself.*
- *You can't transform a system unless you sense and actualize the emerging future.*

The essence of leadership is stepping from one territory into another. It's our collective responsibility to learn from the past and connect it to emerging future possibilities.

**If authentic and sustainable change is to be achieved, an investment in leaders will be required. Along with the system's investment in them, leaders must also be willing to invest in themselves, strengthening their capacity to lead boldly and engage others with competence and care.**

# The Two Loops Model of Systems Change

The two loops model is helpful as it acknowledges the reality that we need to invest in solutions that are part of the current system (branch-level solutions) to respond to current suffering and challenges in our community, while simultaneously focusing on transforming contributing system structures (trunk and roots).

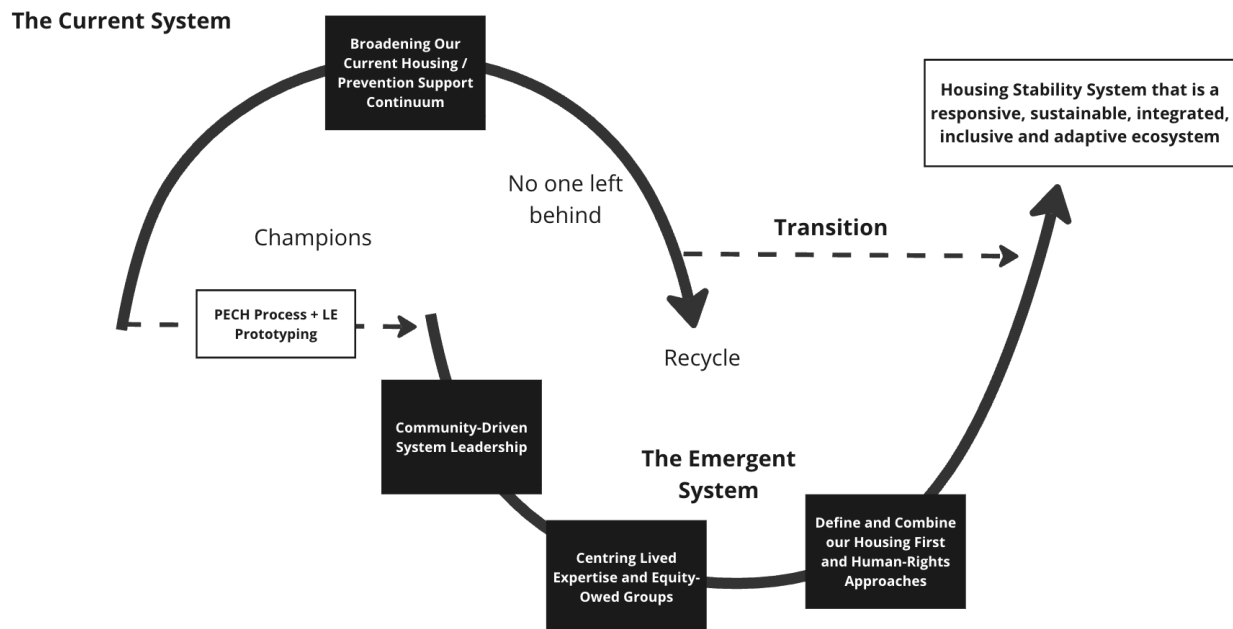


Figure 18. Two Loops Model of Systems Change Diagram

The **Two Loops model** is a nonlinear theory of change. It provides insight into the simultaneous growth and decline processes that are underway within a system during a transition period. It offers a conceptual framework for better connecting the past to the future during change.

- **Champions**—The Two Loops model reaffirms the importance of change agents/champions and their ideas. It provides a pragmatic approach for supporting them, including naming, connecting, nourishing, and illuminating them.
- **No one left behind**—Seeding opportunities for everyone to flourish in an emergent system- particularly those who have been excluded or harmed in the past – is important to its stability and long-term viability. It is also important to assist those who are prospering within the dominant/incumbent system as they are the ones who are most likely to oppose the desired change that is emerging.

- **Recycling**—The model suggests a need to carry forward lessons from the incumbent/dominant system to the new/emergent model. That way, we can maintain and find comfort in the valuable connections to the past, while ushering in new practices.

*(Berkana Two Loop Model: A Quick Introduction to an Accessible Model for Systems Change, 2023) (Rose, n.d.)*

To stimulate and manage change:

- Name the champions
- Connect them together
- Nourish them, with time, connection and resources
- Illuminate their work, or stories of change

**“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has”** (Margaret Mead, circa 1982).



# Short-Term Action Plan and Next Steps

2024			2025
Q2	Q3	Q4	
<b>Monthly Meetings of the Co-Creator Cohort:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and implement the Whole of Community System Leadership Model</li> <li>• Work on implementation and prioritization of PECH Actions</li> <li>• Input into 2025 budget recommendations</li> <li>• Develop and update yearly action plans</li> </ul>			<b>Whole of Community System Leadership Model</b> in place and guiding PECH Implementation
<b>Continuation of the SDC Lived Experts Prototyping Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• broadening representation of LE voices from across the Region.</li> </ul>			<b>Lived Expertise Advisory Board(s) and Process(es)</b>
<b>Fee-For-Service and 2024 PECH Budget Initiatives Begin Implementation</b>		<b>2025 Budget report to Council for FFS and PECH priorities</b>	<b>2025 Budget implementation</b>
<b>System Leadership Capacity Building</b> (Topics may include Adaptive Leadership, Community Co-Creation, Human Centred Design)			
	<b>Return to Regional Council with updated 2025-2030 Investment and Advocacy Strategy</b>		
<b>On-going Communication, Engagement and Change Management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education on PECH vision, initiatives and coming changes to system agencies and partners</li> <li>• Communication strategy to educate broader community including establishing a central website / dashboard</li> <li>• Leverage Central communication resources to illuminate stories of success and change</li> <li>• Implement a change management process across Whole of Community Leadership partners.</li> </ul>			

- Continue change management through identifying, connecting and nurturing champions within the system

The Final Plan to End Chronic Homelessness Report is the culmination of deep, collective community-based work to respond to a growing crisis. The Final Report does not end the collective work of preventing, addressing, and ending chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region. Rather, this is the beginning of a renewed collective focus to create Homes for All for our community's most vulnerable residents. Staff, Co-Creators, and the community more generally are committed to the work ahead and are deeply encouraged and motivated to begin the work of implementing the Plan.

*“A community means we're all in this together. We shouldn't 'other' people in need or blame them.*

*Any of us could see a reversal of fortune and some of us have never had the benefit of a network.” —Engagement Participant*

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Waterloo Region  
April 2024

**The Plan**  
to End Chronic  
Homelessness

**IN COMMUNITY,  
BY COMMUNITY,  
FOR COMMUNITY.**  
#ThePlan

## The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness: Consolidated List of Actions

Our 30 PECH Actions are clear projects, initiatives, and/or achievements we will work toward. Each Action aligns with one or more Strategic Focus Areas. Below we have grouped Actions by the Focus Group they most strongly align with; however, a key feature of the resiliency and flexibility of our PECH is that progress toward any one Action moves us forward toward multiple Strategic Focus Areas.

