

# McMaster Municipal Day of Action

*Addressing issues of access to shelters & supportive housing in the Region of Waterloo*

## *Backgrounder*

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## Executive Summary of Asks

Adequate housing is recognized under federal legislation as a fundamental human right. However, homelessness remains a pervasive issue in the Region of Waterloo, with as many as 750 people in need of supportive housing. While shelters remain a temporary solution, lowering barriers of accessibility can increase opportunity for homeless individuals to find appropriate housing and connect with supportive resources. Annually, lack of winter capacity remains a shortcoming of the shelter and housing system. Intermediate housing strategies such as the Radisson and LOT42 have been instrumental in promoting a *Housing First* model in the Region; however, there remains a deficiency of such initiatives and their temporary nature means no long-term solutions currently exist to address the lack of affordable housing options for many.

This document highlights the following asks:

1. Lower barriers of accessibility to emergency shelters
  - a. Create Region-wide shelter standards to lower barriers of shelter eligibility, including acceptance of opposite sex partners, two-parent families, and persons with pets;
  - b. Recognize that substance use disorder is a high-risk factor to chronic homelessness and refer persons directly to existing harm reduction projects in community systems in the event of service restriction; and
  - c. Increase on-demand interpretation and translation services at shelters, housing search support, and housing help hubs to improve access to shelters and housing supports to newcomers and refugees.
2. Increase winter shelter capacity
  - a. Support the creation of temporary shelter spaces to accommodate surge in demand during winter months; and
  - b. Align shelter capacity expansion with public health efforts to limit infection spread during the COVID-19 pandemic, as per the CDC guidelines below:
    - i. Overflow sites to accommodate shelter decompression (to reduce crowding) and higher shelter demands;
    - ii. Isolation sites for people who are confirmed to be positive for COVID-19;

- iii. Quarantine sites for people waiting to be tested, or who know that they were exposed to COVID-19; and
  - iv. Protective housing for people who are at increased risk of severe COVID-19.
- 3. Support for innovative long-term housing solutions
  - a. Legally authorize encampments of individuals experiencing homelessness to facilitate increased access to food, water, washrooms and primary health services; and
  - b. Utilize funding from the federal government's Rapid Housing Initiative as part of the National Housing Strategy to support the creation of modular housing and innovative housing projects (such as LOT42) to securely shelter the homeless in our community.

## Background: Homelessness and Housing Instability as a Priority Issue

### Overview

According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, homelessness is the “situation of an individual, family or community without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.”<sup>1</sup> However, the definition of homelessness shifts based on individual circumstances and lived experiences. The umbrella of homelessness traditionally includes individuals who are unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and those at risk of homelessness due to financial, social, health and other challenges (See Appendix A). For Indigenous peoples, it recognizes the context of colonialism, described as going beyond the definition of “lacking a structure of habitation” to include “a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews,” referring to isolation from and lost connections to their land, water, kin, cultures, language and identities.<sup>2</sup> The scope of this document focuses on populations who are unsheltered or in emergency shelters within the city. Key stakeholders of this issue on a federal, provincial, regional, and community level are further outlined in Appendix D.

### The Canadian Context of Homelessness

The narrative of homelessness is neither new nor significantly improved in the Canadian context in recent years. Approximately 235,000 Canadians are homeless annually and over 30,000 experience homelessness on any given night.<sup>3</sup> In *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016* report, it was estimated that more than half of those experiencing homelessness in Canada are adults aged 25-49, with men making up a greater proportion than women.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Canadian Definition of Homelessness,” 2012, *Canadian Observatory on Homelessness*, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-homelessness>.

<sup>2</sup> Jesse A. Thistle, “Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada,” 2017, *Canadian Observatory on Homelessness*, <https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/COHIndigenousHomelessnessDefinition.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Natalie Rech, “Homelessness in Canada,” edited July 9, 2019, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/homelessness-in-canada>.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Erin Dej, Tim Richter and Melanie Redman. “The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016,” 2016, *Canadian Observatory on Homelessness*, [https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/SOHC16\\_final\\_20Oct2016.pdf](https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/SOHC16_final_20Oct2016.pdf).

Specific to emergency shelter use, while the rate of shelter use by Canadians has declined over the last decade, it is important to note shifting trends for certain populations.<sup>5</sup> In the 2016 report, it was found that Indigenous people make up 28-34% of the shelter population, despite representing less than 5% of the Canadian population.<sup>6</sup> As well, the length of stay for older adults (age 50 and above) and families is twice as long as youth and adults.

## The Scope of Homelessness in the Region of Waterloo

More specifically, the outlook of housing instability and homelessness in the Region of Waterloo is grim. It is challenging to estimate the magnitude of homelessness due to its transient nature and often lack of visibility. High estimates indicate that up to 750 individuals are in need of housing support units in Kitchener alone.<sup>7</sup> A survey by the Specialized Outreach Services of The Working Centre in late 2019 found that an estimated 500 people are homeless in Waterloo Region, including a large proportion of youth and those with concurrent disorders.<sup>8</sup> The Emergency Shelter System in the Region of Waterloo has a daily capacity to serve 245 people on-site (see Appendix B), but access varies depending on shelter restrictions (see Appendix C).<sup>9</sup> Even still, 110 remain unsheltered in Cambridge<sup>10</sup> and 181 in downtown Kitchener.<sup>11</sup> As shelter capacity is reached, other available beds in the system must be sought for those in need, followed by motel overflow spaces, which have insufficient capacity to meet winter needs.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census - Canada," Statistics Canada, modified April 18, 2019, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-CAN-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=9>.

