



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

Committee Report

To: Chair and Members of the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee
From: Dave Purdy, Director of Housing Services
Date: Wednesday, May 14, 2025 **HS-25-09**
Subject: **Formal Response to City of Guelph Council Resolution Regarding Structured Encampments**

Background:

On July 16, 2024, the Guelph City Council passed the following resolution:

“That Guelph City Council endorse in principle (the) pilot structured encampment shelter model within the City of Guelph and respectfully ask the County of Wellington as the Consolidated Social Services Manager to consider how this model may fit within the housing continuum moving forward.”

The resolution was brought forward for information at the September 2024 Joint Social Service and Land Ambulance Committee meeting. As discussed at the Committee meeting, Housing Services’ priority is to provide individuals experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness with permanent housing and support services. Additionally, several projects to address increased homelessness as quickly as possible, that do not include a structured encampment model, were already in progress. This is consistent with the County staff report submitted to the Guelph City Council in June 2024.

This report is to provide a formal response with further information about the rationale of this direction by providing information on housing stability systems specific to homelessness including an overview of 2023 and 2024 data and trends, progress on emergency response services, and budgetary pressures to provide evidence-based solutions to end chronic homelessness.

Role of Housing Service System Managers

The role of Service System Managers for Housing Services, as contracted by the Province of Ontario, is to deliver housing services to low-income individuals in accordance with Provincial and Federal guidelines and to support community plans to address housing and homelessness locally. This includes housing affordability, the promotion of human-centred and culturally appropriate service delivery models, housing stock revitalization, coordination of support services, and ending chronic homelessness. Within this scope of work, Housing Services has a mandate to be housing-focused to align with Federal and Provincial funding requirements, meaning that priority is given to working with individuals to find permanent housing solutions.

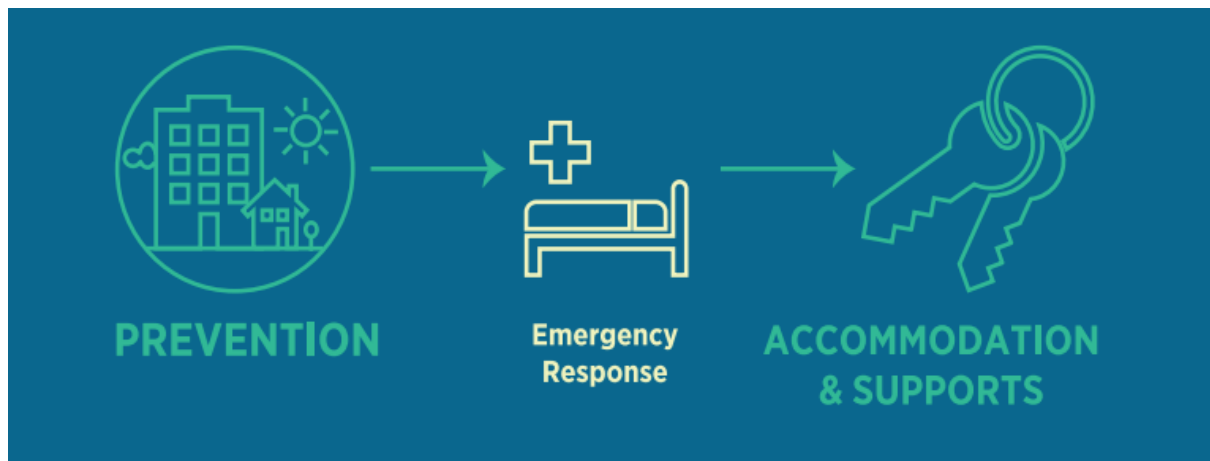
Hence, the division has adopted a “Housing First” approach. As defined by Infrastructure Canada, “Housing First involves moving people experiencing homelessness —particularly people experiencing chronic homelessness—rapidly from the street or emergency shelters into stable and long-term housing, with supports. Stable housing provides a platform to deliver services to address issues frequently faced among the chronically and episodically homeless. The goal is to encourage housing stability and improved quality of life for persons served by Housing First and, to the extent possible, foster self-sufficiency.”