**It is imperative that these actions be reviewed with an understanding that further work to prioritize them and assign system accountability is necessary and still to come. No one organization, sector, or level of government can solve the crisis of homelessness in isolation. As such, accountability for leading these actions will lie with community organizations, all three levels of government, civil society, and the community leadership table.**

<b>Focus Area 1: Create Policy and System Accountability</b>
1.1 Revise current Homelessness & Supportive Housing Frameworks to ensure all Housing Stability System programs/services operate according to Housing First and Housing as a Human Right principles, cultural competency, anti-oppression, gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) lenses and ensure that equity and reconciliation are centred within all system frameworks. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
1.2 Implement a housing-focused Street Outreach Framework and a Human Rights Based Approach encampment response protocol (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024) to better support people living rough/experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
1.3 Apply an intersectional gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) lens to homelessness prevention policy and strategies to ensure equitable housing outcomes are advanced for women, and gender-diverse individuals and communities.
1.4 Expand the local Coordinated Access System (PATHS) to enhance integration and coordination between health, addictions, mental health, acquired brain injury, justice, income support, child welfare, and other critical system partnerships to increase service pathways, service connections, and permanent housing outcomes.
1.5 Implement a Housing Stability System Workforce Strategy, across the region, to ensure a professionalized and healthy workforce. We will advance salary and benefit compensation, employee well-being and retention, as well as training and professional development.
1.6 Launch a Housing Stability System Data Strategy to monitor and track progress on ending chronic homelessness and establish data-informed decision-making processes.
1.7 Implement a User Experience Strategy, across the region, to ensure system service users are supported in all Housing Stability System programs and services. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

**Focus Area 1: Create Policy and System Accountability**

1.8 Create a climate and extreme weather protocol based on a human rights approach. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

**Focus Area 2: Centre Community Voices**

2.1 Establish an All of Community Leadership Table to lead the implementation of The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness recommendations and perform ongoing assessments of activities and progress towards our community’s goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2030 . The work of the All of Community Leadership table will be to ensure systems and strategic planning integration that work together to end chronic homelessness. This will include: Ontario Health Teams Strategic Plans, Region of Waterloo Strategic Plan, Waterloo Integrated Drug Strategy, Rural Upstream Collaborative-Engage Rural and the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.

2.2 Develop a comprehensive and integrative Lived Expertise process, including establishing a Lived Expert Working Group, with representation from across the region, to support ongoing learning and system reviews of organizational and system policies and processes. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

2.3 Establish REDI-specific partnerships, strategies and funding streams to advance equitable homelessness response supports and initiatives to build capacity.

REDI work is inclusive of not only Black, Indigenous, and Racialized groups, but also groups where there is established systemic intersectionality. These partnerships, relationships and networks are currently lacking and must be expanded to a great extent. Where work is currently underway such as with Black communities, Indigenous communities, communities supporting physical disabilities, developmental disabilities, acquired brain injury, people living in rural areas, as well as, people experiencing criminalization in the Justice system, these relationships must be built out and resourced in order to flourish.

2.4 Establish an annual funding application and review process for community organizations, across the region, to support emerging ideas and prototypes to respond to homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

**Focus Area 3: Build System Bridges**

3.1 Identify surplus/underutilized land(s) with the intention of creating more housing options and respond to unsheltered experiences of homelessness, across the region. We will do this through partnerships with area municipalities/townships, not-for-profits, faith-based organizations, and postsecondary institutions. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

3.2 Establish specific health-related coordination efforts, processes, and supports with local health system partners to create a more integrated health and homelessness system of care. This includes embedding the work of the



<b>Focus Area 3: Build System Bridges</b>
PECH within the local Ontario Health Teams, Public Health programs, local hospitals, mental health and addictions providers, community health programs, and other health system programs across the region.
3.3 Align the PECH and related initiatives with local resettlement organizations and services to support Newcomers to Canada experiencing homelessness across the region. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

<b>Focus Area 4: Advance Equitable Housing</b>
4.1 Implement Indigenous homelessness and Indigenous-focused reconciliation strategies, led by Indigenous groups and leaders, to enhance permanent housing outcomes for Indigenous communities and support generational healing, guided by Key Concerns identified through Wellbeing Waterloo, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice, and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
4.2 Expand on use of existing community housing stock to increase permanent housing outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness; including the use of community housing units to support people who have recovered from their experience of homelessness to leave Supportive Housing
4.3 Create new permanent Affordable and Supportive Housing to meet current and future housing needs to end chronic homelessness. This includes deeply therapeutic and harm reduction-focused Supportive Housing to ensure those with the greatest depth of need are supported to stay housed. (Our current 570 Supportive housing units are meetin 50% of our current need) (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
4.4 Create a Seniors Strategy, embedded within the broader PECH, to respond to the unique needs of Seniors experiencing homelessness, including but not limited to addressing lack of social connection and income support for Seniors experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness due to a lack of affordability in the private market and appropriate housing options.
4.5 Co-Create with rural based agencies a Rural Homelessness strategy and actions, embedded within the border PECH, to address the unique needs of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in each of the four Townships.
4.6 Implement alongside system partners, a housing-focused strategy with dedicated resources to end Veteran homelessness.

<b>Focus Area 5: Focus on Preventing Homelessness</b>
5.1 Reduce inflow into chronic homelessness by working with area municipalities to implement policies and programs focused on mitigating the loss of affordable housing in the private market, while continuing to incent affordable housing development. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
5.2 Create a Youth Strategy, embedded within the broader PECH, to respond to the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness and develop upstream approaches that target youth at risk of experiencing homelessness and end generational experiences of homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
5.3 Expand and create new multi-service agency housing hubs across Waterloo Region to ensure universal access to community-based supports that increase housing stability and for public spaces to be readily available for individuals experiencing homelessness outside of shelter operating hours. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

<b>Focus Area 6: Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness</b>
6.1 Launch a comprehensive public engagement and education strategy for partners, Council, area municipalities, provincial and federal government, businesses, and residents to increase awareness and understanding of homelessness related challenges and responses. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
6.2 Implement a comprehensive Housing Stability System Data Strategy to monitor and track progress on ending chronic homelessness and establish data-informed decision-making processes. This resource will also be leveraged to support advocacy efforts and inform our community of the realities of homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
6.3 Establish an ongoing memorializing process for those lost to homelessness. This includes partnering with interest-holders in the Housing Stability System, Lived Experts, Mutual Aid Groups, Unsheltered Communities, and the Coroner’s Office. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

<b>Focus Area 7: Advocate and Collaborate for Broader Change</b>
7.1 Strengthen partnerships with school boards, local universities and colleges to ensure that professors and academics in multiple fields are engaged in developing upstream education programs on the risks of homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)
7.2 Align the All of Community Leadership Model and PECH activities with existing addictions, substance use, and harm reduction community-led initiatives to ensure integrative supports for individuals experiencing homelessness active in their substance-use. This includes alignment and integration with WRIDS, Public Health, and other community-based services and supports across the region.