<sup>7</sup> "City of Kitchener Housing Needs Assessment," January 2020, *City of Kitchener*, [https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD\\_PLAN\\_Kitchener-Housing\\_Needs\\_Assessment.pdf?utm\\_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm\\_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm\\_medium=referral](https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_Kitchener-Housing_Needs_Assessment.pdf?utm_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm_medium=referral).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Angela Pye and Deb Schlichter, "Region of Waterloo Housing and Homelessness Update Summer 2018," August 14, 2018, *Region of Waterloo Community Services/Region of Waterloo Housing Services*, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/region-waterloo-housing-and-homelessness-update-summer-2018-0>.

<sup>10</sup> Community consultation with Social Development Centre Waterloo Region, unpublished.

<sup>11</sup> "City of Kitchener Housing Needs Assessment," *City of Kitchener*.

## Health Outcomes: Homelessness as a Pandemic

Homelessness has a multidirectional relationship with health. The time that homeless individuals spend indoors in crowded shelters and outdoors in unstable weather conditions increases their risk of contracting communicable diseases, particularly harmful with the current risk of COVID-19.<sup>12</sup> Specific health outcomes associated with homelessness include infectious diseases (i.e. sexually transmitted infections); mental health issues (including substance use disorders); decline in cognitive functioning (i.e. memory impairments); chronic diseases (i.e. diabetes, etc.); injuries; and foot infections.<sup>13</sup> This is further compounded by challenges in accessing or adhering to medication regimens, which can exacerbate health conditions and lead to worsened health outcomes and a decreased overall quality of life and life expectancy.

As well, the health of this population is often neglected due to competing factors of food and shelter, and access to primary or interdisciplinary care is limited.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, health influences homelessness through factors such as mental health conditions, substance use disorders, physical health conditions or disabilities. Overall, there is a lack of support and overall reduced life expectancy among the homeless or marginally housed.

## Changing Landscape of Homelessness in the COVID-19 Era

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the gaps in our current health and social systems for individuals experiencing homelessness.<sup>15</sup> Across Canada, it has led to the closure of public spaces and daytime services, including drop-in centres and hygiene facilities.<sup>16</sup> The federal government responded in

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<sup>12</sup> “Evidence Brief: Homelessness and Health Outcomes: What are the associations?,” April 2019, *Public Health Ontario*, <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/e/2019/eb-homelessness-health.pdf?la=en>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “Evidence Brief: Homelessness and Health Outcomes: What are the associations?,” *Public Health Ontario*.

<sup>15</sup> Melissa Perri, Naheed Dosani and Stephen W. Hwang, “COVID-19 and people experiencing homelessness: challenges and mitigation strategies,” *CMAJ* 192, no. 26 (2020): pp. E716-E719, <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.200834>.

<sup>16</sup> Nick Falvo. “Homelessness Could Rise with Economic Downturn,” September 25, 2020, Policy Options, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/september-2020/homelessness-could-rise-with-economic-downturn/>.

March 2020 by allocating \$157.5M in funding for the Reaching Home strategy, with another announcement on September 21 committing an additional \$236.7M to the national strategy.<sup>17,18</sup>

In response to the pandemic, temporary measures put in place in KW include the transfer of a Charles Street Men's Shelter to the Radisson Hotel in Kitchener.<sup>19</sup> By utilizing hotel rooms both to control overflow from shelters and present additional options for isolation for those with COVID-19 symptoms, the Radisson model presented a novel solution that minimized the health risks homeless individuals typically face in shelters as a result of overcrowding.<sup>20</sup> This pilot project, a switch to a 24-hour model with on-site health and housing support services as compared to the overnight model previously used, has proven successful thus far. At least 30 men have been relocated to stable housing, and it has been reported that despite a twofold increase in capacity, there has been a 50% decrease in overdose rates and a 75% decline in emergency medical service visits.<sup>21,22</sup>

Similarly, the Region of Waterloo set up an emergency men's shelter at the A.R. Kaufman YMCA, a 60-bed temporary day-time centre that acted as a "shelter in place," with access to hygiene facilities, technology and leisure activities.<sup>23</sup> As well, access to medical services for those experiencing homelessness was also improved through the Sanguen Health Centre, which provided a mobile health van that provided tests and medical care.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy – COVID-19," April 24, 2020, Employment and Social Development Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/notice-covid-19.html>.

<sup>18</sup> "Canada to Rapidly Create Affordable Housing and Support the Homeless," September 21, 2020, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/media-newsroom/news-releases/2020/canada-rapidly-create-affordable-housing-support-homeless>.

<sup>19</sup> Catherine Thompson, "Kitchener hotel part of a better shelter system for the homeless," August 6, 2020, The Record, <https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2020/08/05/kitchener-hotel-part-of-a-better-shelter-system-for-the-homeless.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Nielsen, "Coronavirus: Radisson will be isolation shelter for Waterloo homeless who contract COVID-19," March 23, 2020, Global News, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6719914/coronavirus-waterloo-radisson-homeless/>.

