

Region of Waterloo

Community Services

Housing Services

To: Community and Health Services Committee

Meeting Date: October 7, 2025

Report Title: The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness – Progress Update

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To provide Council with an update on the progress on the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (PECH) pertaining to:

- a) Updated data highlights and trends as staff continue to analyze trends in homelessness data, including priority groups and equity focused work;
- b) Investment data and relevant outputs and impacts on homelessness trends and service provision;
- c) Tracking and measuring systems change as the success of the PECH depends on building a more equitable, accessible, and sustainable housing stability system. The summary analysis of evidence-based decisions from data trends and community input will highlight progress on systems change;
- d) The four pillars of the data strategy that staff committed to developing through 2025.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report supports the following strategic priorities: Homes for All and Equitable Services & Opportunities in the Region's approved Corporate Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

Homes for All: Through community co-creation and movement towards system transformation, we continue to work towards functional zero chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region.

Equitable Services & Opportunities: Equity is a key driver to the success of the PECH. We will explore new models of service through community collaboration and partnerships with equity-owned groups that will expand our understanding of successful outcomes to be more inclusive of the diversity of needs across our community.

4. Report Highlights:

- The PECH as approved by Council in April 2024 (CSD-HOU-24-006) includes 30 actions. Twenty-one are currently underway thanks to continued investment from Regional Council and the efforts of the Co-Creator community and staff.
- Investments from Regional Council have contributed to significant outputs and impacts in the community, as seen in Appendix B and Appendix C. These include net new rent supplements, increased capacity for our eviction prevention programs, and funding to address the unique homelessness challenges and housing barriers faced by equity-owned groups.
- While the total number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness has risen in the past year, the number of individuals experiencing any type of homelessness as captured in available data has decreased 8% since the anchor investment was made in the PECH in 2024. Details on these trends are available in Appendix A.
- Our community partner, Engage Rural, is leading the co-creation of a Rural Homelessness Strategy to address the unique needs of people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness across the four townships of Wellesley, Woolwich, Wilmot, and North Dumfries. As discussed in Appendix C, this strategy will bridge service gaps, strengthen system accountability, and enhance the mission to end chronic homelessness in a just and rural-inclusive manner.
- The PECH Data Strategy continues to evolve. There are four pillars which will empower staff and community to see the impact of the work, maintain accountability through improved reporting, and promote transparency across the system. Appendix A includes additional detail on homelessness data.
- As evidenced by available data, increased and sustained investment from the provincial and federal governments, and community partners, is needed to augment the Region's anchor investment in the PECH to maintain a trajectory to

our goal of functional zero chronic homelessness by 2030.

5. Background:

On April 9, 2024, Regional Council approved and endorsed the PECH (see **CSD-HOU-24-006**) with a \$10.2M investment to prioritize this work. As directed by Council, staff returned in October 2024 with a comprehensive funding and advocacy strategy as part of the 2024 Regional Budget Process (**CSD-HOU-24-019**). Most recently in May 2025, staff provided an update to Council on the outputs of PECH investments, ongoing equity work, and raised the need for sustained investments to end chronic homelessness (**CSD-HOU-25-005**). This was validated by the 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) count which found that 2,371 people were experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region in October 2024. For this report, staff committed to providing an update on data trends and PECH activities, showing the impact of systems change efforts, and sharing the data strategy for effectively tracking and communicating trends.

Current Data Trends & Highlights

Waterloo Region is the fastest growing community in the country, and as our community grows, so do our social challenges. We continue to bear the impact of an extraordinary rise in homelessness, as experienced by most municipalities across Ontario. Despite municipal contributions to homelessness programs doubling, the rate of provincial homelessness increased by 25% between 2020 and 2024 (AMO Report, *Municipalities Under Pressure* 2025). More than half of the experiences of known homelessness during this time were found to be chronic in nature, meaning individuals spent over six consecutive months homeless, or 18 months homeless over three years. In July 2024, there were 540 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness per the Prioritized Access to Housing Supports (PATHS) list, and one year later, in July 2025, that number reached 630.