**Focus Area 7: Advocate and Collaborate for Broader Change**

7.3 Develop and implement a coordinated advocacy and inter-governmental relations plan to strengthen a multi-tiered response to chronic homelessness. (LE Prototyping Cohort, 2024)

# Lived Expertise Prototyping Report



Prepared by the Social Development Centre  
March 2024



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
This document represents over a year of dedicated effort from the prototyping cohort, encompassing research, collective dialogue, and rigorous editing. It is both a significant research output and a formal publication. Should you quote, utilize, or derive any benefit from this document, please ensure proper attribution.

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## Key Terms

To support a shared understanding of findings and recommendations, key terms are defined below. We encourage the Region and municipalities to adopt these terms so that we are working from a common language.

-  Definitions that are consistent with the overarching report submitted to the council. These terms reflect a shared vocabulary that underpins the report's findings and recommendations.
-  Terms unique to the Lived Expertise Prototyping Report, which do not appear or are not elaborated upon in the Region's staff report. These terms offer specialized insights from lived experience perspectives and are critical to the nuanced understanding of the chronic homelessness issues at hand.
-  Terms found in both this report and the Region's staff report that are defined differently. These differences highlight the variety of perspectives and the evolving nature of our work with lived expertise. Recognizing these varied definitions helps us understand the issue more fully and work together more effectively.

### **Accessibility**

Specific features incorporated by design with the goal to reduce or remove barriers to participation or enjoyment by all people.

### **Adequate Housing**

Housing that meets the legal standards for security of tenure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, availability of services, location and cultural appropriateness. In the absence of such, the right to housing is not met.

### **Affordability**

The definition of affordability must be geared to income. Ontario has a definition where rent that does not exceed 30% of a household's income is considered affordable. The prototyping cohort

advocates for a definition of affordability as not exceeding 10% of a household's income. In the case of having no income, that means no rent is charged.

### **Agency**

The ability to make decisions and exert willpower in the world. The ability to say no and have it respected. A recognition that individuals and communities have sovereignty over themselves.

### **Chronic Homelessness and Hidden Homeless**

Chronic homelessness refers to individuals living in inadequate housing for more than a year, or experiencing this situation repeatedly over a span of two to three years. It encompasses those who are unsheltered, as well as those in shelter spaces and transitional housing. Additionally, it includes individuals experiencing hidden homelessness—those who may be couch-surfing, living in housing without a lease in their name, or residing in precarious housing situations. This broader definition ensures a comprehensive understanding of homelessness, capturing the varied experiences of individuals who lack secure, permanent, and adequate housing.

### **Cultural Appropriateness**

The needs and expectations of housing vary depending on cultural context and family structure. These must be considered when developing housing options so communities have choices that meet their needs. For example, there is a lack of multi-family homes.

### **Dignity of Risk**

Usually considered when the mind is obscured, injured, dissociative or otherwise not functional in a socially “normal” way, Dignity of Risk is a framework to return dignity to those who have those decisions taken from them. This is done by allowing a person the ability to determine if a risk is personally worth it without impeding on individual agency, through empowering experiential learning, knowledge acquisition and awareness of consequence.

### **Functional Zero Homelessness**

When there are enough adequate housing options so that no one experiences more than a year of inadequate housing, with adequacy defined by international human rights standards (see definition of “adequate housing” above).

### **Homelessness**

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It



is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing.

### **Housing First**

Prioritizing adequate and accessible housing for all people as a first step to remove barriers to participation in society. In an approach to chronic homelessness, people are provided housing first without needing to complete any forms, treatment, programming or participating in any other created barriers to shelter. The Housing First Approach and Human Rights Approach are fundamentally tied to each other. This means that agency and informed consent must be provided alongside housing first.

### **Human Rights Approach**

People experiencing homelessness are treated as rights holders, where their agency is respected, and where the Region has a duty of care for their housing needs. The Region will be compliant with national and international human rights law and ensure it is appropriately prioritized amidst other legal obligations such as those regarding property rights, privacy and liability.

### **Indigenous Homelessness**

“Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships” (Thistle, 2017; see also Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012).

### **Informed Consent**

Informed Consent is a pillar of the Human Rights Approach. It means the Housing Stability System educates the people it is serving about the risks, benefits, and alternatives of a given housing offer. It is also a requirement for any encampment relocation.

 **Security of Person**

The ability to secure oneself in bodily health and liberty. This includes having an adequate standard of living that allows a person to have access to food, clothing, housing, medical care, necessary social services, and the right to security in circumstances beyond their control.

 **Security of Residence/Tenure**

Legal protection for all persons against forced eviction, harassment, threats and discrimination.

## Overview of Calls to Action

FOCUS AREA	CALLS TO ACTION
<b>Centre Community Voice</b>	<b>1</b> Adopt a Human Rights Approach for consulting people with first-hand experience of homelessness.
	<b>2</b> Establish a Lived Expertise oversight process for homelessness services funded by the Region of Waterloo.
	<b>3</b> Develop a common process to obtain informed consent from encampment communities, shelter users, and other unsheltered communities.
<b>Focus on Preventing Homelessness</b>	<b>4</b> Endorse a tenant protections package and work with area municipalities to adopt subsequent bylaws and policies
	<b>5</b> Establish a Tenant Rights Hub.
	<b>6</b> Endorse a licensing process for landlords and work with area municipalities to implement consistently.
	<b>7</b> Ensure comprehensive rehousing support and integrate preventive measures
	<b>8</b> Hire an outreach coordinator to evaluate stability of rehousing initiatives and standardize supports for transitional housing.
	<b>9</b> Update property tax code to encourage development of new and preservation of existing affordable housing options.
<b>Create Policy and System Accountability</b>	<b>10</b> Adopt the Key Terms defined by the Lived Expertise Prototyping Cohort.
	<b>11</b> Conduct a review of shelter system providers and transitional housing providers.
	<b>12</b> Launch a lifelong support worker program to provide continuous support for individuals navigating the housing stability system during and after experiences of homelessness.
	<b>13</b> Prioritize Community Services funding in budget season until functional zero homelessness is achieved.
<b>Build System Bridges</b>	<b>14</b> Focus on prioritizing youth homelessness by recognizing their unique rights and needs.
	<b>15</b> Partner with key stakeholders in the education sector to ensure there are wrap-around services available and accessible in schools and educational institutions.
	<b>16</b> Acknowledge and formally integrate the contributions of the unhoused in roles such as cleaning, security, construction, property management, harm reduction, and community support into the region's labour strategies.

	<b>17</b>	Implement a peer mentorship program to facilitate transitions from lived experience to employment.
	<b>18</b>	Work to reduce barriers to safe supply in collaboration with harm reduction initiatives.
	<b>19</b>	Update the plans for the transit hub to ensure the continuation of 100 Victoria Street as a sanctioned encampment until functional zero homelessness has been achieved.
<b>Advance Equitable Housing</b>	<b>20</b>	Prioritize a base level 'floor' of low barrier options to meet fundamental needs of people falling through gaps.
	<b>21</b>	Design housing options through a relational lens.
<b>Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness</b>	<b>22</b>	Launch a homelessness advocacy office to run public education campaigns.
	<b>23</b>	Facilitate Lived Expertise workshops that allow the public to engage directly with and learn from the experiences of those who have lived through homelessness.
	<b>24</b>	Create a comprehensive Public Housing and Homelessness dashboard.
	<b>25</b>	Collaborate with the coroner's office to establish a memorializing process for those lost to homelessness.
	<b>26</b>	Fund and implement homelessness prevention education.
	<b>27</b>	Advocate to other levels of government for Universal Basic Income.
	<b>28</b>	Hire an outreach coordinator to liaise with neighbourhood groups and conduct public education initiatives that disrupt stigma
<b>Climate and Extreme Weather Planning</b>	<b>29</b>	Develop a Proactive Extreme Weather Mitigation Protocol (i.e. winter warming packages 3.0)
	<b>30</b>	Draft an extreme weather homelessness response plan (i.e. out of the cold with paid staff)

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and purpose

Lived Expertise Prototyping is an ongoing initiative aimed at incorporating the knowledge and insights of those with lived experience into the operations of the Waterloo Region. Facilitated by the Social Development Centre throughout 2023, this process will extend until the end of 2024.