<sup>21</sup> Carmen Groleau, "Kitchener men's shelter looking for new home, funding so they can continue to serve homeless 24/7," August 6, 2020, CBC, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/house-of-friendship-radisson-hotel-partnership-covid-19-1.5673423>.

<sup>22</sup> Bill Jackson, "ShelterCare program to house the homeless to continue at Waterloo inn," October 5, 2020, Waterloo Chronicle, <https://www.waterloochronicle.ca/news-story/10215370-sheltercare-program-to-house-the-homeless-to-continue-at-waterloo-inn/>.

<sup>23</sup> "Region plans to open temporary shelter this week," March 25, 2020, CTV News, <https://kitchener.ctvnews.ca/region-plans-to-open-temporary-shelter-this-week-1.4867801>.

<sup>24</sup> Chase Banger, "Mobile clinic begins testing at-risk people for COVID-19," April 29, 2020, CTV News, <https://kitchener.ctvnews.ca/mobile-clinic-begins-testing-at-risk-people-for-covid-19-1.4917081>.



Even with the COVID-19 measures, however, the Region has faced challenges in adequately serving those who are homeless or precariously housed.<sup>25</sup> The A.R. Kaufman YMCA temporary shelter reached capacity by early May and was eventually closed at the end of June as phase II of the reopening plan was initiated.<sup>26</sup> This was primarily due to resource constraints, as return of personnel from the YMCA to their regular duties meant no staff was available to continue the services at the shelter. While the regional officials have been working with community organizations to reallocate people who depend on the shelter services, it has raised concerns for the second wave of the pandemic as well as the additional needs that arise in the winter.

More recently, the Region has announced the use of COVID-specific federal and provincial funding to open an additional shelter site at the Inn of Waterloo for the next 12 months, another 24-hour shelter care model that has emerged largely due to the successes of the Radisson pilot.<sup>27</sup>

## Centring Our Asks within the Long-Term Vision

While our asks are focused on emergency shelter requirements and the challenges presented in the upcoming winter months, it is important to note that any long-term solutions to homelessness must emphasize the *Housing First* model, which is built on the principle that people must first be housed in order to receive and benefit from additional social supports and services, including healthcare, education, and employment.<sup>28</sup> According to the Homeless Hub, the five core principles of the Housing First model are:<sup>29</sup>

- 1) Immediate access to permanent housing without housing readiness requirements (i.e. removing restrictions related to substance use, sobriety, etc.);
- 2) Consumer choice and self-determination (i.e. giving clients some choice in type of housing, location, etc.);

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<sup>25</sup> Anam Latif, "Waterloo Region shelters hit capacity during pandemic, other homeless individuals choose to camp instead," June 5, 2020, The Record, <https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2020/06/04/waterloo-region-shelters-hit-capacity-during-pandemic-other-homeless-individuals-choose-to-camp-instead.html?rf>.

<sup>26</sup> Aastha Shetty, "Region to close temporary shelter at A.R. Kaufman YMCA," June 18, 2020, Kitchener Today, <https://www.kitchenertoday.com/local-news/region-to-close-temporary-shelter-at-ar-kaufman-ymca-2445998>.

<sup>27</sup> Bill Jackson, "ShelterCare program to house the homeless to continue at Waterloo inn," October 5, 2020, Waterloo Chronicle.

<sup>28</sup> "Housing First," The Homeless Hub, accessed October 2, 2020, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/housing-first>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

- 3) Recovery orientation (i.e. providing access to supports aimed at improving individual well-being, including harm reduction services);
- 4) Individualized and client-driven supports (i.e. tailored to individual needs, including income supports, mental health needs, etc.); and
- 5) Social and community integration (i.e. creating opportunities for social engagement, etc.)

## Improving Shelter & Supportive Housing Accessibility: Our Asks

### Lowering Barriers of Accessibility to Emergency Shelters

#### *Current Shelter Admission Policy*

The emergency shelter program provides short-term housing assistance to those who meet the following conditions: have no other safe and appropriate place to stay while working to secure housing, can manage activities of daily living and have means to administer medications independently (if applicable), and meet any restrictions applied on intake.<sup>30</sup> In Kitchener, seven shelters serve the following populations: families, men, women, women and children, and youth.<sup>31</sup> As per the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, all sites serve people who identify as transgender and accommodate service animals.<sup>32</sup> People are not to be denied access on the basis of cultural, political or religious background, marital status, or sexual orientation. Access may be restricted, however, based on unsafe behaviours such as substance use, weapons on site, theft, damage to shelter, drug-dealing on site, harassment, bullying, threats or violence. If the restriction actively applies to all shelters in the system, the person is offered emergency lodging by the Waterloo Regional Police Services and might attempt to reapply to the emergency shelter program at a later date when they meet qualifications.<sup>33</sup> Protocols exist

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<sup>30</sup> "Region of Waterloo Emergency Shelter Program Framework Summary," March 2017, *Region of Waterloo Community Services*, <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/resources/Documents/Housing/region-of-waterloo-emergency-shelter-program-framework-summary-accessupdatefeb2018.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> "City of Kitchener Housing Needs Assessment," January 2020, *City of Kitchener*, [https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD\\_PLAN\\_Kitchener-Housing\\_Needs\\_Assessment.pdf?utm\\_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm\\_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm\\_medium=referral](https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_Kitchener-Housing_Needs_Assessment.pdf?utm_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm_medium=referral).