Evidence-Based Housing Stability System

In 2017, Stephen Gaetz and Erin Dej released the paper “[A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention](#)” in collaboration with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness which outlines three main tasks required to prevent and address homelessness:

- **Preventing Experiences of Homelessness** involves strategies to end or reduce as much as possible, the risk of people becoming homeless. Prevention support services include assistance with rental and/or utilities arrears as well as assistance with first and/or last month’s rent for eligible households.
- **Emergency Responses to Experiences of Homelessness** includes services that address the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness. Emergency responses will always be a part of the solution because, despite best efforts, some people will continue to experience struggles and difficulties that will lead to their experiencing homelessness. In Wellington-Guelph, emergency responses include outreach and rapid re-housing services, emergency shelter, temporary accommodations, and transitional housing.
- **Housing Placements and Supports** involve strategies and resources to move people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing solutions and the provision of supports (health, mental health, addictions, housing) that are needed to reduce the risk of housing instability and/or recurring experiences of homelessness. Depending on the needs of the individual or household, this can include solutions in market rental, social, government-funded affordable, or supportive housing solutions.

This prevention framework implies focusing resources on prevention and on housing placements and supports to achieve a reduction in the need and duration for emergency responses. This approach has also been adopted by Housing Services and community partners as a Built for Zero community.



Source: Stephen Gaetz & Erin Dej. (2017). A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

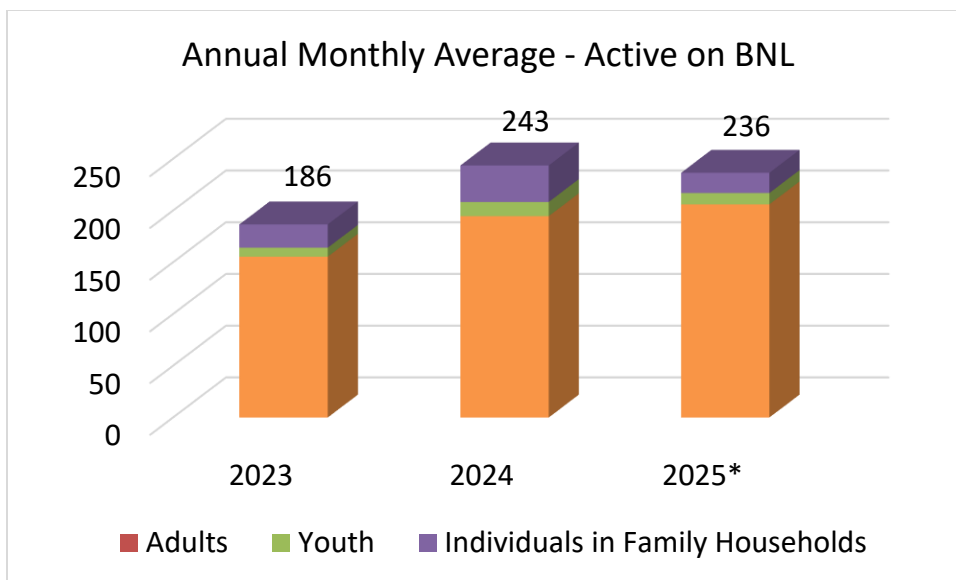
Data and Trends Analysis - Increased Experiences of Homelessness

The recent report, "[Municipalities Under Pressure: The Growing Human and Financial Cost of Homelessness Crisis](#)," shows that homelessness in Ontario has increased by 25% since 2022 and, that more than 80,000 people experienced homelessness in 2024.

The Housing Services division is mandated to manage local homelessness data in accordance with provincial requirements. The Wellington-Guelph By-Name List (BNL) is a real-time standardized list of people experiencing homelessness in Wellington-Guelph based on data received by local agencies whereby the individual has provided consent. Data collected allows service providers in the Housing Stability System to understand the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, match services and supports to needs, coordinate and prioritize service delivery and track changes in housing status as individuals and families move in and out of chronic homelessness.