Lived experts are people with lived/living experience of homelessness and housing instability, advocacy experience, and connections to communities. This process was also supported by representatives from advocacy groups, mutual aid groups, front line service agencies and regional staff.

The purpose of this report is to outline the theory of change and recommendations developed by the prototyping cohort for the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. It aims to establish a shared vocabulary and clarify terms, enabling productive discussions and dialogues about the necessary changes. Additionally, it advocates for a human rights-based approach to address chronic homelessness in the Waterloo Region. This document is directed at the Regional Council and the broader community, highlighting the issues and potential for positive transformation as perceived by the lived expertise prototyping cohort. While informing the comprehensive Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, authored by Overlap and its core team, this report also serves as a standalone document. It ensures that the community has direct access to the insights generated by the cohort.

## 1.2 The Problem

The overarching aim of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness is to achieve a state of “functional zero” homelessness in the region. However, the lived expertise prototyping cohort has pinpointed several obstacles to reaching this objective. Initially, there is a lack of a precise definition for “functional zero.” Similarly, fundamental principles such as the “housing first approach” and the “human rights approach” require clear articulation. It's essential that “functional zero” is defined at the regional level, as these are terms with locally specific

meanings. Despite the absence of a universal definition for functional zero, establishing a clear definition is vital for accurately monitoring progress.

We—the "Housing Stability System" (another term that lacks clarity)—have not successfully implemented the housing first approach. The Region's strategy for addressing homelessness does not adhere to a human rights framework. Instead, private interests are often prioritized over human rights, as evidenced by the ongoing eviction of encampments in our community, which resulted in a Charter ruling against the Region. Infrastructure Canada has observed that municipalities frequently place greater emphasis on complaints from neighbours than on the human rights of encampment residents.

The term "Chronic Homelessness" also demands clarification. The prototyping cohort defines it as situations where an individual resides in inadequate housing for more than a year or on a recurring basis over several years. Although this might appear to be a straightforward definition, the Region's current measurement tools, such as the Point-in-Time Count (PIT Count) conducted every two to three years and the PATHS List, do not fully capture the extent of hidden homelessness. This oversight is particularly problematic for groups with higher rates of hidden homelessness, such as seniors, newcomers, students, people with disabilities, and women (Schwan et al., 2021).

The prototyping cohort views colonial systems of genocide, slavery, and apartheid as the fundamental causes of homelessness. These systems have evolved in recent decades into de-industrialization, neoliberal economics, austerity, the financialization of housing, and the criminalization of homelessness. To eradicate chronic homelessness, it is imperative to acknowledge these failures and advocate for new economic and housing models that prioritize the perspectives of those most adversely impacted by colonialism.

### **1.3 The Goal**

The prototyping cohort envisions a Region where no one needs to live in an encampment because there are enough adequate housing options available to all. A Region where all people have the ability to choose housing that meets their needs. A Region that embraces a diversity of

persons, especially those currently experiencing dehumanization. A Region where everyone has a home.

The Region of Waterloo will be human rights compliant, and act consistent with domestic and international frameworks on the right to housing. Specifically the Region will maintain compliance with the internationally recognized dimensions of the right to housing including the security of the person, security of residence/tenure, adequacy, dignity of risk, accessibility, affordability, and cultural appropriateness. The Region will incorporate lived expertise knowledge, and recognize the fundamental agency and dignity of risk of all people. The Region will enable the Housing First approach through a diversity of non-market housing options.

## **2.0 SETTING THE LEGAL CONTEXT**

This section sets the legal context for this report, outlining the human rights framework within which the Region and its partners should operate. It examines the intersection of housing with human rights as delineated by various domestic and international laws, and underscores the importance of integrating Indigenous and post-colonial perspectives into these legal standards. This legal context was compiled by one of the prototyping projects called the Human Rights Review. This prototype has been working with Regional Staff to begin integrating a human rights lens into Regional policy and procedure.

### **2.1 Literature review**

The Region and partners must operate, at minimum, in the context of human rights as defined by domestic and international declarations as cited below. Existing human rights declarations and legislation were written largely as part of a colonial system. Therefore, the Region and partners should also be guided by definitions emerging from Indigenous and post-colonial sources. The Region should be compliant with human rights law as a minimum.

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”

Article 3 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [them]self and of [their] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond [their] control.”

Article 25.1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.”

Section 7 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms 1982*

“Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them”

Article 23, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2017*

“It is declared to be the housing policy of the Government of Canada to recognize that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law”

Section 4 (a) of the *National Housing Strategy Act 2019*

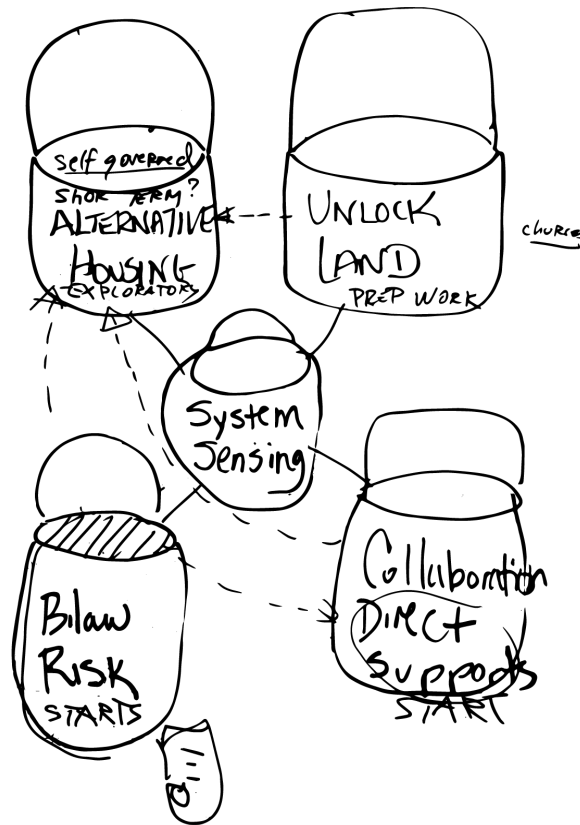


### **3.0 PROTOTYPING APPROACH**

The Lived Expertise Prototyping project represents a dynamic partnership, evolving from consultations to integrating the real-world experiences of individuals and communities affected by homelessness into pilot projects. This integration aids in crafting solutions to eradicate chronic homelessness in our community. The group's research utilized the U-Lab Process, based on the methods developed by Otto Scharmer and colleagues at the Presencing Institute. The process was split into two distinct phases.