<sup>32</sup> "Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act," April 2016, *Government of Ontario*, <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11>.

<sup>33</sup> "Region of Waterloo Emergency Shelter Program Framework Summary," March 2017, *Region of Waterloo Community Services*.

to refer between shelters and, to some extent, to other housing stability projects; however, no explicit protocols exist to refer to programs in other community projects not funded by the Region.<sup>34</sup> Community programs for harm reduction in the Region exist, including the Rapid Access Addictions clinic, House of Friendship Addiction Treatment program and Moving Forward, Stonehenge Therapeutic Program, as well as needle syringe and naloxone programs throughout the region.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Concern & Supporting Evidence*

In a survey by the Working Center in January 2020, one Kitchener shelter turned away 191 persons in September alone.<sup>36</sup> As well, approximately 60% of respondents to the survey faced concurrent mental health and drug addiction disorders, which restricts access to shelter service.<sup>37</sup> Existing barriers to access include those with substance use disorder, newcomers and refugees, those wishing to stay with a partner of the opposite sex, and those with pets. For instance, people frequently get turned away from shelters because of having pets, despite existing evidence that has demonstrated the relationship between women delaying or avoiding leaving an abuser because of fear of pets being harmed.<sup>38</sup> Shelters also lack co-ed facilities. Policies for newcomers are unclear, and often limited by language barriers. No wet shelters exist in the Region. The current policy, in the event of a “shelter system-wide” service restriction, does not refer individuals towards community resources for support.<sup>39</sup>

### *Our Asks*

With the above context in mind, we propose the following asks:

- ☐ Create Region-wide shelter standards to lower barriers of shelter eligibility, including acceptance of opposite sex partners, two-parent families, and persons with pets;
- ☐ Recognize that substance use disorder is a high-risk factor to chronic homelessness and refer persons directly to existing harm reduction projects in community systems in the event of service

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Addiction Treatment Programs,” 2018, *Waterloo Region Integrated Drugs Strategy*, <https://www.waterlooregiondrugstrategy.ca/en/find-help/addiction-treatment-programs.aspx#Community-Addiction-Treatment>.

<sup>36</sup> “City of Kitchener Housing Needs Assessment,” January 2020, *City of Kitchener*.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Vanja Zdjelar, “The links between pets and intimate partner violence,” Paws for Hope Animal Foundation, <https://pawsforhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Pets-IPV-Lit-Review-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> “Region of Waterloo Emergency Shelter Program Framework,” *Region of Waterloo Housing Services*, March 2017, <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/resources/Documents/Housing/Region-of-Waterloo-Emergency-Shelter-Program-Framework-March-2017-access.pdf>.

restriction; and

- ❑ Increase on-demand interpretation and translation services at shelters, housing search support, and housing help hubs to improve access to shelters and housing support to newcomers and refugees.

## Increasing Winter Capacity

### *The Current Situation*

Inclement weather during the winter months presents unique challenges for homeless populations, many of whom spend the summer “living rough” on the streets or in encampments outdoors.<sup>40</sup> In addition to low temperatures, which preclude outdoor living, unshoveled sidewalks impede individuals’ ability to traverse between service agencies. The presence of slush on the streets further contributes to extreme weather exposure, especially for those who are unsheltered and do not have appropriate winter footwear.

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to exacerbate the pre-existing need for increased shelter capacity this winter.<sup>41</sup> Overcrowded shelters, congregate housing environments, and inadequate resources to maintain proper hygiene and infection control practices make the unsheltered particularly vulnerable to infection.<sup>42</sup> In addition, many people experiencing homelessness have pre-existing health issues that lead to compromised immunity, the risks of which may be compounded by lower health-seeking behaviours or lack of healthcare access.

These risk factors underscore the need for shelters to take decisive actions to increase their capacity in the coming winter months, both in terms of bed count and physical space. Evidently, this is paramount particularly during the winter months as the number of individuals accessing shelters increases and the amount of time spent indoors rises with the drop in temperatures.

### *The Concern & Supporting Evidence*

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<sup>40</sup> Wendy de Gómez, “Vulnerability to Climate Related Events: A Case Study of the Homeless Population in Waterloo Region” (Masters diss., University of Waterloo, 2010), 69-70.

<sup>41</sup> “Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19),” August 2020, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>.

<sup>42</sup> “Guidance for providers of services for people experiencing homelessness (in the context of COVID-19),” June 2020, Government of Canada, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/homelessness.html>.

Seasonal weather patterns drive a fluctuation in shelter demand throughout the year. Each winter, shelters in the Region of Waterloo consistently experience an increase in demand. In 2018-2019, YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo hosted a temporary overflow shelter for the first time to support increased demand from January to April.<sup>43</sup> This shelter added 45 beds to the existing 244 spread between six shelters across the region. In 2019-2020, St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Kitchener and the Bridges shelter in Cambridge hosted a combined 73 additional beds during the winter months to fulfill the same need.<sup>44</sup> A staff report noted that there has been "ongoing capacity pressures" on shelters in the region for the past few years, all of which are over capacity most nights.

