

County of Huron | Social and Property Services
2020 Housing and Homelessness Annual Report

**Working together to
provide a coordinated
system of care.**

www.HuronCounty.ca/housing



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Fundamental Right to Housing Statement

The Corporation of the County of Huron is dedicated to enhancing the social and economic well-being of Huron County through the creation and preservation of affordable housing.

The County supports an individual's fundamental right to housing without discrimination as protected under Ontario's Human Rights Code.

Taking a holistic approach to housing and homelessness in Huron.

As external pressures, such as the effects of the pandemic and the housing crisis increase, it's more important than ever that we work together to address homelessness and housing instability in our community.

At the County, we're tackling this head on. Our teams, including Social & Property Services, Planning, Economic Development, and Communications, are working collaboratively to address every point on the housing continuum simultaneously. This integrated approach works to ensure that everyone in our community has access to safe and affordable housing now and tomorrow.

The County's Social & Property Services team addresses the needs of Huron's most vulnerable, by providing things such as a temporary emergency shelter, coordination of multiple service agencies and not-for-profits, and various forms of financial aid. In addition, this team is developing a Housing First strategy and investigating a variety of supportive and affordable housing options for our community.

While the Social & Property Services team works to address the current, and often immediate needs of our community, they are also collaborating with the County's Planning and Economic Development departments to find solutions

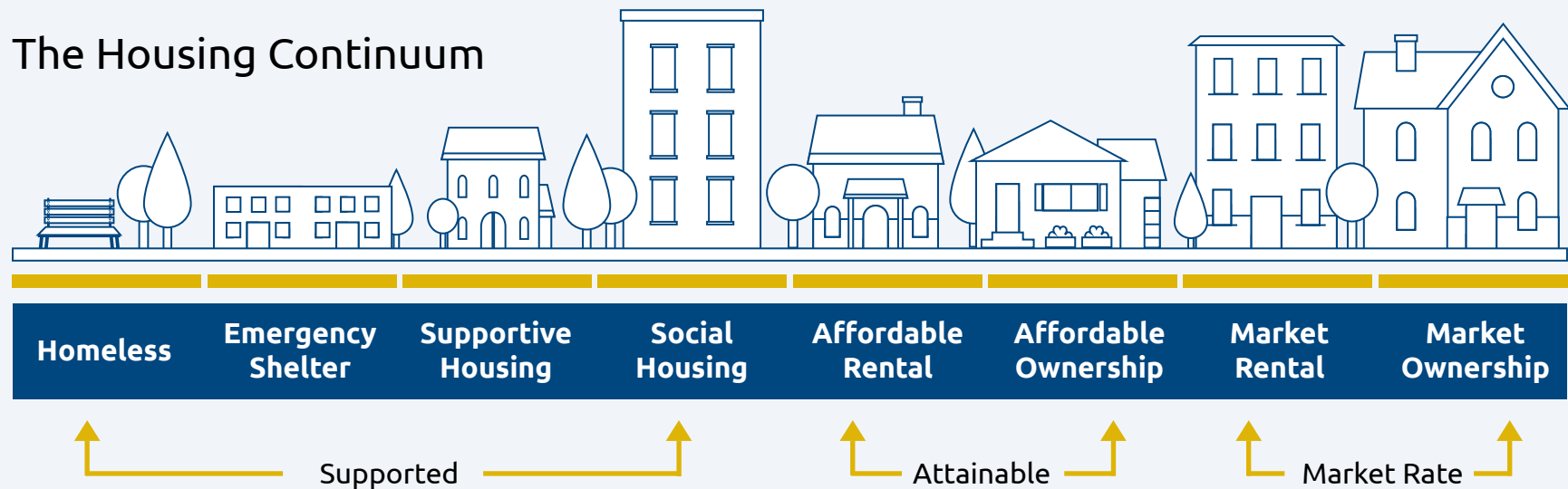
that meet our community's evolving needs in the future. Some of these current projects include local housing surveys, establishing accurate and relevant data sources, working with developers and the business community, drafting planning guidelines, and reviewing current zoning documents and official plans.

Throughout all of these efforts, Social & Property Services continues to collaborate with the Communications team to help engage the public and ensure all stakeholders are informed at every step along the way.