#### **Phase 1: Co-Initiation, Co-Sensing, and Co-Presencing (March–July 2023)**

- **Co-Initiating:** This stage established shared intentions and laid the groundwork. Participants focused on relationship building, exchanging intentions and queries through mutual interviews.
- **Co-Sensing:** This period was dedicated to observation and reflection to define priorities, employing 3D mapping for visualizing current and desired states, and delineating the path for community-led participatory action research.
- **Co-Presencing:** Engaging deeply with the source of inspiration, the phase included holding community dialogues with individuals who have lived experience of unsheltered and hidden homelessness, and initiating conversations with lived experts and front-line workers aiding hidden homeless populations, including immigrants, refugees, and students.



*This sketch is a conceptual framework with various 'buckets' identified by the lived expertise group through the prototyping process.*

The comprehensive report for this initial phase is available here: [Lived Expertise Prototyping Project - The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness](#).

## **Phase 2: Co-Creation and Co-Evolution (August 2023–March 2024)**

In the latter half of the research, from August 2023 to March 2024, the group entered a phase of Co-Creation and Co-Evolution. This part of the process is set to continue until the year's end and includes regular and emergent meetings with various stakeholders.

During this time, the specific cohort listed at the beginning of this document, encompassing lived experts, mutual aid groups, and advocates, convened over a six-week period. Their discussions produced the content of this report, which will directly inform the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.

This Phase will continue to December 2024. In the appendix we have included a summary report written by the SDC and University of Waterloo. This document dives further into the methodology and learnings from Phase 2.

### **3.0 RATIONALE FOR CALLS TO ACTION**

The Lived Expertise prototyping cohort, through an iterative and emergent process, has resulted in **30 calls to action** for the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and its subsequent implementation. We have organized these recommendations into six focus areas, each accompanied by supporting rationale drawn from document reviews and consultations.

#### **3.1 Centre Community Voices**

To meaningfully centre community voices, the Region should:

1. Adopt a Human Rights Approach for consulting people with first-hand experience of homelessness.
2. Establish a Lived Expertise oversight process for homelessness services funded by the Region of Waterloo.
3. Develop a common process to obtain informed consent from encampment communities, shelter users, and other unsheltered communities.

This approach involves defining 'Lived Expertise' to encompass a broad range of personal experiences with homelessness, advocating for equitable compensation, and ensuring that participation does not jeopardize individuals' social support. The Oversight Board will ensure that consultations are effectively managed and that micro-grants are provided to support low-income initiatives. Furthermore, informed consent will be integral, ensuring that the rights of

the unsheltered are upheld and that their ability to decline participation is respected, drawing on international human rights standards.

### **3.2 Focus on Preventing Homelessness**

To strengthen tenant rights and enhance housing stability, the Region should:

4. Endorse a tenant protections package and work with area municipalities to adopt subsequent bylaws and policies.
5. Establish a Tenant Rights Hub to support and educate tenants.
6. Endorse a licensing process for landlords and work with area municipalities to implement consistently.
7. Ensure comprehensive rehousing support and integrate preventive measures.
8. Hire an outreach coordinator to evaluate stability of rehousing initiatives and standardize supports for transitional housing.
9. Update property tax code to encourage development of new and preservation of existing affordable housing options.

These recommendations aim to address the full spectrum of housing issues from tenant protection to rehousing and community involvement. They involve adopting bylaws that prevent unfair evictions and define adequate housing, coupled with increased funding for enforcement of tenant protections. A Tenant Rights Hub would provide comprehensive support, from property standards to eviction prevention, with a collaborative framework for service delivery. A consistent landlord licensing process with human rights training aims to enhance rental experiences and follows similar processes that have been implemented in other Ontario municipalities. An outreach coordinator to evaluate the stability of rehousing initiatives and advocate for standardizing support for transitional housing. Finally, tax reform proposals and a targeted land acquisition plan are geared toward increasing the supply of affordable, non-market housing,

drawing on successful models from other cities and tools like the Housing Assessment Resource Tools (HART) initiative.

### **3.2 Create Policy and System Accountability**

To advance housing stability and system accountability, the Region should:

10. Adopt the Key Terms defined by the Lived Expertise Prototyping Cohort.
11. Conduct a review of shelter system providers and transitional housing providers.
12. Launch a lifelong support worker program to provide continuous support for individuals navigating the housing stability system during and after experiences of homelessness.
13. Prioritize Community Services funding in budget season until functional zero homelessness is achieved.

These steps include adopting terminology developed by those with lived experience to ensure consistency and clarity across services. An integrated approach emphasizes the necessity of housing as a foundation for stability while respecting individual autonomy and choices. Reviews and audits of housing services aim to identify areas for improvement and ensure transitions from temporary to stable housing are effectively planned and executed. Implementing a lifelong support worker program acknowledges the need for ongoing support beyond housing placement, ensuring individuals remain housed and stable. Finally, reallocating funding towards Community Services and evaluating administrative expenses against social service benchmarks emphasizes a commitment to addressing homelessness through sustainable investment in services that directly support individuals experiencing and at risk of experiencing chronic homelessness.

### **3.3 Build System Bridges**

To address and bridge systemic gaps in the housing stability system, the Region should:

14. Focus on prioritizing youth homelessness by recognizing their unique rights and needs.

15. Partner with key stakeholders in the education sector to ensure there are wrap-around services available and accessible in schools and educational institutions.
16. Acknowledge and formally integrate the contributions of the unhoused in roles such as cleaning, security, construction, property management, harm reduction, and community support into the region's labour strategies.
17. Implement a peer mentorship program to facilitate transitions from lived experience to employment.
18. Work to reduce barriers to safe supply in collaboration with harm reduction initiatives.
19. Update the plans for the transit hub to ensure the continuation of 100 Victoria Street as a sanctioned encampment until functional zero homelessness has been achieved.

Youth homelessness requires a tailored approach that respects their human rights and provides platforms for their voices and leadership, ensuring access to services without barriers.

Collaborations with educational sectors aim to create a supportive network around housing, addiction, and family services within schools. Recognizing the contributions of the unhoused in community services can redefine engagement and provide meaningful opportunities for involvement and employment. A peer mentorship program, inspired by successful models, offers a pathway to professional development and empowerment for those with lived experience. Efforts to ensure a safe supply address critical health concerns, with input from those most affected by housing instability. Lastly, updating the plans for the transit hub highlights the importance of maintaining supportive spaces for the unhoused during transitional periods towards achieving functional zero homelessness.

### **3.4 Advance Equitable Housing**

To effectively end chronic homelessness, the lived expertise group suggest the following best practices for the Region:

20. Prioritize a base level of low barrier options to meet fundamental needs of people falling through gaps.

21. Design housing options through a relational lens.

Insights highlight the significance of initiatives like 24-hour barrier-free drop-ins, which can serve multiple functions including emergency shelter and climate respite centres. These recommendations are born out of a collaborative effort to recognize and amplify the work of impactful community projects such as A Better Tent City.