### *Our Asks*

With the above context in mind, we propose the following asks:

- ☐ Support the creation of temporary shelter spaces to accommodate surge in demand during winter months; and
- ☐ Align shelter capacity expansion with public health efforts to limit infection spread during the COVID-19 pandemic, as per the CDC guidelines below:
  - ☐ Overflow sites to accommodate shelter decompression (to reduce crowding) and higher shelter demands;
  - ☐ Isolation sites for people who are confirmed to be positive for COVID-19;
  - ☐ Quarantine sites for people waiting to be tested, or who know that they were exposed to COVID-19; and
  - ☐ Protective housing for people who are at increased risk of severe COVID-19.

## Supporting Innovative Housing Solutions

### *The Current Situation*

In the Region of Waterloo, there are approximately 750 community members in need of supportive housing who deserve to be safely and securely housed.<sup>45</sup> Among these are around 500

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<sup>43</sup> "Extreme cold weather pushes Kitchener overflow shelter over capacity," April 2020, The Record, <https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2019/01/22/extreme-cold-weather-pushes-kitchener-overflow-shelter-over-capacity.html?rf>.

<sup>44</sup> "Temporary winter shelter opening at the Bridges in Cambridge, St. Mark's in Kitchener," November 2019, The Record, <https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2019/11/05/temporary-winter-shelter-opening-at-the-bridges-in-cambridge-st-mark-s-in-kitchener.html>.

<sup>45</sup> "City of Kitchener Housing Needs Assessment," *City of Kitchener*.

unsheltered, which includes individuals in the emergency shelter network and those living rough or in encampments. The individuals living in encampments in Kitchener and Cambridge who are not within the emergency shelter system are frequently transient and therefore difficult to account for. Within this context, the emergency shelter network, although currently necessary to ensure the safety of those unsheltered, does not represent a tenable long-term housing solution. This system fails to address the expressed need for stability and support in the homeless population, and the lack of privacy, security and autonomy in these spaces fails to affirm the rights of unsheltered community members. In April 2018, with the establishment of the country's first National Housing Strategy, the Government of Canada committed to fulfilling its obligation under international human rights law. In putting forth its commitment through the National Housing Strategy, the federal government has stated that it plans to "progressively implement the right of every Canadian to access adequate housing."<sup>46</sup> The unfortunate reality in the Region of Waterloo context is that there is much work to be done in order to achieve this federal goal. One innovative solution to supportive housing has been the creation of "A Better Tent City" at LOT42, which includes 12 insulated cabins as well as several tents, access to washrooms and kitchen facilities, garbage and recycling bins, and houses approximately 40 individuals.<sup>47</sup> This was only possible through a City of Kitchener-approved zoning bylaw exception that will be effective for one year.

### *The Concern & Supporting Evidence*

Although there is an immediate need for emergency shelter capacity expansion, adding capacity in this way should not be viewed as a permanent solution. Creative solutions to the Region's challenges related to inadequate transitional housing must be sought to avoid a continuation of the status quo in the overburdened emergency shelter network. Emergency shelters should only serve as a temporary approach to adequately sheltering people while they are being assisted with seeking permanent housing solutions. This approach would be consistent with a *Housing First* model, which has been shown by the national At Home/Chez Soi project to be cost-effective and to lead to improved quality of life, community functioning, and symptom-related outcomes, including substance use problems and mental health symptoms.<sup>48</sup> Following a *Housing First* model would involve promotion of engagement in support and

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<sup>46</sup> "Canada's National Housing Strategy," April 2019, *Government of Canada*, <https://epdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/placetocallhome/pdfs/canada-national-housing-strategy.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> "A Better Tent City," July 2020, Civic Hub Waterloo Region, <https://civichubwr.org/a-better-tent-city/>.

<sup>48</sup> "National Final Report: Cross-Site At Home/Chez Soi Project," 2014, *Mental Health Commission of Canada*, [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/mhcc\\_at\\_home\\_report\\_national\\_cross-site\\_eng\\_2\\_0.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/mhcc_at_home_report_national_cross-site_eng_2_0.pdf)

treatment services that allow the aforementioned beneficial outcomes to be achieved. This strategy would also see a shift away from crisis and institutional services and a positive movement towards community-based services.<sup>49</sup> A system that fails to intervene in the cycle of emergency shelter use and living rough is not appropriately addressing the intermediate needs of the unsheltered, leaving them vulnerable.

Living without shelter has been proven in the Canadian and Ontario settings to have demonstrable effects on health and importantly access to primary care. Unsheltered individuals have been shown to have higher morbidity, mortality, and higher prevalence of substance use and mental health conditions.<sup>50</sup> People living in homelessness have also been shown to have a higher rate of emergency room visits, are admitted to the hospital as inpatients more frequently, and access and benefit from primary preventative care less often than stably housed individuals.<sup>51</sup> Despite this demonstrated increased need for care, a number of barriers exist to unsheltered individuals accessing primary and emergency care services. Attending to needs for shelter and food are significant among existing barriers. Addressing the upstream need for stable housing should be viewed as an effective preventative measure in mitigating the myriad of negative health outcomes this population faces. Solutions to the provision of housing should be sought by using a *Housing First* strategy and by funding and supporting innovative projects such as LOT42 and the establishment of semi-permanent shelter capacity at sites such as the Radisson or the Inn of Waterloo.