By coordinating the actions of the County's various teams, we will be more diversified in our approach, and better prepared to embrace and celebrate social and economic diversity in our community. This holistic approach ensures that everyone experiencing a housing need, regardless of where they are in the housing continuum, is considered with equal value and has their individual needs and concerns addressed with compassion and respect. The current work being done by the Social & Property Services team and their partners is essential for reaching success in this goal.

Meighan Wark, County of Huron, CAO

Everyone deserves access to a safe and affordable home.



County of Huron Social and Property Services is working proactively alongside the County's Planning and Economic Development departments to increase the housing stock available at all points on the housing continuum. This will ensure that everyone in the community has access to safe and affordable housing now and tomorrow.

Learn more: HuronCountyConnects.ca/huron-county-housing

Background

Two main themes have been the focus of Housing and Homeless work in the County of Huron since 2013 to support the Provinces goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025;

- To support people experiencing homelessness to obtain and retain housing;
- To support people at risk of homelessness to remain housed.

The vision for the Community Homeless Prevention Initiative (CHPI) is to have:

“A coordinated and holistic service delivery system that is people-centred, evidence informed and outcomes-based, and reflects a Housing First approach that focused on homelessness prevention and reduces reliance on emergency services.” (CHPI Program Guidelines, Province of Ontario, 2017)

“*Research has shown that long-term approaches to ending homelessness are more cost-effective than emergency responses. Investing in affordable housing today means enabling more people to realize their full potential in the future.*”

www.ontario.ca/page/ending-homelessness-ontario

Addressing the Long-term Affordable Housing and Homelessness Plan

1. Establish a Framework to Provide Leadership, Governance and Advocacy

- Provide education and advocacy for housing and homelessness issues at both the local level and at provincial planning and policy tables
- Adopt a local definition of homelessness
- Champion a housing first philosophy
- Create momentum for a paradigm shift that works towards ending homelessness rather than managing it by breaking down inter-agency silos, working in an integrated fashion grounded in collaboration and coordination of services

2. Expand Access to Affordable Housing

- Increase affordable housing by working in partnership with municipalities, developers and collaborating with all stakeholders
- Increase housing support staff to include housing stability and liaison workers

3. Improve Data Collection and Reporting

- Continue participation in provincial enumeration
- Continue commitment to better understand homelessness, poverty and associated complexities as to inform program decisions to reflect prevailing need

4. Develop an Emergency Service System Oriented Toward Ending Homelessness

- Commit to diversion from shelter as a best practice whenever possible to do so
- Develop a rapid re-housing program for those experiencing episodic homelessness
- Adopt and educate a housing first philosophy and incorporate the principals of housing first in appropriate aspects of the department client services
- Shift service delivery to a Coordinated Access System and the creation of a by-name list that enables municipal partners to keep track of who is homeless, their depth of need and begin to match them to appropriate housing and supports

5. Increased Targeted Efforts to Prevent Homelessness

- Create a formalized homelessness diversion strategy to be incorporated in an integrated social services delivery model
- Develop a comprehensive and holistic eviction prevention strategy
- Prioritize homeless prevention initiatives including support to reduce the burden of housing and household expenses for low-income households

6. Improve Service Coordination

- Implement and provide community training for a common assessment tool
- Engage with all community partners and stakeholders to collaboratively commit to eliminating chronic homelessness

7. Use Municipal Tools to Facilitate Affordable Housing Preserve and Improve Existing Social Housing

- Improve coordination, communication and integration with all municipalities in the Huron County services area

8. Preserve and Improve the Existing Social Housing

- Support the sustainability of the social housing stock

9. Establish a People-Centered System of Housing and Homelessness

- Connect clients with the peer support worker as is suitable to do so
- Develop a housing preference form to help clients identify their housing goals
- Stay connected to clients in their ongoing housing stability
- Create crisis management plans with high risk clients that supports them to maintain their housing
- Engage in meaningful service training for service practitioners that focus on compassionate approaches in services delivery, motivational interviewing and allow the client to guide the process in obtaining and retaining appropriate housing.