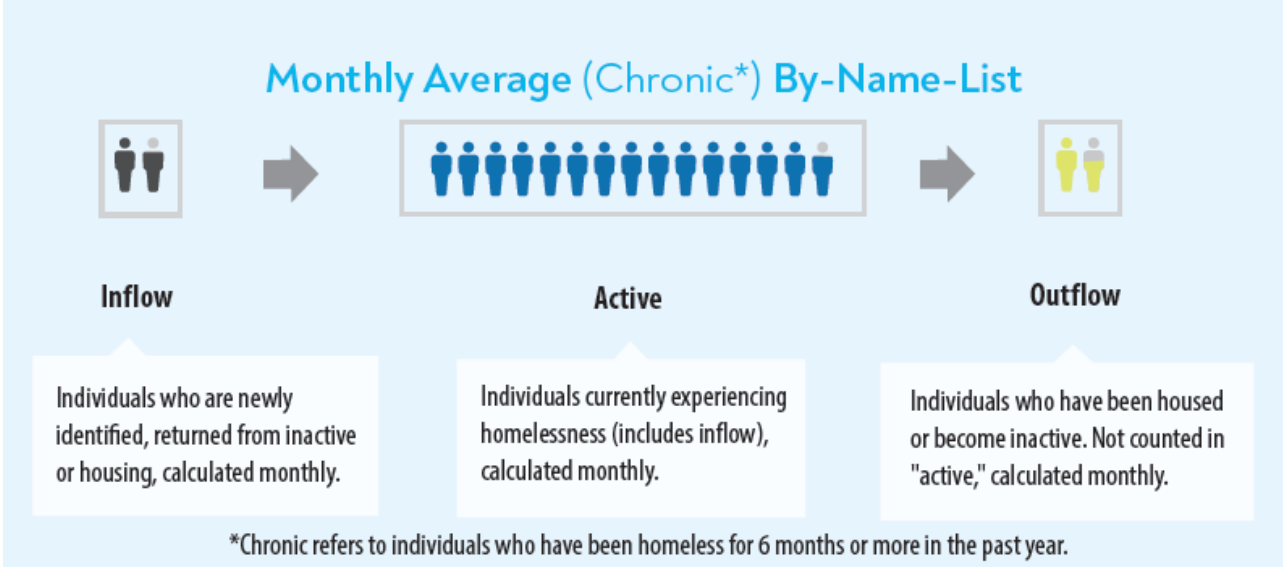
The circumstances of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness who are on the BNL vary widely. Many are temporarily sheltered either through the emergency shelters or the temporary accommodation site or are staying temporarily with family or friends (i.e., couch surfing) but do not have their own home. A smaller percentage are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, which means they are staying outdoors in a tent or a car or somewhere not intended for human habitation.

Figure 1 below shows the average monthly number of individuals experiencing homelessness (chronic and non-chronic) in 2023, 2024 and early 2025 in Wellington-Guelph.



The figure shows that the monthly average of 186 individuals and families experiencing homelessness in 2023 increased to 243 in 2024, representing a 31% increase in the monthly average. *As of March 2025, the monthly average of individuals on the BNL was 236. The reduction in 2025 is explained in the housing placements from the BNL section of this report.

Information gathered through the BNL database helps communities understand who is coming into the homelessness system (inflow) and being housed/leaving the system (outflow). Figure 2 below provides BNL data definitions for inflow, active, and outflow.