### **3.5 Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness**

To shift societal perspectives and enhance support systems for homelessness, stakeholders recommend the following best practices:

22. Launch a homelessness advocacy office to run public education campaigns. This office would focus on reducing stigma, highlighting the rights of tenants and the unsheltered, and advocating for housing and homelessness to become central issues in political discourse.

23. Facilitate Lived Expertise workshops that allow the public to engage directly with and learn from the experiences of those who have lived through homelessness, fostering understanding, empathy, and community connections.

24. Create a comprehensive Public Housing and Homelessness dashboard displaying key data points such as inflow/outflow, eviction statistics, Point-In-Time (PIT) count, shelter usage, rehousing figures, and mortality rates related to homelessness.

25. Collaborate with the coroner's office to establish a memorializing process for those lost to homelessness, ensuring there is space for both private and public mourning and story sharing.
26. Fund and implement homelessness prevention education. Partner with educational institutions to integrate prevention education into curricula, covering tenant rights, navigating the Housing Stability System, and practical life skills.
27. Advocate for Universal Basic Income (UBI): Push for UBI as a fundamental policy change at all government levels, supported by public education campaigns to address misconceptions and advocate for adjustments in social welfare programs to match the cost of living.
28. Hire an outreach coordinator to liaise with neighbourhood groups and conduct public education initiatives that disrupt stigma.

These recommendations aim to change the narrative around homelessness through education, advocacy, and public engagement. By establishing a dedicated advocacy office and leveraging direct experiences from lived expertise, the Region can foster a more compassionate and informed public discourse. Creating accessible data points and memorials acknowledges the reality and humanizes the issue, while prevention education and a push for UBI address systemic causes and potential solutions. Finally, an outreach coordinator whose focus is on public education and challenging stigma would be central to fostering inclusive neighbourhoods. This multifaceted approach encourages a societal shift towards understanding, empathy, and action in addressing homelessness.



### 3.6 Climate and Extreme Weather Planning

This focus area is unique to the prototyping cohort. It was added to reflect the ongoing work of the broader prototyping process on climate and extreme weather planning. Since the fall of 2023, there has been a prototyping project called the Continuum of Care that has been learning from current climate and extreme weather planning to develop calls to action as well as more immediate interventions for 2024 and beyond.

To effectively address the challenges posed by extreme weather conditions for vulnerable populations, it is recommended that the Region

29. Implement a comprehensive Extreme Weather Mitigation and Response Strategy. This strategy should include the development of proactive protocols for both summer cooling and winter warming, leveraging flexible outreach funding and engaging in quarterly planning to ensure preparedness year-round.

Additionally, the strategy should incorporate insights from emergency response experts, such as the Red Cross and military, to enhance the efficacy of homelessness response plans. This would involve establishing frameworks for the rapid mobilization of temporary shelters and ensuring that staff and volunteers receive adequate training. The unified approach aims to streamline efforts, foster cross-sector collaboration, and adapt to emerging needs, ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals experiencing homelessness during extreme weather events.

## 4.0 DETAILED CALLS TO ACTION

FOCUS AREA	CALLS TO ACTION
<b>Centre Community Voices</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="317 375 1936 797"> <b>1</b> Adopt a Human Rights Approach for consulting people with first-hand experience               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="443 423 1936 586">● Define 'Lived Expertise' as:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="527 456 1936 488">○ Having personal experience with homelessness (including situations where people aren't visibly homeless).</li> <li data-bbox="527 488 1936 521">○ Ensuring those most impacted are heard.</li> <li data-bbox="527 521 1936 553">○ Including people with experience in advocating for change.</li> <li data-bbox="527 553 1936 586">○ Having people who are chosen by their community to speak on its behalf.</li> </ul> </li> <li data-bbox="443 586 1936 651">● Set a Standard Payment for Consultations:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="527 618 1936 651">○ Agree on a payment rate for those providing their lived expertise, previously \$50/hour.</li> </ul> </li> <li data-bbox="443 651 1936 797">● Sign an Agreement to Change Payment Rules:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="527 683 1936 797">○ Work with the province to change the rules so money given for this work doesn't count against income for social support programs like ODSP/OW. Make sure it's clear this money is for community service and doesn't need to be reported for taxes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li data-bbox="317 797 1936 1310"> <b>2</b> Establish a Lived Expertise oversight process for homelessness services funded by the Region of Waterloo               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="443 829 1936 1105">● Create a Central Lived Expertise Oversight Board:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="527 862 1936 927">○ Approve the processes agencies use to consult with people who have personal experience of homelessness and address any conflicts of interest.</li> <li data-bbox="527 927 1936 992">○ Manage a special fund to provide small amounts of money (micro-grants) to people without shelter and support low-income initiatives.</li> <li data-bbox="527 992 1936 1024">○ Guide staff on the best ways to involve people with lived experience in consultations.</li> <li data-bbox="527 1024 1936 1057">○ Monitor how the Region is doing in getting agreement from people without shelter to be represented.</li> <li data-bbox="527 1057 1936 1105">○ Learn from existing groups like PAG, StepHome, LEWG, and other advisory processes to improve our methods.</li> </ul> </li> <li data-bbox="443 1105 1936 1310">● Encourage Each Region Funded Agency to Have an Advisory Process:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="527 1138 1936 1203">○ Allocate more funds to programs that are guided by people with lived experience, especially when funding is above a set level. Make sure an oversight process by people with lived experience is part of this.</li> <li data-bbox="527 1203 1936 1310">○ Advisory Board's Role: Look at each agency from the perspective of those using services to find and address shortcomings.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ol>

FOCUS AREA	CALLS TO ACTION
	<p><b>3</b> Develop a common process to obtain informed consent from encampment communities, shelter users, and other unsheltered communities. For example, regional staff and partners would have to use this process if they wanted to move or interfere with an encampment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consent = Free, prior and informed</li> <li>● The ability to say no is respected</li> <li>● Formally acknowledge all unsheltered (and under-sheltered i.e., hidden homeless) as rights holders</li> <li>● Learn from UN approach to human rights</li> </ul>
<p><b>Focus on</b> <b>Preventing</b> <b>Homelessness</b></p>	<p><b>4</b> Endorse a tenant protections package and work with area municipalities to adopt subsequent bylaws and policies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A rental replacement bylaw</li> <li>● A renovations bylaw and renovations licensing process</li> <li>● A common definition of adequate housing</li> <li>● Expanded funding for property standards enforcement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fund an analysis of bias and barriers that are preventing property standards teams from enabling adequate housing.</li> <li>○ Protections and a pathway forward for tenants in illegal housing situations.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Human rights approach to evictions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Banning from a shelter is an eviction</li> <li>○ Winnowing is a chronic issue through the housing stability system</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>5</b> Establish a Tenant Rights Hub to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A third party property standards assistance team</li> <li>● An eviction prevention team</li> <li>● A tenant organizing team</li> <li>● A landlord and tenant board assistance team</li> <li>● A rent bank that is flexible and not dependent on sheriffs order or eviction order to be accessed.</li> <li>● Recommendation is that RFP requires collaboration between at least two non-profit organizations and at least one grassroots organization.</li> </ul> <p><b>6</b> Endorse a licensing process for landlords and work with area municipalities to implement consistently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Set up training for landlords on their responsibilities through a human rights lens.</li> </ul>

