Everyone has a home... Home is the foundation

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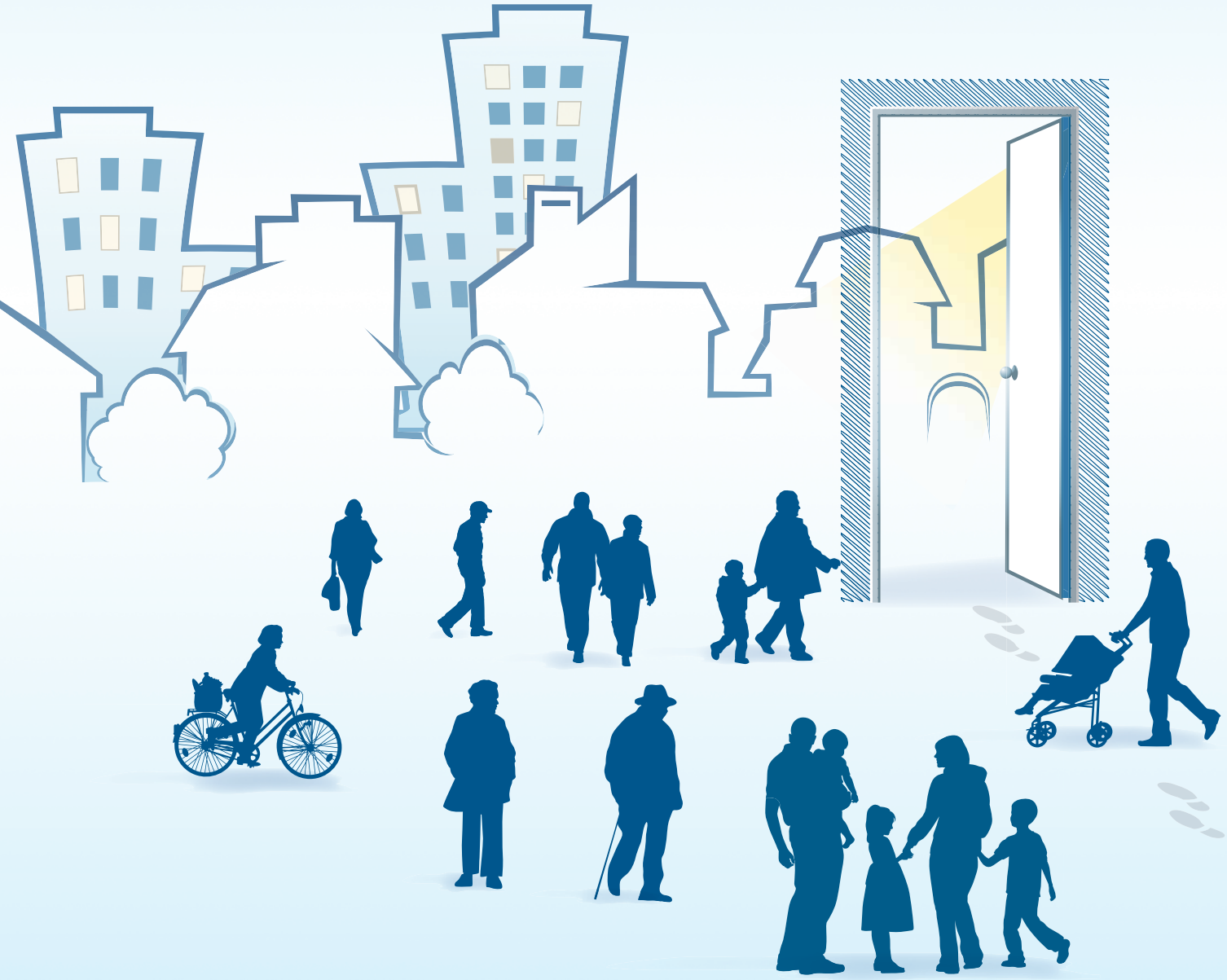
Hamilton's Housing & Homelessness Action Plan Summary



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1. INTRODUCTION

The 10-year Housing & Homelessness Action Plan will help the City of Hamilton make decisions about affordable housing and homelessness issues in Hamilton. The plan has two parts:

- **A strategic plan** with a vision, guiding values, outcomes and targets
- **An implementation plan** with 54 strategies, critical investments, accountabilities, timing, reporting and monitoring.