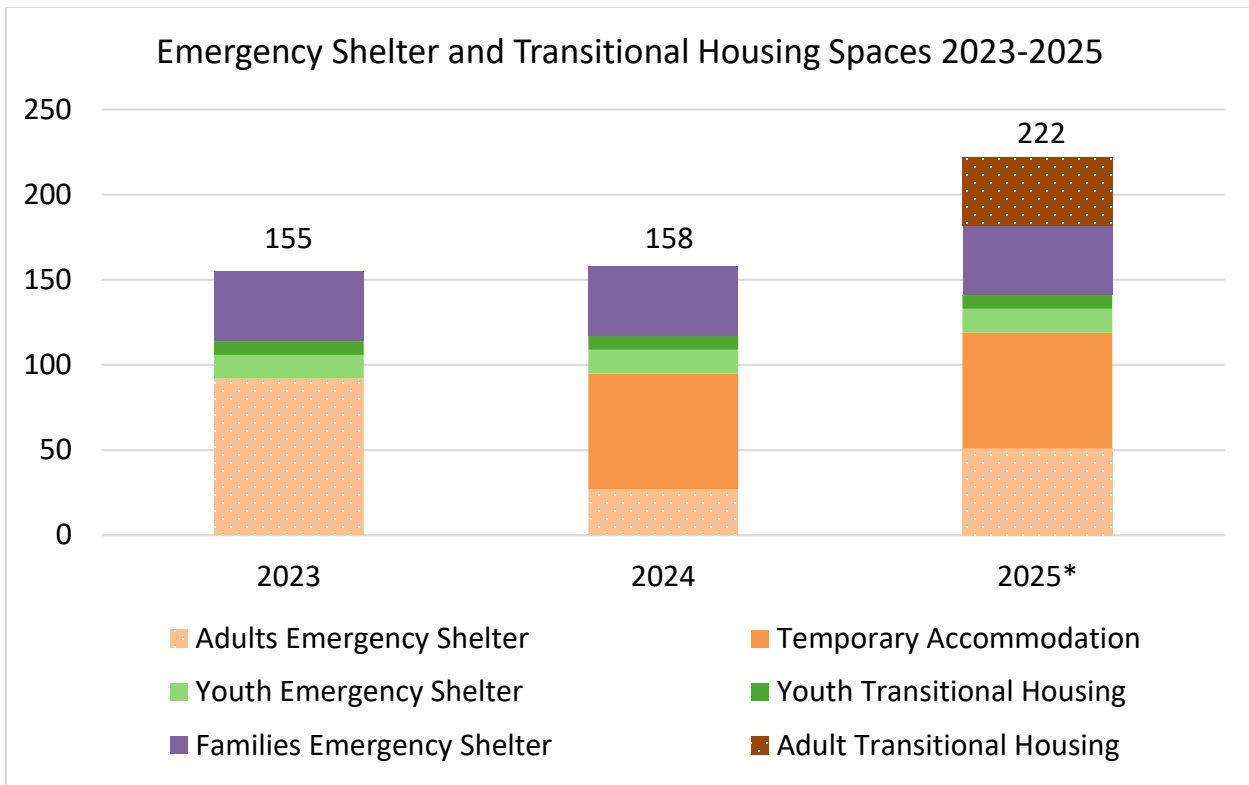
Changes in the annual monthly average of individuals experiencing chronic and non-chronic homelessness from the BNL data is shown in the table below:

Monthly average	2023	2024
INFLOW	26	38
ACTIVE	186	243
OUTFLOW	22	35

In 2024, the average monthly “inflow” was 45% higher compared to the monthly inflow average in 2023. The largest change in BNL data from 2023 to 2024 was the monthly outflow average, which increased by 56%. This increase is largely due to the success of Wyndham House (youth) and Stepping Stones (adults and families) finding housing placements for individuals they encounter experiencing homelessness, as contracted by Housing Services. However, it is important to note that the inflow continued to surpass the outflow which resulted in a 31% increase to the active monthly average between 2023 and 2024.

Expansion of Emergency Responses: Emergency Shelters, Temporary Accommodations and Transitional Housing Spaces 2023-2025

Given the lack of housing solutions (community/social housing and government-funded affordable housing), and available subsidies towards rent costs in market-based units, increases to emergency responses have expanded dramatically over the past two years. This required increased municipal investments due to lack of Provincial and Federal investments. Figure 4 below shows the expansion of emergency responses to homelessness for 2023, 2024, as well as additional spaces under development that will be operational in 2025 (patterned areas in the graph).