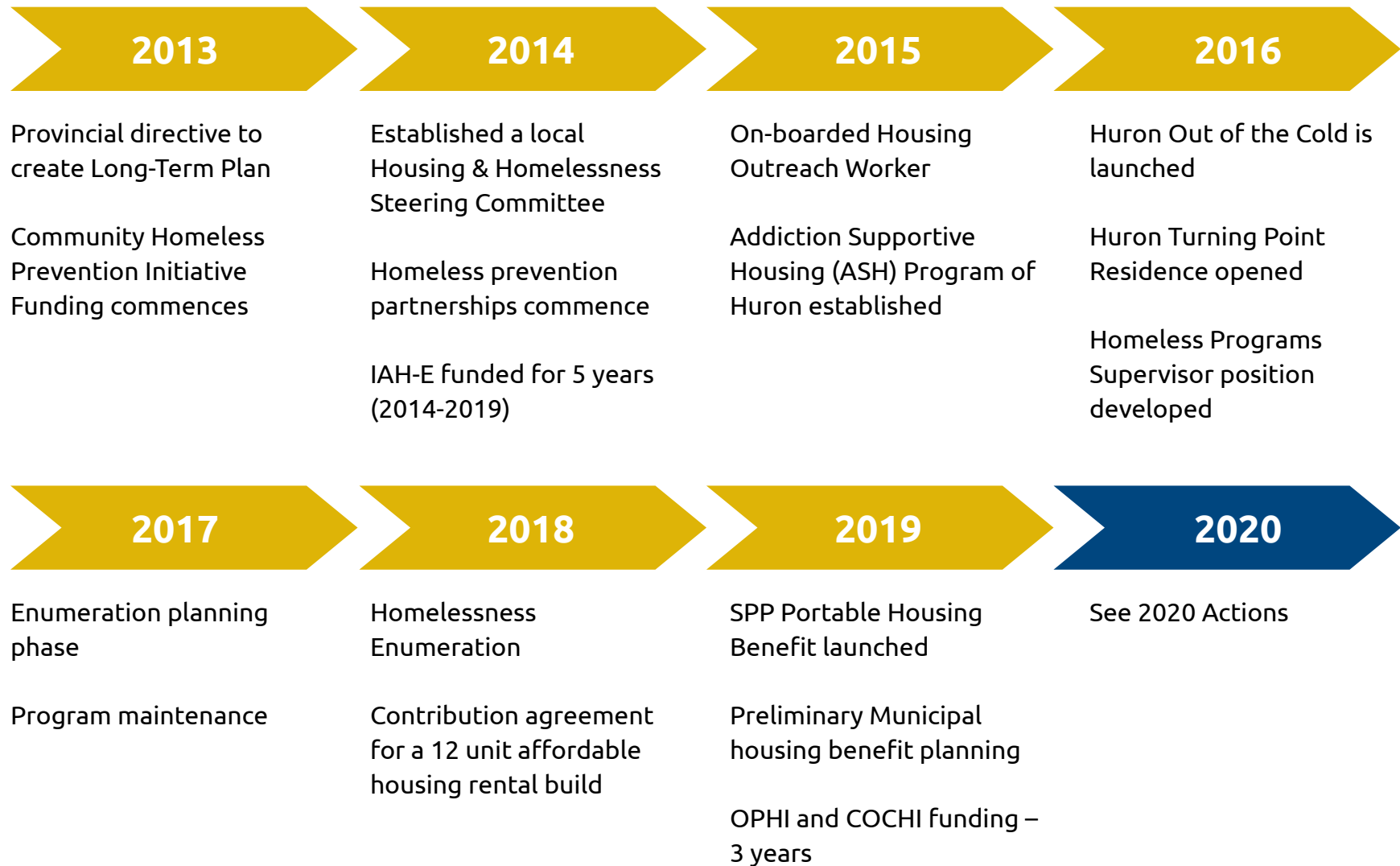
Housing and Homelessness Plan:

<https://www.huroncounty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Housing-HomelessnessPlan-1.pdf>

Housing and Homelessness Plan 5 Year Review:

<https://www.huroncounty.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Long-Term-Affordable-Housing-and-Homelessness-Plan-Update.pdf>

Actions to date



2020 Actions

The added pressures and health concerns brought on by COVID-19 exasperated the homelessness crisis in our, and in many other, rural communities. Huron's most vulnerable population faced many barriers to accessing the proper health and safety education, and PPE required to properly protect themselves, putting them at a much higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

As a result of this, an increased level of local attention was drawn to the heightened emergency situation Huron's homeless population were facing, particularly at the onset of the winter season. At this time, community members expressed concern for those facing potentially life threatening situations from both COVID-19 and from potential exposure to the elements.