### *Our Asks*

With the above context in mind, we propose the following asks:

- ☐ Legally authorize encampments of individuals experiencing homelessness to facilitate increased access to food, water, washrooms and primary health services; and
- ☐ Utilize funding from the federal government's Rapid Housing Initiative as part of the National Housing Strategy to fund the creation of modular housing as well as support innovative housing projects (such as Lot42) to securely and semi-permanently shelter the homeless in our community.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen W. Hwang et al., "Universal Health Insurance and Health Care Access for Homeless Persons," *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 8 (2010): pp. 1454-1461, <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2009.182022>.

<sup>51</sup> "Interventions to Improve Access to Primary Care for People Who Are Homeless: A Systematic Review," April 2016, *Heath Quality Ontario*, <http://www.hqontario.ca/Portals/0/documents/evidence/reports/hta-pc-homeless-1604-en.pdf>.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A: Summary of key terminology, replicated from *The Canadian Definition of Homelessness Report*<sup>52</sup>

Operational Category	Definition & Examples
<b>1. Unsheltered</b>	<p>Includes people who lack housing and are not accessing emergency shelters or accommodation, except during extreme weather conditions. In most cases, people are staying in places that are not designed for or fit for human habitation.</p> <p>1.1 People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract (i.e. sidewalks, squares, parks, etc.)</p> <p>1.2 People living in places not intended for permanent human habitation (i.e. living in cars, garages, shacks, tents, etc.)</p>
<b>2. Emergency Sheltered</b>	<p>Refers to people who, because they cannot secure permanent housing, are accessing emergency shelter and system supports, generally provided at no cost or minimal cost to the user. Such accommodation represents an institutional response to homelessness provided by government, non-profit, faith based organizations and / or volunteers.</p> <p>2.1 Emergency overnight shelters for people who are homeless</p> <p>2.2 Shelters for individuals/families impacted by family violence</p> <p>2.3 Emergency shelter for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires, floods, etc.</p>

<sup>52</sup> "Canadian Definition of Homelessness," *Canadian Observatory on Homelessness*, 2012, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-homelessness>.

<b>3. Provisionally Accommodated</b>	<p>This describes situations in which people, who are technically homeless and without permanent shelter, access accommodation that offers no prospect of permanence. Those who are provisionally accommodated may be accessing temporary housing provided by the government or the non-profit sector or may have independently made arrangements for short-term accommodation.</p> <p>3.1 Interim housing for people who are homeless (called ‘transitional housing’)</p> <p>3.2 People living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing (i.e. the hidden homeless)</p> <p>3.3. People accessing short term, temporary rental accommodations without security of tenure (i.e. staying in motels, hostels, etc.)</p> <p>3.3 People in institutional care who lack permanent housing (i.e. group homes, medical institutions, who may be released with no arrangements for housing)</p> <p>3.4 Accommodation / reception centres for recently arrived immigrants and refugees</p>
<b>4. At-Risk of Homelessness</b>	<p>Although not technically homeless, this includes individuals or families whose current housing situations are dangerously lacking security or stability, and so are considered <b>to be at-risk of homelessness</b>. They are living in housing that is intended for permanent human habitation and could potentially be permanent (as opposed to those who are provisionally accommodated). However, as a result of external hardship, poverty, personal crisis, discrimination, a lack of other available and affordable housing, and/or the inappropriateness of their current housing (which may be overcrowded or does not meet public health and safety standards) residents may be “at risk” of homelessness.</p> <p>4.1 People at imminent risk of homelessness (i.e. precarious employment, sudden unemployment, those facing eviction, division of household, etc.)</p> <p>4.2 Individuals and families who are precariously housed (related to adequacy, affordability or suitability standards)</p>

## Appendix B: Figures from the Region of Waterloo Housing and Homelessness Update (2018) Report<sup>53</sup>

### Emergency Shelter Provider Capacity in Waterloo Region (2018):

Service Provider	Population	Capacity
Argus Residence for Young Men & Young Women, Cambridge	Youth 16-24	21 spaces
Cambridge Shelter, Cambridge	Males & Females 16+; Families	78 spaces + 10 motel overflow
Charles Street Men's Shelter, Kitchener	Males 16+	51 spaces + 10 motel overflow
oneROOF, Kitchener	Youth 16-25	17 spaces
Safe Haven, Kitchener	Youth 12-17	10 spaces
The Working Centre Bunkies, Kitchener	Males & Females 16+	2 spaces
YWCA Emergency Shelter, Kitchener	Females 16+; Families (incl. father-led)	66 spaces + 10 motel overflow
<b>7 Service Providers</b>		<b>245 spaces + 30 overflow</b>

### Homelessness Enumeration in Waterloo Region (2018):

Type of Homelessness	2017/18 Count
Sheltered Homelessness	242 (average nightly shelter use) (note historic average is 232)
Unsheltered Homelessness – Connected	40 people (based on 2018 PiT Count & PATHS)
Unsheltered Homelessness – Unconnected	Unknown
<b>Total</b>	<b>282 Connected People</b>

<sup>53</sup> Angela Pye and Deb Schlichter, "Region of Waterloo Housing and Homelessness Update Summer 2018," *Region of Waterloo Community Services/Region of Waterloo Housing Services*, August 14, 2018, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/region-waterloo-housing-and-homelessness-update-summer-2018-0>.