The plan will guide how we ensure that everyone in Hamilton has a home.

The development of the plan was supported by the Housing and Homelessness Planning Group, made up of members from more than a dozen housing sectors in Hamilton. This group was co-sponsored by the Affordable Housing Flagship, a group of private, public and non-profit stakeholders who came together to promote affordable housing.

City staff talked to people with different perspectives, all of whom have lived, planned or worked within a variety of housing contexts, and analyzed statistical information to ensure the plan is grounded in evidence.

The plan links to and complements other key planning initiatives in Hamilton including the City of Hamilton's Corporate Strategic Plan, The Urban Hamilton Official Plan, the Neighbourhood Development Strategy and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

This report summarizes Hamilton's 10-year Housing & Homelessness Action Plan. Further details, can be found in the full length plan and supporting documents at www.hamilton.ca/HousingActionPlan.

The plan will guide how we ensure that everyone in Hamilton has a home.

2. KEY CONCEPTS FROM THE ACTION PLAN

Housing Continuum

This Action Plan responds to homelessness and housing insecurity for all residents with low or moderate incomes. It provides solutions for all types of housing situations, known as the 'housing continuum'. The housing continuum includes:

- Supports for people who are absolutely homeless
- Emergency Shelter
- Housing with Supports (Supported, Supportive and Transitional Housing)
- Social Housing (Rent Geared to Income)
- Affordable Rental (Market)
- Affordable Homeownership

Equity

An equity perspective recognizes that people do not have the same access to services. Some people may need different services or more supports to find and stay in their homes. Peoples' experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness are complex and the issues of gender, Aboriginal status, sexual orientation, age, race and ability have a significant impact on these experiences. The issue of equity is an important part of Hamilton's housing solutions.

Homelessness

Homelessness is the experience of people sleeping outside, in a public place or a shelter (absolute homelessness), people staying with family and friends (hidden homelessness) and people who are at-risk of becoming homeless because of unaffordable, inadequate, unsafe housing conditions.

A□ordable housing

Affordable housing is housing that costs 30% or less of gross household income for households with low to moderate income.

Housing First

According to the Homeless Hub, Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that means quickly providing homeless people with housing and then providing additional services as needed. While the housing technically comes first, supports and services must be put in place at the same time or very quickly. The concept of 'housing' in Housing First must be flexible to meet the unique needs of some groups of people (for example, women and youth).

6. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

The Action Plan outlines **54*** strategies and the actions that need to be undertaken to help us achieve our outcomes and targets:

- **19** of the strategies are considered critical investment strategies key to achieving the targets identified for each outcome area. They are a way to prioritize investments.
- The remaining strategies are also important, but not as critical to achieving our targets.

Actions that support the strategies have also been identified in the Action Plan. The chart below outlines the critical investment strategies identified in the plan and gives an example of one* action that will be undertaken to help implement that strategy.

*Please refer to the full Action Plan for a detailed list of all strategies.

Outcome #1 – Supply

CRITICAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY	ACTION EXAMPLE
Advocate for a National Housing Strategy and for provincial and federal funding for new affordable housing	• Link with the current Government Relations work and other community advocacy efforts
Explore new incentive and funding programs and expand and promote more broadly existing City incentive programs to increase the supply of affordable housing	• Inventory what programs/incentives exist now in Hamilton and identify for whom this information will be useful
As part of the City's new Comprehensive Zoning By-law, explore the potential for pre-zoning	• Identify areas where pre-zoning for appropriate zoning designations is possible and would support affordable housing development
Explore opportunities for social housing providers to leverage their existing capital assets in order to develop additional affordable housing units	• Review Housing Services Act and social housing operating agreements and identify opportunities for potential development using existing social housing assets