In September 2023, increased funding was approved to add a family shelter (24 hours of operation) with space for 19 individuals at 1 Waterloo in Guelph as well as a substance-free male emergency shelter (12 hours of operation) with space for 22 individuals at Hwy 6, just outside Guelph.

In June 2024, increased funding was approved to secure low-barrier Temporary Accommodations (24 hours of operation) with 68 beds at 128 Norfolk in Guelph that results in a small but important increase. Previously, a similar number of 24/7 emergency shelter spaces were to be phased out in 2024.

In March 2025, Wellington County opened the first Transitional Housing facility for adults offering, 28 units located at 65 Delhi Street in Guelph. Later in 2025, 24 new Emergency Shelter beds for adults and 12 new Transitional Housing units will open at 23 Gordon Street, in Guelph.

As a result of these increases in emergency responses to homelessness, our expanded housing stability system will provide 222 dedicated beds/units by mid-2025 for people experiencing homelessness, representing a 43% increase within two years. This does not include 20 overflow cots at 23 Gordon or the use of hotels to address overflow or the Winter Response Plan.

Where possible, staff intentionally removed barriers to promote access to emergency response services. For example, the Temporary Accommodation located at 128 Norfolk has options for those with pets and provides an option for couples. The Hwy 6 emergency shelter is substance free based on feedback that some individuals could not attend a low-barrier site. Flexibility was also provided to temporarily repurpose the Hwy 6 site to accommodate a spike in families experiencing homelessness. These examples demonstrate how Housing Services provides responsive emergency shelter support for Wellington-Guelph.

While Housing Services ensured a response to the increase in homelessness since 2023, staff remain cautious that continued investments in emergency responses will move us further from our community’s pre-2023 progress in ending chronic homelessness. A lack of intentional work to shift/increase resources to a range of prevention strategies that keep people from entering into homelessness and access to permanent housing will result in the system keeping individuals in a growing emergency response system for extensive periods of time - moving further away from the ability to end chronic homelessness.

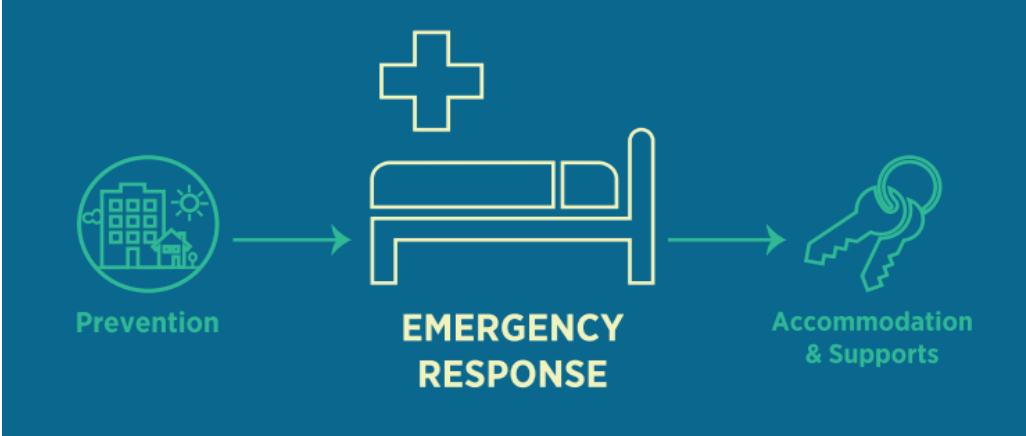


Figure 5 Source: Stephen Gaetz & Erin Dej. (2017). A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

The next three figures show how the Housing Services budget has shifted toward emergency responses, resulting in a reduction in available resources to end chronic homelessness. The orange section in the permanent housing bars show costs to maintain and operate the current housing stock, while the blue shows funding to secure housing placements for individuals through rent subsidies or supplements.