## Appendix C: Shelters in Kitchener (2019)<sup>54</sup>

FAMILIES	MEN	WOMEN	WOMEN & CHILDREN	YOUTH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>YWCA - Mary's Place</u> 84 Frederick St</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>House of Friendship</u> Charles St. Men's Hostel 63 Charles St. E</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>YWCA - Mary's Place</u> 84 Frederick St</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Anselma House</u></li> <li>• <u>Saint Monica House - Maternity Only</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Lutherwood Safe Haven (12-15)</u> 41 Weber St. W.</li> <li>• <u>oneRoof</u>, 242 Queen St S</li> </ul>

Source: *Guide to Kitchener Waterloo*

## Appendix D: Key Stakeholders

### Government of Canada & National Organizations

#### Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

Originally established in 2012, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) has been a key player in the national progress towards ending chronic homelessness in Canada. In 2015, the CAEH launched the *20,000 Homes Campaign* in partnership with 21 communities (including the Region of Waterloo) across Canada, with an aim to “house 20,000 of Canada’s most vulnerable people by July 1, 2018” (later revised to an end goal of July 2020 following revisions), and was able to meet its objective in March 2019.<sup>55,56</sup>

Since then, CAEH has established Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C), a new national effort, which has also partnered with around 38 communities across Canada to further build on the model utilized in the *20,000 Homes Campaign*.<sup>57</sup> In particular, the BFZ-C model emphasizes a data-driven approach that involves the use of real-time, person-specific data to capture every individual experiencing homelessness. Key components of this initiative include development of a By-Name List, which ensures that no individual

<sup>54</sup> “City of Kitchener Housing Needs Assessment,” *City of Kitchener*, January 2020, [https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD\\_PLAN\\_Kitchener-Housing\\_Needs\\_Assessment.pdf?utm\\_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm\\_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm\\_medium=referral](https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/DSD_PLAN_Kitchener-Housing_Needs_Assessment.pdf?utm_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm_medium=referral).

<sup>55</sup> “20,000 Homes Campaign Communities Close in on Goal to House 20,000 of Canada’s Most Vulnerable Homeless People,” The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, February 3, 2019, <https://caeh.ca/20000-homes-campaign-communities-close-in-on-goal/>.

<sup>56</sup> “20,000 Homes Campaign Beats Goal to House 20,000 of Canada’s Most Vulnerable Homeless People,” The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, March 6, 2019, <https://caeh.ca/20-000-homes-campaign-beats-goal/>.

<sup>57</sup> “Getting to Zero,” Built for Zero Canada, accessed October 2, 2020, <https://bfzcanada.ca/getting-to-zero/>.

falls through the cracks, while real-time data enables the tracking of progress achieved over time. A coordinated access system allows for “communities to design, streamline and bring consistency to the process by which people experiencing homelessness access housing and services.”<sup>58</sup> The end goal is to achieve functional zero, defined as a community having “three or fewer people experiencing homelessness over three months.”<sup>59</sup>

### Government of Canada

Federal legislation Division 19 of Bill C-97 recognizes the right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the current federal government has demonstrated a commitment to addressing homelessness, with an expressed commitment of \$2.2 billion to tackle the issue of chronic homelessness.<sup>61</sup> In 2018, they announced the “Reaching Home” strategy, a community-based program that falls under the National Housing Strategy, which aims to “support the most vulnerable Canadians in maintaining safe, stable and affordable housing and to reduce chronic homelessness nationally by 50% by fiscal year 2027 to 2028.”<sup>62</sup> The success of the *20,000 Homes Campaign* influenced core elements of the Reaching Home strategy, and communities involved in the latter are required to develop By-Name Lists and Coordinated Access Systems.

Funding from the Reaching Home strategy is distributed to communities through two mechanisms: a national or regional funding stream.<sup>63</sup> Included in the latter is the Designated Communities stream, which has provided funding to over 60 urban communities to adopt outcomes-based approaches to chronic homelessness. By removing any national set investment-related prerequisites under the *Housing First* model, this strategy has given communities flexibility for allocation of the funding as long as they work alongside local stakeholders to develop a community plan with clearly outlined local outcomes,

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> “Bill C-97,” June 2019, Parliament of Canada, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-97/royal-assent>.

<sup>61</sup> “About Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy,” Employment and Social Development Canada, modified June 9, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> “Funding Streams under Reaching Home,” Employment and Social Development Canada, modified August 17, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/homeless.html>.

including coordinated access to services and availability of local data, and annual progress updates to the Government of Canada.<sup>64</sup>

The overarching goals of the Reaching Home strategy are as follows:<sup>65</sup>

- Moving to an outcomes-based approach, with required public reporting on community-wide outcomes to track annual progress;
- Implementing Coordinated Access Systems locally to streamline housing and other community services for those in need, supported by the establishment of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS); and
- Taking a phased approach that gives communities three years for planning and implementation of the objectives.

### ***The Province of Ontario***

The objective set by the Ontario Government is to end chronic homelessness across the province by 2025. The Ontario Government developed its Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) in 2010 (updated in 2016), which led to the establishment of the *Housing Services Act* (2011).<sup>66</sup> This *Act* requires municipalities in Ontario to develop 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plans, starting from 2014. In 2013, under the LTAHS, the provincial government combined five separate homelessness programs (including emergency shelters) into a single, fixed funding envelope referred to as the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI).<sup>67</sup> The CHPI essentially provides Service Managers (the municipalities) with greater flexibility in developing and implementing housing support programs suited to local needs.