The greater attention brought on by COVID-19, meant that staff saw increased community support in their efforts to aide those in crisis and at risk. Support came by way of provincial and community funded financial aid programs, such as the Urgent Needs Fund, managed in partnership with Perth-Huron United Way, and direct donations of cash, warm clothing, and personal hygiene items made through the local Library system, to the emergency shelter program. As community momentum grew, and with the full support of Council, staff developed and led a Homelessness Task Force. This Task Force

connected staff, Council, and multiple service agencies, enabling a coordinated approach that addressed the increased pressures quickly and effectively. Staff, working with partner agencies, were able develop an emergency COVID-19 shelter in local motels, as well as enhance the existing temporary cold weather shelter to include wrap-around supports provided by trauma trained professionals.

In addition to demonstrating immense flexibility throughout their COVID-19 response, staff continued to work and make progress on the Long-term Affordable Housing and Homelessness Plan by developing a Housing First strategy, investigating opportunities for supportive housing builds, and further developing a system of coordinated access.

County of Huron Social & Property Services worked incredibly hard in 2020 to engage with at risk individuals, the community, and all stakeholders. In doing so they not only maintained service levels throughout the pandemic, but enhanced many existing services and programs.

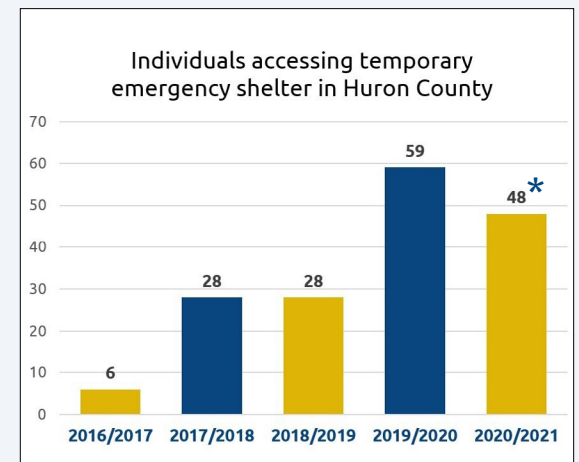
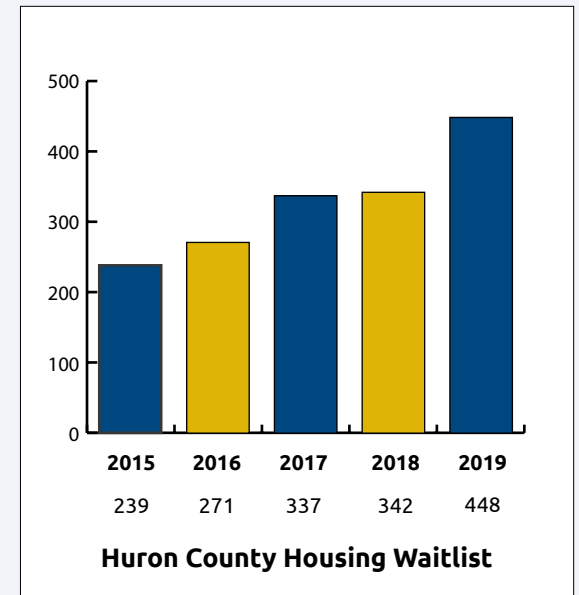
Addressing homelessness in Huron County in 2020

2018 Enumeration

A County led enumeration project undertaken in 2018 indicated that, at that time, Huron County had at least 100 homeless individuals. This enumeration project continues to inform work being done in 2020. A follow up enumeration project is planned for fall 2021.

Taking Proactive Action

There is a housing shortage across the province, but rural communities feel this burden even more with limited access to new developments and funding. Local social housing waitlists continue to grow longer, with an increase of 91% over the past 5 years. There is a severe lack of affordable housing units available for our community members. Coordinating, developing and implementing affordable housing is challenging with inadequate funding and resources available, especially in small-urban and rural municipalities. A sufficient supply of affordable housing, rather than a continuum of short-term and bandage fixes, is absolutely critical to end homelessness in the long term. For these reasons, and others, Social and Property Services is working in coordination with County of Huron's Planning, Economic Development, Communications teams and various external stakeholders to proactively and holistically address the housing needs of everyone in our community, including those experiencing homelessness or housing instability.