Outcome #2 – Affordability

CRITICAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY	ACTION EXAMPLE
Encourage mixed housing and mixed income development in all urban neighbourhoods by increasing opportunities for affordable housing in areas where opportunities are limited	• Ensure that all municipal planning decisions with respect to mix and range follow the policy direction of the Urban Hamilton Official Plan • Map areas underserved by affordable housing
Expand rent subsidy programs	• Secure new funding and/or reallocate funding
Advocate for changes to income policies like increased social assistance rates and Living Wage policy	• Link to broader community advocacy efforts

Outcome #3 – Supports

CRITICAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY	ACTION EXAMPLE
Expand housing with support options including mobile, in situ and transitional housing options	• Conduct/review research about housing with supports, on what exists and what is needed
Develop partnerships with senior levels of government to do a better job of discharge planning	• Organize a municipal/provincial housing forum in Hamilton
Implement an assessment and support process as part of the 'wait list' for social housing to better address the needs of applicants	• Review current access processes and develop a model for enhanced service
Encourage the development and implementation of enhanced eviction prevention policies in the social housing system	• Support the best practices from the Housing Services Act Working Group for eviction prevention
Ensure high quality, trauma-informed services and supports for individuals and families in homelessness and/or insecure housing situations	• Build on practices of person-centredness with the system of housing and homelessness services

Outcome #4 – Quality

CRITICAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY	ACTION
Explore the potential for new funding programs and expand and promote, more broadly, existing programs for rehabilitating the housing stock	• Evaluate the Ontario Renovates Program and connect with the renovation pilot of the Neighbourhood Development Strategy
Develop and implement a proactive and coordinated strategy to address bed bugs	• Consult with the Domiciliary Hostel Working Group and social housing providers to develop an implementation plan
Adequately fund capital reserves for social housing	• Ensure social housing building condition assessments are up to date and adequate
Encourage all social housing providers to support tenant safety through capital improvements	• Engage Hamilton Police Services safety audits for identified social housing communities
Plan and implement community building efforts that will develop a sense of community in all social housing	• Look to Neighbourhood Development Strategy as a model

Outcome #5 – Equity

CRITICAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY	ACTION
Engage tenants and landlords regarding rights and responsibilities through: • Outreach • Mediation • Public awareness	• Engage community development workers to work with landlords and tenants about their rights and responsibilities
Ensure that everyone who accesses housing and homelessness services is meaningfully engaged in planning and decision making that impacts their lives	• Engage various stakeholders to develop the right model

7. WORK ALREADY UNDERWAY

The Action Plan is not starting from scratch – there is a lot of work already underway that we can build on:

- The Housing and Homelessness Action Plan has already been endorsed by City Council as a Strategic Action within the City of Hamilton's 2012-2015 Strategic Plan.
- Incentive programs are in place for residential development (e.g. development charge exemptions for affordable housing, Hamilton Downtown Multi Residential Property Investment Program, etc.) that serve various purposes and are targeted to different areas and types of development.
- The advocacy work of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and Federation of Canadian Municipalities (and other Provincial and National associations) can be leveraged as we implement the plan.
- Currently funding 1,500 rent supplements and housing allowances to people who live with a low income.
- The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction works locally to get issues of income and affordability on the radar.
- Currently provide 3,000 housing with supports units or beds in Hamilton (including mobile, in-situ and Residential Care Facilities). The majority of these options are for persons with mental health issues, physical or cognitive disabilities and people experiencing homelessness.
- The City of Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Services area employs three social workers to provide brief intervention and long term counseling to people experiencing homelessness from a trauma-centred perspective.
- Hamilton has a long history of administering programs to rehabilitate existing housing stock. The Ontario Renovates program (formerly the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program) is expected to help improve 225 units of affordable housing in Hamilton by March 2015.
- CityHousing Hamilton, through its Tenant Engagement Strategy, is embarking on community building efforts.
- Hamilton's emergency shelters are successfully implementing the Blueprint for Emergency Shelter Services to improve basic shelter services and help people secure and maintain long term housing.
- Since 2003, 731 affordable rental housing units have been constructed in Hamilton through the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program.
- Working with the community and Residential Care Facility operators to implement recommendations from a review of the Domiciliary Hostel Program (Room for Potential Report, 2011).