### ***The Region of Waterloo***

#### **20,000 Homes Campaign**

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<sup>64</sup> “Designated Communities Funding Stream,” Employment and Social Development Canada, modified April 17, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/homeless/homeless-designated-communities.html>.

<sup>65</sup> “Backgrounder - Reaching Home,” Employment and Social Development Canada, modified April 30, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2018/11/backgrounder---reaching-home.html>.

<sup>66</sup> “Ontario’s Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy: Update (March 2016),” *The Homeless Hub*, published March 2016, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/ontarios-long-term-affordable-housing-strategy-update-march-2016>.

<sup>67</sup> “Region of Waterloo Emergency Shelter Program Framework,” *Region of Waterloo Housing Services*, March 2017.

The Region of Waterloo was the first community in Canada to join the *20,000 Homes Campaign* in 2014.<sup>68</sup> Key achievements listed in the 2014-2017 Progress Report included the establishment of a By-Name List and Coordinated Access System, as well as housing of 50 people experiencing homelessness in 2014/15, 96 people in 2015/15, and 115 in 2016/2017.<sup>69</sup>

The By-Name List was further used to establish a comparison between the number of people who are either newly homeless or returning to homelessness (“inflow”) versus the number of people who were recently housed and pulled out of homelessness (“outflow”).<sup>70</sup>

### The Region of Waterloo Government

The provincial government has designated the regional government as the Service Manager for housing and homelessness and the Community Housing Provider in Waterloo region. Under the provincial *Housing Services Act* (2011), the Region of Waterloo government is responsible for developing the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness and the Housing Action Plan, as well as administering allocation of funding from the provincial government, developing new housing or rental units, and maintaining affordability and service standards.<sup>71</sup>

In 2017, the Waterloo Regional Council initiated the process to develop the 20-year Waterloo Regional Housing Master Plan (2020-2040), designed as a strategic framework to create new and revitalize old housing communities through redevelopment and growth while maintaining affordability.<sup>72</sup> The main objective included the development of an additional 600 units of housing at minimum within its 65 communities.

The Prioritized Access to Housing Support (PATHS) process, established in 2018 as a means to operationalize the requirement for a Coordinated Access System, is the centralized system used by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo to match individuals experiencing homelessness to various housing support programs and services.<sup>73</sup> Part of the local Housing Stability System, which is a network of local organizations and individuals working to provide housing services to those in need in the Waterloo region,

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<sup>68</sup> “Waterloo Region 20,000 Homes Campaign Progress Report,” *Region of Waterloo Community Services*, June 2017, <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/waterloo-region-20000-homes-campaign-progress-report>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> “Waterloo Region Housing Master Plan (2020 – 2040),” *Region of Waterloo Community Services*, November 2019, <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/resources/Housing-Services/Waterloo-Region-Housing-Master-Plan.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> “Region of Waterloo Prioritized Access to Housing Support (PATHS) Framework,” *Region of Waterloo Housing Services*, December 5, 2017, <http://www.20khomes.ca/wp-content/uploads/Waterloo-PATHS-Framework.pdf>.

the PATHS process prioritizes individuals with high acuity needs (i.e. those experiencing chronic homelessness).

In 2018, the Region of Waterloo published a Housing and Homelessness Update Report. Key findings from the report are summarized here:<sup>74</sup>

- The Region of Waterloo continues to face challenges related to poverty, access to affordable rental housing, and access to services/supports
- The net number of private rental units increased between 2017/18, yet vacancy rate declined only slightly, and cost continues to rise annually
- The number of community housing rental units only increased by 0.5 percent, while number of households on the waiting list by December 2017 showed a 40% increase over a period of one year
- The sheltered homelessness
  - Increased significantly in number in fall of 2017 and then sharply declined by summer of 2018, with an average nightly occupancy of 232 between April 2015 to July 2018, 331 between October to January 2018, 211 in June 2018 and 226 in July 2018
  - While fewer people accessed shelters, the length of stay (especially for single households, mostly males) increased to find housing
  - The Region saw an overall reduction in youth and family homelessness; during the period of 2017/18, there was a 60% average shelter occupancy rate for youth shelters, and number of families in shelter and length of stay were reduced by 14% and 21%, respectively
- The unsheltered homelessness
  - There are ~40 people living in unsheltered spaces at any point in time who seek access to services from the Housing Stability System
  - This is an underrepresentation, as there are likely a number of other people living without a permanent home who do not access services through the Housing Stability System and are thus not counted
- Chronic homelessness

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<sup>74</sup> Angela Pye and Deb Schlichter, "Region of Waterloo Housing and Homelessness Update Summer 2018."



- Progress was achieved through the PATHS process, with an increase of 87% in the number of people housed from the PATHS list between 2017/18, as well as decrease of 36% in the number of people with the highest level of need
- While the PATHS process facilitates access to housing for those experiencing homelessness with a higher level of need, the wait list for support programs continues to be long, and more resources are required to facilitate quicker access to services, including personnel

### Community Partners<sup>75</sup>



June 2020

<sup>75</sup> "Primary Care Providers Education Session," June 2020, Inner City Health Alliance.