Figure 6 – 2023 Expenditures

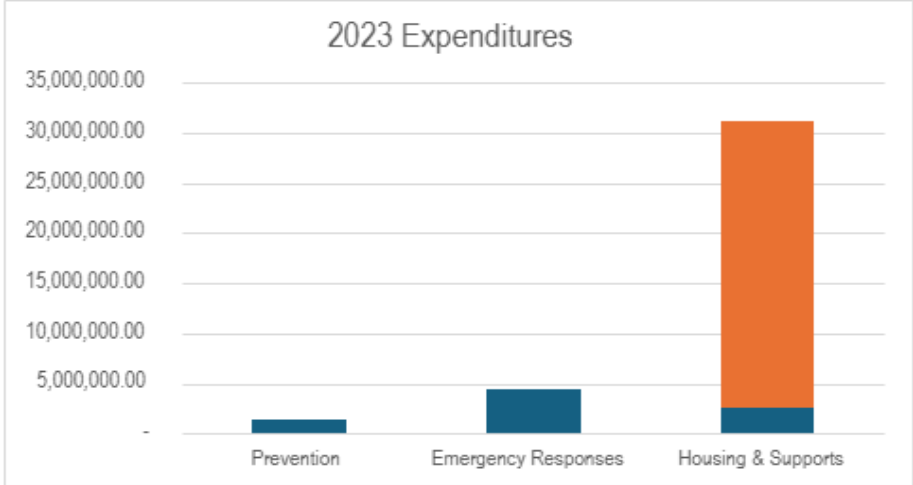


Figure 7 – 2024 Expenditures

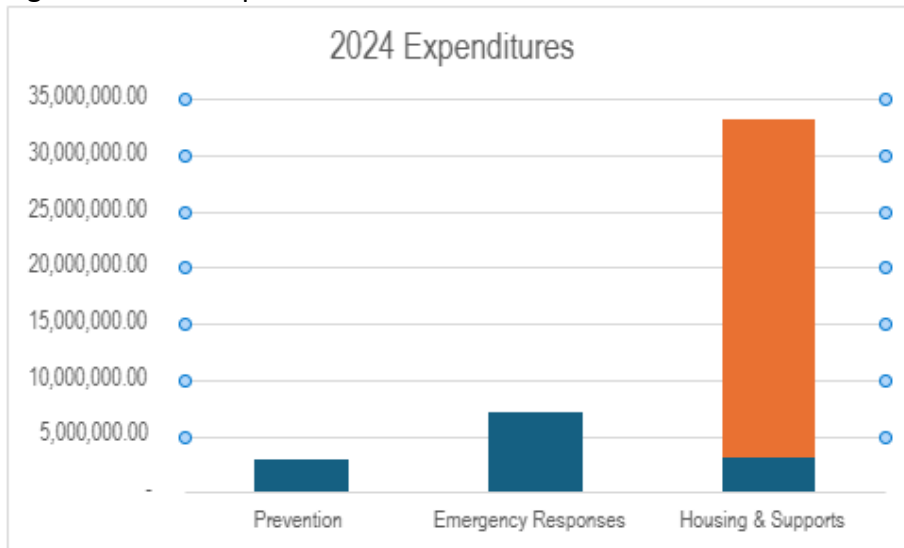
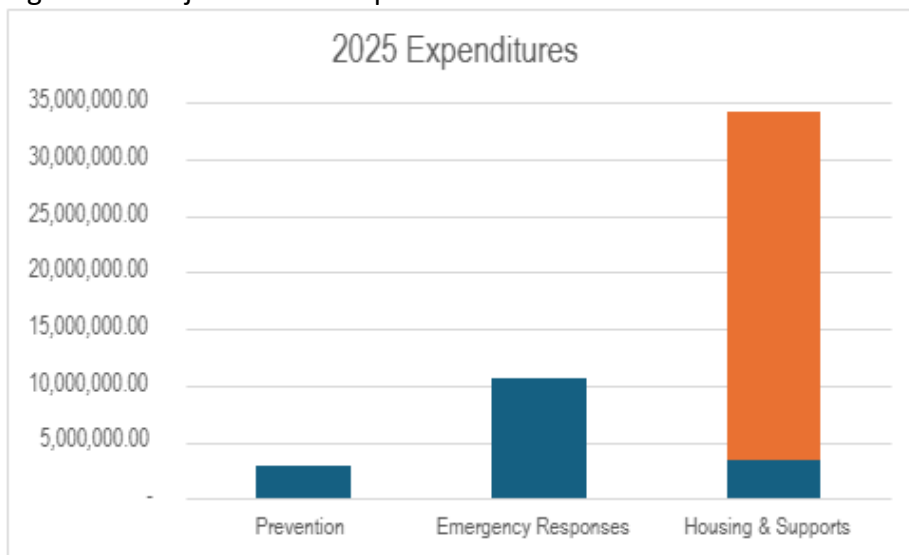