Municipalities increasingly bear the weight of the increased costs associated with these challenges. During the 2025 budget process, a net new operating budget investment of \$4.6M was made by Regional Council. This brings a total investment of \$14.8M that is dedicated to supporting the PECH in 2025. This is in addition to the \$50.7M allocated to other homelessness initiatives within the 2025 Approved Operating Budget. These funds have allowed staff and community to work together towards functional zero chronic homelessness in the face of unprecedented social challenges, through service and program expansion, and systems change efforts.

While the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness in Waterloo Region has increased, investment into PECH has helped slow the rate of growth of all homelessness. Using currently available data and updated modeling, we can track homelessness trends across some priority and equity-owed groups, including women,

seniors, youth, veterans, and Indigenous people. Overall, this model shows a decrease of 8% in total active homelessness from 2024 to 2025. More highlights in these trendlines are available in Appendix A.

Eviction prevention is an important tool in reducing the inflow into homelessness. Investment into programs like the Rent Bank has prevented more people from becoming homeless, by covering rental arrears for households in financial crisis, and with funds for first-and-last months' rent to support individuals out of experiences of homelessness or who need to be rapidly re-housed. These trends and analyses are available in more detail in Appendix A.

There has also been a steady increase in housing outcomes, or experiences of accessing permanent housing from chronic homelessness, due to the increased investments from Council. In 2023, we saw 182 housing outcomes; in 2024, 190 housing outcomes, and from January to July 2025 we have already seen 116 housing outcomes for people experiencing chronic homelessness. In addition, PECH funding has introduced 60 new rent supplements for households from equity-owned demographics.

PECH Activities and Community Impact

Waterloo Region is not unique in facing the challenge of supporting an increasing number of homeless individuals into permanent housing. Resolving a homelessness problem of this scale requires significant investment, and the funds approved by Council in 2024 and 2025 have already made meaningful impacts through service provision, community-building, and with supporting people to secure and maintain housing. While it is challenging to measure, this funding likely helped prevent a sharper increase in chronic homelessness. This funding has enabled 21 of 30 PECH activities as prioritized in PECH's Navigating Functional Zero report to be actioned in at least partial capacity.

Investment in the PECH and the coordinated efforts of the community have slowed the rate of experiences of homelessness; however, without the participation and partnership of additional funders to augment the Region's anchor investment in the PECH, the current timeline to reach functional zero is at risk.

Systems Change and Community Impact

The PECH remains resolute that the all-of-community approach is the only way to successfully achieve and sustain functional zero homelessness. This has been demonstrated so far by better systems equity, service and program expansion, and stronger relationships with our community.

Of note, intentional planning has ensured we have an inclement weather plan for the winter, and the expansion of four new shelter and transitional housing services has

allowed us to provide support for up to 120 women and gender diverse individuals experiencing homelessness. Significant work in structural change via upstream reform is also underway including the onboarding of policy research consultants to revise the Region of Waterloo's Homelessness and Supportive Housing Frameworks to align with Housing First and Housing as a Human Right principles.

The PECH Co-ordination Team launched in June, comprising of nine community leaders and two Region of Waterloo staff members. This de-centralized leadership group ensures that key deliverables continue to align with PECH values and the community's priorities. By distributing project management and decision-making, the PECH is strengthening relationships between government, service providers and community members with lived experience of homelessness. Further details on systems change and how it is occurring through the co-ordinated efforts of community, Co-Creators, staff and the investments of Council, can be seen in Appendix C.

Data Strategy

As detailed in the April 2024 PECH report, an important part of the work towards ending chronic homelessness is tracking our progress towards functional zero chronic homelessness and making data-informed decisions. Regional staff and PECH Co-Creators initiated a data strategy that centres on four pillars of work:

- 1. Creation of a public dashboard that will display the total number of people experiencing episodic and chronic homelessness.** This dashboard will have the ability to analyze the data by different elements and population group (e.g., women, men, youth, older adults, etc.) and will be publicly available in 2026.
- 2. Collection and reporting of additional quantitative and qualitative data to complement the data dashboard.** These data points will be co-created with PECH partners, help assess progress on PECH actions, and be used to make data-informed decisions about future actions and investments.
- 3. Regular reporting on the activities, outputs, and outcomes of PECH investments.** PECH funded partners are required to report on the activities, outputs, and outcomes of their work. This data will be regularly reported back to PECH Co-Creators to assess the impact of the PECH investments and inform future investments.
- 4. Assessment and reporting on the changes that are taking place within the community and Housing Stability System as we create a stronger system.** These changes include looking at markers of growth, structural and relational change, independent investments among partners, and the balancing of power through collaborative approaches.