*During the initial COVID-19 community response the County supported 73 households, in 21 emergency motel rooms over seven months, to enable access to private spaces. Those spaces concluded in December and individuals who were not able to find housing transferred to Huron Out of the Cold Heart to Home. 48 unique individuals accessed the emergency shelter in the 2020/2021 season.

Individual Financial Supports

Social & Property Services continues to offer financial support opportunities that aim to prevent homelessness including:

Pathways to Self-Sufficiency

Pathways to Self-Sufficiency is a joint project supported by Social Services and the Health Unit. Pathways is an emergency program that helps low-income families and individuals in Huron County when they are most in need. The aim of the program is to reduce child poverty, promote attachment to the workforce, and prevent homelessness.

Ontario Works

Ontario Works is an Ontario-wide program that provides income and employment support to people in temporary financial need.

In addition to these ongoing programs, Social & Property Services as partnered with Perth Huron United Way to offer emergency relief funding including:

- Social Services Relief Fund
- United Way Urgent Needs Fund:

The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit

The COHB is a federal-provincial housing allowance program launched on April 1, 2020. The purpose of the COHB program is to increase the affordability of rental housing, by providing an income-tested, portable housing benefit (PHB). This payment goes directly to eligible households in housing need who are on, or eligible to be on, social housing waiting lists as well as households in need living in community housing.

The COHB program is modeled after and replaces Ontario's Portable Housing Benefit – Special Priority Policy. This program expands the target groups beyond survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, and now includes persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness, Indigenous persons, seniors, and people with disabilities, as well as households living in community housing.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, a total of 35 households in Huron County received COHB. At present, Huron County has 33 households on the program who were approved in this time period.

Community Partners & Collaboration

Homelessness is a complex social issue and no one agency can solve it alone. Collaboration and partnerships are critical in meeting all the unique needs of those in the crisis of being without a place to call home. Partnerships come in many forms, some as funders, some in prevention and upstream work and some responding within the emergency shelter system.

The County Housing and Homelessness team works closely with agencies such as;

- Health Care: a nurse practitioner and EMS work to support the medical needs of those who are experiencing homelessness.
- Faith Based Organizations: provide safe spaces, housing loss prevention supports.
- Public Health: support the work of the shelter teams in keeping staff and guests safe with current infectious disease control measures and safe food handling.
- Recreation facilities: offer locations for those in crisis to access personal hygiene and toileting facilities.
- Substance Use and Mental Health Service Agencies: offer wrap around supports, access to housing and housing stability staff
- Government Services: assist with income supports, employment counselling, emergency funding,

homeless prevention resources

- Municipal Councils: solution focused, engaging in difficult conversations and raising awareness in all avenues on the need for more resources
- Funding Partners: allies in advocacy and education while leveraging community resources and facilitating partnerships
- **YOU – Community Champions** turning the conversation on housing as a human right and ending chronic homelessness in our community!

“We’re working together to prevent and address homelessness in Huron County.”



Heart to Home

People experiencing homelessness and those at high risk of becoming homeless are individual people, each with unique experiences and challenges that require an individualized response. Responding to homelessness is not just about providing housing, it requires relationship and trust building and often means addressing complex issues including past traumas, mental illness or substance use.

For these reasons, addressing homelessness requires an integrated system of support and care strategies that are provided by multiple organizations and agencies working together.

Homelessness Task Force

At the onset of the pandemic, an emergency Homelessness Task Force was developed to address the immediate concerns facing Huron's homeless population. This Task Force consists of County staff, members of Council, and multiple partner agencies. Together, they have worked to quickly increase staffing levels, set up an emergency COVID-19 and cold weather shelters that provides wrap around supports, increase supportive services, develop and distribute public education campaigns, investigate funding opportunities, and plan for a new supportive housing build to be developed in Huron.



What is Heart to Home?

Heart to Home is a group of local agencies and not-for-profits, led by the County of Huron, who are working together to prevent and address homelessness in Huron County using a Housing First strategy.