8. INVESTING IN HAMILTON'S ACTION PLAN

Many of the Action Plan strategies do not require significant financial investment. A number of strategies require policy changes, advocacy, shifts to the way systems operate and education for various stakeholders. However the plan does identify four critical investment strategies that require significant resources:

CRITICAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY	INVESTMENT
Expand existing incentive programs, and explore potential for new ones, to increase supply of affordable housing (e.g. capital grants, loans and tax deferrals)	$30 million annually over 10 years to meet the target of 3,000 new affordable rental units
Expand portable and in situ rent subsidy programs (i.e. rent supplements and/or housing allowances that go with the tenant and are not tied to a particular unit)	$2.52 million annually over 10 years to meet the target of 2,100 new housing allowances
Expand existing funding programs, and explore potential for new ones, to rehabilitate housing stock, including: • Ontario Renovates • Grassroots, neighbourhood or community-based quality-improvement initiatives	$7 million annually to rehabilitate target of 3,500 units of existing housing stock needing repair/ modifications
Adequately fund capital reserves for social housing based on Building Condition Assessments and Reserve Fund studies	$3.24 million annually to fund Building Condition Assessments and the renewal of Provincial Social Housing Renovation and Retrofit Program
TOTAL	$42.7 MILLION ANNUALY

Addressing housing and homelessness in Hamilton is a shared responsibility. Implementing the Action Plan will require coordinated advocacy e□orts and resource commitments from all three levels of government, the private sector, the non-profit sector and the community.

Home is a place you choose, not somewhere you are forced to stay out of necessity.

Safe, affordable housing makes sense and makes good healthy communities. We won't need many other services from government … it pays to have good housing.

We need to feel safe where we live – we don't feel safe right now.

People are on waiting lists for extended periods of time. Give support to these people while they are on the list.

There isn't enough good quality affordable housing.

Encourage the federal government to re-think its role in housing and make a commitment to a National Housing Strategy.

Responsible landlords should be rewarded for well-maintained properties.

If you don't know the questions to ask, it's hard to find the service.

Workers should take a 'no wrong door' problem-solving approach to clients, informing them of all allowances and programs they are entitled to apply for and spending the necessary time with clients to help them understand the system. This customer service approach should be standardized across agencies.

- Excerpts from What We Heard...Talking to people About Housing & Homelessness in Hamilton

9. THE COST OF NOT IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

If in 10 years we don't achieve Outcome #1 – "Supply", we will:

- Have a net loss of rental housing stock with no new rental housing, and we won't be able to replace any losses due to demolitions and conversions to condominiums
- Have a 'tighter' rental market with lower vacancy rates resulting in less choice for renters and higher rents
- Lose our ability to offer affordable housing choices to employers and skilled professionals who are thinking about re-locating to Hamilton

If in 10 years we don't achieve Outcome #2 – "Affordability", we will:

- Double the households on the social housing waiting list
- Have a decline in the overall health of Hamilton residents and neighbourhoods as a result of increasingly instable housing situations and lack of choice

If in 10 years we don't achieve Outcome #3 – "Supports", we will:

- See the hundreds of people who have been successfully housed, homeless again, thereby elevating emergency shelter occupancy to a crisis level
- Have more emergency department visits as people have nowhere else to turn for their health needs
- Have more evictions from private market and social housing buildings. Landlords will have increased costs as a result of high tenant turnover

9. THE COST OF NOT IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

If in 10 years we don't achieve Outcome #4 – "Quality", we will:

- Have people living in poor quality and/or unsuitable housing with poorer health outcomes
- Have less choice for people with special housing needs
- Have a deteriorating housing stock that will be more expensive to repair later

If in 10 years we don't achieve Outcome #5 – "Equity", we will:

- Have further segregation of people who are traditionally discriminated against in housing that is poor quality and unsuitable
- See more people who find it harder and take longer to find stable housing and satisfaction
- Have to spend more resources on each system area (housing, healthcare, corrections, food security, etc.)