The four pillars of the data strategy will be a regular part of the PECH Co-Creation process and will be implemented with the support of the PECH Coordination Team.

Measuring, assessing, and reporting the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the PECH actions and investments will form a cornerstone of the PECH work to ensure progress towards functional zero chronic homelessness. Appendix A provides additional details on the two major data sources used to report on homelessness. By integrating both sources, we are better able to analyze and understand the impacts of investment and systems change on trends in chronic homelessness and within priority groups such as women, youth, older adults, veterans, Indigenous people, and families. As data collection improves, analysis will also improve.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Areas Municipalities: Through a Municipal Housing and Homelessness Leads Committee, Region staff remain closely connected with area municipalities in the collective work of addressing housing and homelessness related issues in the region. Staff meet and communicate regularly on housing and homelessness issues, including progress on the implementation of the Interim Housing Solutions, taking into consideration the valuable insights, considerations and resources of area municipal partners. Through collaborative problem-solving, data sharing, and leveraging shared resources, area municipalities are a vital partner in building a healthy and inclusive community for all. Of note, some representatives from municipalities sit as members of the PECH Co-Creators table. In addition, the Co-Creator's monthly roundtable is actively used as an avenue for engagement on municipal issues impacting the goal of functional zero chronic homelessness. These opportunities have served to help inform and support some of our area municipalities with their renoeviction frameworks, as well as connecting to area townships to launch our rural strategy.

Public: The PECH Co-Creators table continues to hold well-attended monthly meetings. This collaborative group includes 65 active organizations represented by 120 individuals, 33 lived experience experts, and members of Regional Staff. Both Co-Creators and Regional Staff continue to collaborate around the overall goal of systems transformation, while building trust, strengthening partnerships, and working to ensure more equitable access to the system.

7. Financial Implications:

	Current Year	Future Year(s)
Budget Impact?	No new impact	No new impact
Capital Plan Impact?	No new impact	No new impact

The 2025 Approved Operating Budget allocates \$65.6M for homelessness initiatives,

sourced from a combination of provincial and federal grants, as well as the property tax levy. Within this budget, a \$14.8M investment is dedicated to the PECH, with the full amount funded through the tax levy.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

Through the remainder of 2025, Regional staff, in partnership with Co-Creators will continue to focus on the priorities as outlined in the Funding Strategy (see CSD-HOU-24-019). The key deliverables that can be expected to be prioritized for the remainder of 2025 and into 2026 include:

- Continued work to further develop the PECH data strategy, including improved data analysis, to inform investment decisions and data-informed recommendations and decision-making.
- Systems change – specifically the completion of Phase One of the Rural Strategy, the Older Adults Strategy, and the launch of action-groups for issues related to inflow into homelessness, active homelessness, and outflow from homelessness.
- Adjustments to the funding strategy based on needs identified by the data strategy and co-creator/community input as it relates to systems change.

Staff will return to Council with further updates on identified priority work in Spring 2026.

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: Current Trends and Data Highlights

Appendix B: PECH Activity Progress

Appendix C: Systems Change and Community Impact

Appendix D: PECH Council Report Presentation

Prepared By:

Jennifer Beckett, Social Planning Associate, Housing Services

Keren Harvey, Social Planning Associate, Plan to End Chronic Homelessness

Reviewed By:

Jennifer Gordon, Manager, Plan to End Chronic Homelessness

Chris McEvoy, Manager, Homelessness and Supportive Housing

Ryan Pettipiere, Director, Housing Services

Approved By:

Peter Sweeney, Commissioner, Community Services