Learn more about Huron Heart to Home:

www.HuronCountyConnects.ca/huron-heart-to-home

Emergency COVID-19 Shelter

When the province and the county shifted services to respond to the pandemic the province provided Social Services Relief Funding to all regions. Funds were used to support social service agencies in business continuity for vulnerable clients. 579 people were assisted with those funds. Additionally the County was able to open three emergency shelter locations supporting 76 people in total with temporary emergency accommodations.

The annual Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative funding remained as an ongoing component to respond to local housing and homelessness needs. 36 people accessed transitional housing in 2020 while another 269 households received housing loss prevention and retention supports.

Emergency Cold Weather Shelter

Out of the Cold: Heart to Home supported 48 unique individuals this past season. The shelter was near the 15 person capacity almost every night.

This year's program was even more robust than in previous seasons as the increased staffing levels and facility changes enabled longer shelter days and more partner agencies to offer extended services within the shelter doors.

Noteworthy was the success of the partnerships with Huron County's Community Paramedicine program and the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance Nurse Practitioner program. Included in the work, Community Paramedicine, in partnership with Huron Perth Public Health, was able to stand up a small vaccine clinic for those accessing the shelter.

“ *It was nice to have a warm place to go when it was really cold out and you could have some food and a rest. The staff were helpful and got me in contact with the services I needed that will help me overcome my issues.* ”

~Shelter Guest

The Stability Team

Social & Property Service's Stability Team has undergone Housing-Based Case Management training focusing on shift in service delivery from the shelter program. This training brings new tools and resources to Huron that have not previously been a part of housing stability work including, methods to increase awareness and access to tools, and to be proactive in working with those who may otherwise disengage from the case management process.

The Stability Team will use their training to:

- Use a housing first philosophy
- Provide client driven service
- Help set clients up for success
- Stimulate positive change and support the change process.
- Engage in crisis planning
- Provide risk assessments and readiness

When dealing with an individual in crisis, staff will consider all prevention and diversion options to prevent the crisis worsening. While most individuals can resolve their homelessness themselves, some require a greater depth of support. Those with the longest period of chronic homelessness will be the Stability Team's primary focus. They will coordinate efforts with the housing advocate, to source units and start the critical process of move-in.

This team will be in the field until the next shelter season at which time they will resume the shelter work.

What are wrap-around supports?

Wrap-around supports to an individual living within a community means enhancing access to support services, establishing trust and rapport, and providing increased opportunities to meeting their needs because services are available when they need them.

Wrap-around services may include:



Meals



Mental Health
and Addiction
Supports



Medical
Services



Financial
Assistance



Life Skills/
Counselling



Employment
Services

Communications & Education

Social & Property Services collaborates with the County's Communication team to inform and educate all stakeholders and the public. Together, this team has accomplished in 2020:

- Provided a new website design: www.huroncounty.ca/housing
- Drafted Huron Heart to Home branding
- Developed a Huron County Connects public engagement platform: www.connectedcountyofhuron.ca/huron-heart-to-home
- Issued a variety of media releases
- Developed educational toolkits and distribute them to various stakeholders
- Facilitated a community donation campaign that was run in partnership with the Huron County Library for the emergency cold weather shelter.

Supportive Housing

Currently, the County of Huron owns and manages 415 rent-g geared-to-income units located throughout the County. Housing Services provides administrative and property management services for these properties; essentially acting as the landlord for these County-owned units.

The current wait list for the County's units varies between 1-5 years depending on location and apartment type. As of June 2021 there are 458 active applications on the subsidized rent geared to income (RGI) waiting list.

Because the need for different types of housing is critical in Huron, the County is exploring options for municipal rental builds. The Corporation is working with local municipalities, seeking opportunities to build affordable housing and/or supportive housing and plans to act as the developer and landlord of that build.

A Housing Development Team has been developed to investigate funding opportunities, source potential locations and draft communications for the initiatives. This team is taking a multi-pronged approach to address the affordable housing shortage in Huron because more than construction is required to address the shortage.

Heart to Home Timeline



By working together with Huron Heart to Home partners, staff, Council, and all other stakeholders and by accessing federal and provincial funding opportunities, progress is being made to end chronic homelessness in Huron County.