Figure 8 – Projected 2025 Expenditures



The 2024-2025 budgetary increases for emergency responses to homelessness have supported a 43% increase in available spaces within the last 2 years – creating spaces for 94% of the total monthly average of **all** individuals experiencing homelessness of which a small percentage is experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Wellington-Guelph is unique in that our expedient increases to emergency response services that offer a variety of spaces now allows a shift back to evidence-based priorities of homelessness prevention and permanent housing solutions, while we continue to monitor BNL data.

Continued Experiences of Unsheltered (Chronic) Homelessness

We must recognize that despite increases to the number and variety of emergency response services, some individuals experiencing unsheltered (chronic) homelessness, will decline access to these spaces which are largely delivered in a congregate setting and, for some, permanent housing solutions currently available, such as an apartment or supportive housing are not for them.

Housing Services works with community partner organizations which provide housing-focused outreach services as well as other outreach services, particularly those that serve Wellington County, to gather information about individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Each month Housing Services collects information from community partner agencies so that we have consistent data that helps us estimate the number of individuals experiencing homelessness across Wellington County and Guelph.

As we are currently expanding our housing-focused outreach in Wellington County, this section of the report will focus on the number of unsheltered individuals in the Guelph area. As of March 31, 2025, our data shows there are 16 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Guelph. We learned from the outcomes of the Winter Response plan that some individuals, primarily in Guelph, remained unsheltered (who may have frequently or infrequently used emergency shelters) despite being offered a 24/7 temporary accommodation during the winter months.

Given that Housing Services aims to serve all people experiencing homelessness as much as possible, it was important to learn more about these individuals and better understand their needs. To do so, staff requested Stepping Stone to conduct a survey with these individuals in March 2025.

The results of recent surveys carried out by Stepping Stone housing-focused Outreach Workers shows that the majority of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness stated that they would like to have their own apartment or permanent supportive housing. People shared that they wanted a place that was safe and secure.

This is consistent with previous engagement with individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness that was carried out in 2023 by Housing Services - that having their own place was a stated preference – specifically having an apartment and not just a room in a rooming house.

As such, Housing Services will not promote a structured encampment model to further emergency responses to homelessness and will prioritize permanent housing solutions for those experiencing chronic and unsheltered homelessness that promotes dignified services that are founded in a human rights and “Housing First” approach.

Strategic Action Plan:

This report relates to the following objectives and priorities in the County's Strategic Action Plan:

Making the best decisions for the betterment of the Community

Recommendation:

That the Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee recommend to County Council to receive the report, Formal Response to City of Guelph Council Resolution Regarding Structured Encampments, for information

Respectfully submitted,



Dave Purdy
Director of Housing Services

In consultation with/approved by:
Luisa Artuso, Social Services Administrator
Scott Wilson, Chief Administrative Officer