FOCUS AREA	CALLS TO ACTION
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| 7 | <p>Ensure comprehensive rehousing support and integrate preventive measures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct a review to make visible how stable or unstable rehousing is (i.e. are people falling back into inadequate housing in 3, 6, 12 months?)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ More options for rehousing based on population segments i.e. options for seniors, options for couples/families</li> <li>○ Metrics of success for rehousing need to be tied to metrics around evictions</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Set thresholds for caseloads for transition/supportive housing partners               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Establish standards for supportive housing to ensure stability</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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| 8 | <p>Hire an outreach coordinator to evaluate stability of rehousing initiatives and standardize supports for transitional housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encourage tenant involvement in neighbourhood groups. Make considerations for minorities not represented by neighbourhood groups to be heard.</li> <li>● Address complaint overuse through education and guidelines.</li> </ul> |
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| 9 | <p>Update property tax code to encourage development of new and preservation of existing affordable housing options. This would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Vacant lot tax; Use it or lose it bylaw; Multiple property tax; Speculation tax</li> <li>● Develop an affordable housing fund that would collect revenue from these taxes to fund non market housing development.</li> <li>● That the Region conduct a regular survey of vacant housing, to make visible how inefficient and inequitable space use contributes to homelessness (i.e. understand how many people are overhoused, how much surplus land is available)</li> <li>● Develop a land acquisition plan to best facilitate the construction of affordable non-market housing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Learn from Housing Assessment Resource Tools (HART) tools: <a href="https://hart.ubc.ca/">https://hart.ubc.ca/</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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<b>Create Policy and System Accountability</b>	
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| 10 | <p>Adopt the Key Terms defined by the Lived Expertise Prototyping Cohort.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adopt an integrated Housing First and Human Rights Approach for Housing Stability System.</li> <li>● Adopt processes for informed consent and dignity of risk (disability justice). All people should have the ability to determine their risks and choices in their lives.</li> </ul> |
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FOCUS AREA	CALLS TO ACTION
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| <b>11</b> | <p>Conduct a review of shelter system providers and transitional housing providers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Launch a pilot audit of University Ave transitional housing to understand how to gather user feedback and unpack what qualitative and quantitative data is needed for broader review.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Ensure the transitional housing on University Ave is effectively temporary by establishing and enacting a clear exit strategy for residents, which includes subsequent, sustainable housing solutions.</li><li>○ Identify and incorporate the demographics of shelter populations currently not recognized in official statistics (?) to ensure all individuals receive appropriate support and resources.</li><li>○ Set standards for outflow data collection (i.e. bans, evictions, and deaths are not considered outflow)</li></ul></li><li>● Set up an Independent body to review the Housing Stability System (such as an auditor or ombudsman)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Intersects with lived expertise advisory process</li><li>○ User experiences are considered a factor in service standards</li><li>○ Inflow/outflow analysis is undertaken to understand why is experiences of homelessness recurrence are occurring</li><li>○ Focus on racism and transphobia within the shelter system</li></ul></li><li>● Remove punitive review models that discourage agencies from giving accurate data.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ There is a need for provisions for people who are not housing ready</li><li>○ All metrics need to reference PIT count and bigger picture of homelessness\Name barriers to housing to turn into advocacy</li></ul></li></ul> |
| <b>12</b> | <p>Launch a lifelong support worker program to provide continuous support for individuals navigating the housing stability system during and after experiences of homelessness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Create a common framework for social support workers that allows them to support people through the Housing Stability System.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Create service connectivity between street outreach, shelter supports, and transitional/supportive housing</li><li>○ Support would continue for at least one year after placement in adequate housing.</li></ul></li></ul>  |
| <b>13</b> | <p>Prioritize Community Services funding in budget season until functional zero homelessness is achieved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Strategically redirect a portion of the policing budget to enhance community services.</li><li>● Review admin salaries and spending in comparison to key metrics like:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ OW and ODSP rates</li><li>○ Outreach worker salary</li><li>○ Cost of Living</li></ul></li></ul>  |

FOCUS AREA	CALLS TO ACTION
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**Build System Bridges**

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| <b>14</b> | <p>Focus on prioritizing youth homelessness by recognizing their unique rights and needs. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recognize the human rights of youth               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Advocate for the rights of children to be codified</li> <li>○ Homeless children and youth need specific rights</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Support the creation of youth drop in centres, particularly in areas lacking dedicated youth programs and services (i.e. low-resourced neighbourhoods, rural townships, etc).</li> <li>● Dedicate funding for a Youth advocacy table to provide a platform for youth lived expertise to be developed               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide mentorship opportunities between youth advocacy table and lived expertise advisory process.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <b>15</b> | <p>Partner with key stakeholders in the education sector to ensure there are wrap-around services available and accessible in schools and educational institution, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Housing supports and tenant supports</li> <li>● Addiction supports</li> <li>● Family supports and alternatives to Family and Child Services</li> </ul>   |
| <b>16</b> | <p>Acknowledge and formally integrate the contributions of the unhoused in roles such as cleaning, security, construction, property management, harm reduction, and community support into the region's labour strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Require lived expertise in the contracts for security, cleaning and outreach services.</li> <li>● Mandate encampment resident involvement in cleaning and property management to ensure stuff is not lost or stolen.</li> <li>● Provide lockable lockers and storage units on site at encampments with five or more people.</li> <li>● Set up a stipend fund to compensate residents fairly and equitably for their labour.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>17</b> | <p>Implement a peer mentorship program to facilitate transitions from lived experience to employment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have lived expert's shadow HSS staff as a paid mentorship that transition into full employment.</li> <li>● Professionalized staff mentoring themselves out of a job to empower and educate those most impacted by current failure state.</li> <li>● Based on Inuvik model 2010.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>18</b> | <p>Work to reduce barriers to safe supply in collaboration with harm reduction initiatives, including partnering with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Harm reduction partners to develop a steady safe supply to remove toxicity risks.</li> <li>● Lived experts to identify and remove dealers who are poisoning people.</li> </ul>   |

FOCUS AREA	CALLS TO ACTION
<b>Advance Equitable Housing</b>	<p><b>19</b> Update the plans for the transit hub to ensure the continuation of 100 Victoria Street as a sanctioned encampment until functional zero homelessness has been achieved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Set aside land/funding for a transition fund through conversation with Metrolinx and the Province.</li> <li>● Ensure residents are provided with comparable land and supports</li> </ul>
	<p><b>20</b> That the Region prioritize a base level ‘floor’ of low barrier options to meet fundamental needs of people falling through gaps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Specialized housing is important but it fundamentally creates barriers</li> <li>● Need a full spectrum of housing options especially low barrier options</li> <li>● Lack of low barrier options undermines specialized housing</li> <li>● Need a place for people we currently banned</li> <li>● Flexibility to move between specialized to low barrier housing to meet needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ That the Region set up multiple 24hr barrier free drop ins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Recognize extra work of A Better Tent City (ABTC)</li> <li>■ Can double as emergency shelters and warming/cooling centres in extreme weather</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>21</b> Design housing options through a relational lens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have housing options that accommodate families, found families and community bonds.</li> <li>● Community bonds need to be respected.</li> </ul>
<b>Change the Narrative on Housing and Homelessness</b>	<p><b>22</b> Launch a homelessness advocacy office to run public education campaigns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on changing public perceptions to free up system, minimize criminalization, and expand window of possibilities.</li> <li>● Key areas of focus: tackling stigma, rights of tenants, rights of the unsheltered, challenging dehumanization and criminalization</li> <li>● Pressure other levels of government to make housing and homelessness the top election issue.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>23</b> Facilitate Lived Expertise workshops that allow the public to engage directly with and learn from the experiences of those who have lived through homelessness.</p> <hr/> <p><b>24</b> Create a comprehensive Public Housing and Homelessness dashboard that includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inflow and outflow data</li> <li>● Eviction data</li> <li>● PIT Count data</li> <li>● Shelter data</li> <li>● Rehousing data</li> <li>● Deaths</li> </ul>