Huron is well on it's way to being able to provide a Housing First model that focuses on homelessness prevention and reduction on the need for emergency services. Using a coordinated and holistic service delivery system this approach will be people-centred, evidence informed and outcomes-based.

Working towards a Housing First strategy

What is Housing First?

A Housing First approach puts a primary focus on helping people who are experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, to quickly access safe, affordable and stable housing, combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around support services.

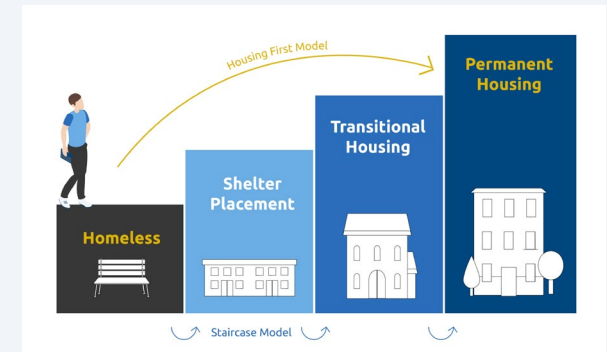
It is the goal of Huron Heart to move to transition to a housing first model that eliminates the need for emergency shelter.

The 5 principles of Housing First are:

1. Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements.
2. Participant choice and self-determination.
3. Recovery orientation.
4. Individualized and participant driven support.
5. Social and community integration.

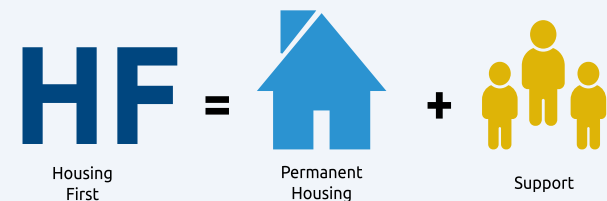
Outdated Method

The **Staircase Model** requires advancement through various stages of “readiness” like sobriety or having all mental health sorted out. This is an outdated approach that does not have a proven track record.



Preferred Method

A **Housing First** approach puts a primary focus on helping people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, quickly access safe, affordable and stable housing.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Adopting a Housing First approach in Huron will ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness basic biological needs are met first. This will lead to greater success in their future housing stability.

SELF ACTUALIZATION

Desire to become the most that one can be

ESTEEM

Respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom

LOVE & BELONGING

Friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection

SAFETY

Personal security, employment, resources, health, property

PHYSIOLOGICAL

Air, water, food, housing, sleep, clothing, reproduction

A Shelter is Not a Home



A shelter provides immediate access to safe and temporary relief from the elements, but an individual accessing emergency shelter remains in crisis mode.



A permanent home meets an individual's physiological needs, helping reduce or eliminate crisis, enabling other life stabilizing factors, such as mental illness or addiction to begin to be addressed.

What's Next?

Homeless Enumeration

Homeless enumeration is an opportunity for a service area to gain a snapshot of homelessness in the community. The last enumeration that was conducted was a period prevalence count in 2018 that revealed 100 people in Huron who identified as without a place to call home. The 2021 enumeration will be a point in time count (mandatory), coupled with a registry week (voluntary). The registry week component enables enumerators to conduct field assessments of those experiencing homelessness and then add those names to the by-name list if that is the wishes of individual or household. It is important to note that the purpose of both a point in time count and a registration week is in an effort to better reach those who may remain hidden in their experience of homelessness as a point in time count (done in the streets over one 24 hour period) presents challenges due to the rural geographic nature of Huron County. As Huron Out of the Cold; Heart to Home is currently closed it has been decided to conduct the enumeration at the end of November when the shelter reopens. This time frame also aligns with provincial objectives to have a greater percentage of the population vaccinated thereby mitigating COVID-19 spread and infection as a registry week is best conducted in person.



By-Name List Implementation

A by-name list is a living document that, when coupled with a coordinated access system, stands to better connect individuals experiencing homelessness with services available to them in the community. They provide the foundation and a standardized approach to assessment and prioritization leading to referral processes that ensure clients are being matched to the services they need. Mobilization off the by-name list is not conducted chronologically but by the greatest depth of need based on a local set of mutually established and agreed upon priority criteria. The province is requiring that a by-name list is in place by April of 2021. The province has further committed resources to service areas to enhance and strengthen the practice of a by-name list. Additionally the County of Huron has retained the services of OrgCode Consulting to enhance local learning and development in concert with the tools offered by the province and through national resources such as the Built for Zero program. Huron currently has a by-name list and will continue to enhance its effectiveness over the course of the next seven months by which time the province has required an active and robust by-name lists by December 31st.

“ For high-needs participants, every \$10 investment in housing assistance with individualized support services resulted in average savings of \$21.72 (in averted costs for hospitalizations and other services). Participants also spent fewer nights in shelters or at emergency departments. ”

ONTARIO'S LONG-TERM AFFORDABLE
HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE, MARCH 2016
Ontario.ca/housingstrategy

Working towards a system of coordinated access

A coordinated access system is a community wide strategy to help prevent homelessness, and eliminate chronic homelessness. The objective of the Huron County Coordinated Access System is to match households experiencing homelessness to the appropriate housing and support resources, using a Housing First approach.

Community Access Points and Common Assessment

Agencies trained to identify and access people experiencing homelessness, and are working with them to:

1. Divert from emergency shelter where possible.
2. Complete the Huron County Common Intake Form.
3. Assess needs and make connections to appropriate service provider(s).

Huron County By-Name List (BNL)

Once assessed, people are added to the By-Name List; a real-time, up-to-date list of all people experiencing homelessness who have accessed services through the Huron County Homelessness Services and Supports System. The BNL helps community partners know every person experiencing homelessness by name, understand their unique needs, and then prioritize them for the most appropriate and available housing intervention.

Matching to Available Resources

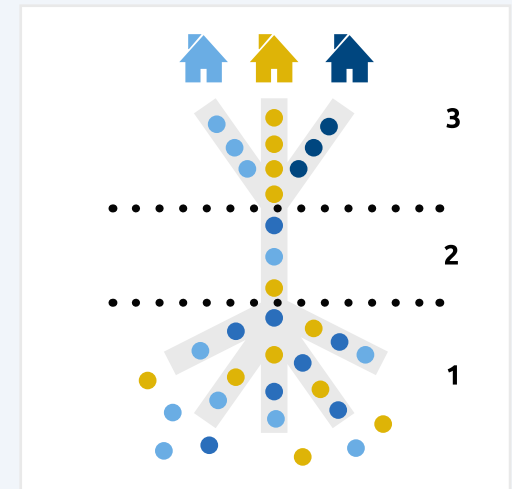
Our by-name list matches dedicated support and housing resources as they become available, prioritized to meet an individual or family's depth of need. These resources can include affordable, supportive or transitional housing, rent supplements, support workers, financial assistance, housing search support and more.

Current Service Provision



- Frequent barriers
- Client in crisis before access to services
- Siloed services

Coordinated Access



1. Assess
2. Navigate
3. Connect with housing and supports

This is why we do what we do

Messages from the Out of the Cold: Heart to Home emergency shelter staff

“ This year, we worked with an elderly woman who had dementia and spent several days at the shelter. By taking a wraparound approach and engaged all community partners, we were able to successfully transition her into a nursing home, offering unique options to keep her active and engaged. Her family has expressed feeling like the H2H shelter saved their loved one’s life.

These are the moments that keep us going.

“ It’s when we’ve been able to assist someone to reconnect with a friend or family member, or help them navigate a difficult relationship, ultimately leading to that person being able to return to a safe place and have a roof over their head, then I feel we’ve done something really special.

This happened on a few occasions in the 2020 season, especially with some of the younger individuals who accessed the shelter. I’m proud of the support we were able to provide.

“ Working with a well known chronically homeless individual who’s physical and mental health began to decline due to living rough was a tough case for us. The individual was not seeking medical care for a variety of reasons and it was difficult to watch his health decline.

But with hard work, time and wraparound supports, we were able to build a trusting relationship with him. He spent much of the winter season in shelter. During this time, he was able to receive healthcare from a nurse practitioner, a COVID-19 vaccine from Huron’s paramedics mobile clinic, and had access to the items needed to meet his basic needs and regain his physical health. He is now connected to ongoing support agencies.

I’m glad to know that we make a positive impact on someone’s personal wellbeing.