FOCUS AREA	CALLS TO ACTION
	<p><b>25</b> Collaborate with the coroner’s office to establish a memorializing process for those lost to homelessness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Updated monthly</li> <li>● Public location with list of names</li> <li>● Opportunities for private and public grieving and story sharing</li> </ul>
	<p><b>26</b> Fund and implement homelessness prevention education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Partner with the school boards and universities to develop prevention education for students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Include topics around tenant rights, lived expertise, navigating Housing Stability System.</li> <li>○ Challenge streamlining of students where life skills are taught only to those identified as non-worker.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Fund training for users of Housing Stability System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Include topics such as tenant rights, lived expertise, navigating Housing Stability System, literacy, how to stay safe on streets for folks who are new, consent, relationships.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>27</b> Advocate to other levels of government for Universal Basic Income.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fund dedicated advocacy staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Liaise with lived experts and grassroots groups.</li> <li>○ Advocacy paired with advocacy on OW and ODSP geared to cost of living.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Pair advocacy with a public education campaign <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Need to counter neoliberal austerity culture that will turn UBI into the failure state that OW and ODSP currently are.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>28</b> Hire an outreach coordinator to liaise with neighbourhood groups and conduct public education initiatives that disrupt stigma.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide workshops on human rights, tenant rights, extreme weather planning (supporting warming and cooling centres)</li> <li>● Liaise with Neighbourhood Associations, BIAs, condo boards, tenant groups, community connectors, Facebook groups and NextDoor.</li> <li>● Develop a toolkit to address participation barriers (transportation, childcare, accessibility) to encourage more inclusive and diverse participation in neighbourhood conversations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Climate and Extreme Weather Planning</b></p>	<p><b>29</b> Develop a Proactive Extreme Weather Mitigation Protocol (ii.e. winter warming packages 3.0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Summer cooling and winter warming</li> <li>● Flexible outreach materials funding (with big lead)</li> <li>● Quarterly planning (i.e. winter planning starts in spring and summer planning starts in fall)</li> <li>● Coordinate between formal and informal outreach embedded with continuum of care learnings so protocol adapts to emerging needs.</li> </ul>



**FOCUS AREA****CALLS TO ACTION**

- 30** Draft an extreme weather homelessness response plan (i.e. out of the cold with paid staff)
- Consult with the Red Cross, military, and other emergency response groups to identify learnings that can be translated to homelessness response.
  - Develop a framework to mobilize temporary shelters quickly (i.e. churches account for in kind accounting)
    - Provide training framework to ensure adequate staff and volunteers

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The Plan to end Chronic Homelessness

# The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness

# Chronic homelessness

## What is chronic homelessness?

- A total of at least six months of homelessness over the past year
- Recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past three years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months

According to our data, **558 people** are currently experiencing chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region.

The next PiT count will take place in **fall 2024**.

# Functional zero by 2030

“Functional zero” is achieved when:

- three or less people experience homelessness over three or more months
- in a system that is tracked closely with data.

It means that we are able to prevent homelessness whenever possible and ensure that when homelessness does occur, it is rare, brief and one-time.



**The Plan**  
to End Chronic  
Homelessness

# Strategic priorities and actions

- Create policy and system accountability
- Centre community voices
- Build system bridges
- Advance equitable housing
- Focus on preventing homelessness
- Change the narrative on housing and homelessness
- Advocate and collaborate for broader change

# Co-creator membership

- ACCKWA – Housing stability outreach Cambridge
- Argus
- Compass Refugee Centre
- Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
- Cambridge Shelter Corp
- Camino Wellbeing & Mental Health
- Cambridge and North Dumfries Ontario Health Team
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Coalition of Muslim Women
- Community Care Concepts
- Community Healthcaring KW
- Community Justice Initiatives
- Developmental Services Ontario
- Developmental Services Planning & Advisory Council
- Eviction Prevention (Social Development Centre)
- Healing of the Seven Generations
- House of Friendship
- Immigration Partnership
- Indwell
- KW Multicultural Centre
- KW Urban Native Wigwam Project
- Lutherwood (PATHS)
- Marillac Place Women’s Shelter
- oneROOF Youth Services
- Porchlight Counselling and Addiction Services
- Probation and Parole
- Ray of Hope
- Region of Waterloo – Community Services
- Region of Waterloo – Public Health
- Sanguen Health Centre
- Safe Haven Lutherwood Youth Shelter
- Services and Housing in the Province (SHIP)
- Social Development Centre Waterloo Region
- Sunbeam Community & Developmental Services
- Somali Canadian Association of Waterloo Region
- The Working Centre
- The Rural Upstream Collaborative – Engage Rural
- Traverse Independence
- Waterloo Region Integrated Drugs Strategy
- YWCA – Cambridge
- YWCA – Kitchener Waterloo
- Dr. Brian Doucet, University of Waterloo
- Dr. Erin Dej, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Dr. Laura Pin, Wilfrid Laurier University

## **Community partners who support the Plan**

- Langs
- Supportive Housing of Waterloo

**The Plan**  
to End Chronic  
Homelessness



# Community voices

Marjorie Knight

Jennifer Gordon

# System transformation

- Current system is not designed or adequately resourced to address the **increase in number of individuals** who require support or the **complexity of needs**.
- Shift away from reactive, emergency-based response to prevention through upstream supports and to more affordable homes built.

# Housing First and Human Rights

Waterloo Region was one of the first communities in Canada to start using Housing First philosophies and strategies in 2007.

Locally, our Housing First Supportive Housing programs are more than **99 percent effective** at keeping people housed.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights lists the fundamental human rights to be universally protected. This includes the right to housing.

# Current funding

The Region of Waterloo has directed unprecedented investments towards programs, supports and capital projects to meet community need.

In 2024, the Region will **invest more than \$245 million** into Affordable Housing and Homelessness, from all sources.

Of this, 23 per cent is directed to homelessness and supportive housing programs amounting to **\$56 million this year.**

# Investment plan and advocacy

This is a shared community challenge that is not to be owned or solved by one order of government alone.

We will develop an advocacy strategy to engage other levels of government, sectors, public and private sector partners to address the significant investment required to address this escalating challenge.

**In community,  
by community,  
for community.**

# The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness

**#ThePlanWR**