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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Health and Social Services Committee
From: Commissioner of Social Services
Report: #2023-SS-9
Date: June 8, 2023

Subject:

A Second Update on Durham Region's Homelessness Support and Coordinated Access System

Recommendation:

That the Health and Social Services Committee recommends:

That this report be received for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Region of Durham's (Region) Homelessness Support and Coordinated Access System.

2. Background

- 2.1 This report complements the information report provided to the Health and Social Services Committee in May 2023 (Report #2023-SS-6). Combined, the May and June reports represent a full update on Durham's homelessness support and coordinated access system.
- 2.2 The Homelessness Initiatives Team has historically been small and provided oversight and system management to meet minimum requirements for funding.
- 2.3 Regional staff are now engaging in direct delivery of homelessness support programming to provide enhanced leadership within the homelessness support and coordinated access system.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

3.1 2023-SS-6: Homelessness Support and Coordinated Access System Update

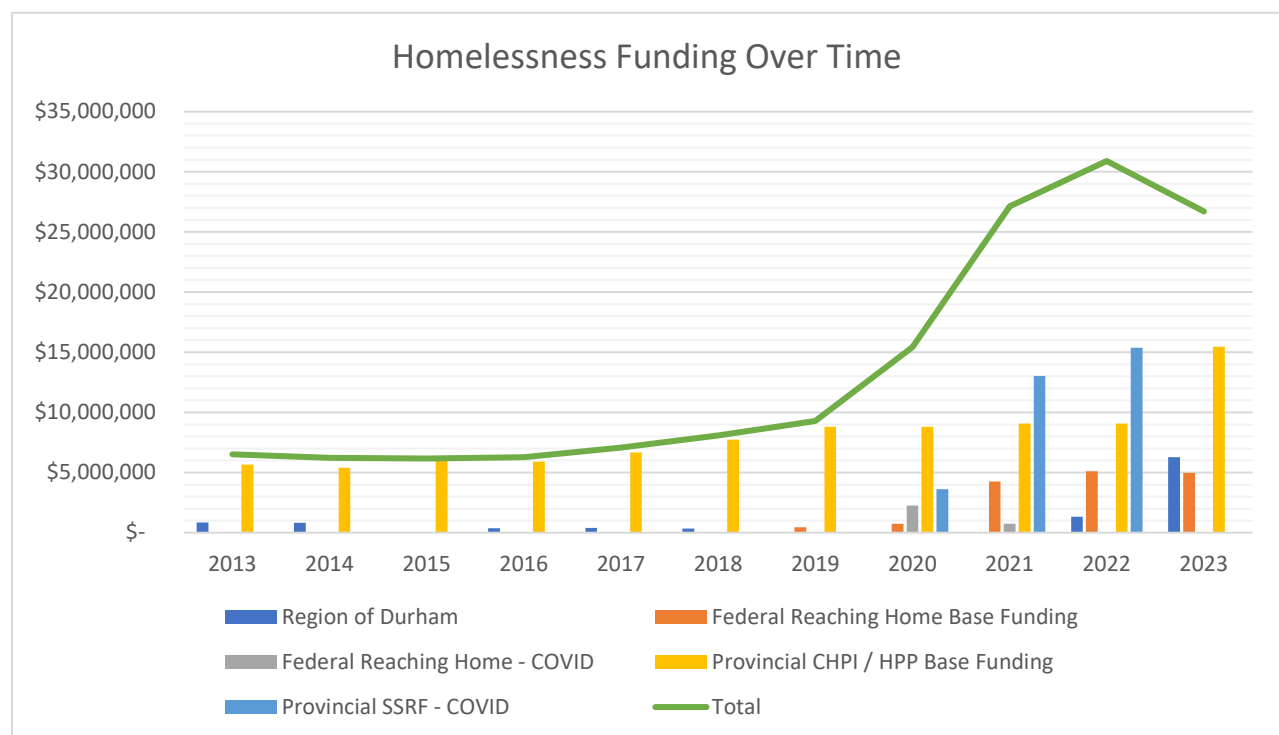
3.2 2023-SS-7: Unbudgeted Provincial Funding for the Homelessness Prevention Program

3.3 2023-INFO-11: A Review and Renewed Homelessness Support and Coordinated Access System for Durham Region

4. 2023/2024 Homelessness Funding Investments

4.1 Durham's homelessness support and coordinated access system is funded through federal, provincial and regional funding. Funding levels prior to the pandemic were stable but insufficient to drive reductions in homelessness.

4.2 The chart below displays federal, provincial and regional investments in homelessness over time.

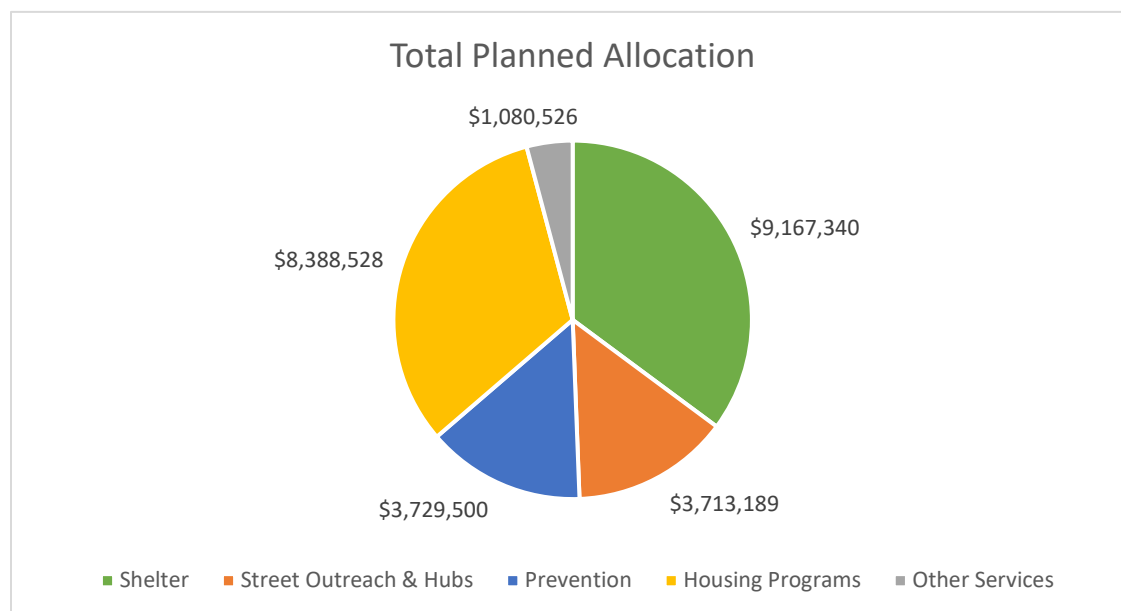


4.3 Prior to 2020, funding to support the system was below \$10 million dollars, with most of the funding being contributed provincially. Funding increased in 2020 through federal Reaching Home COVID-19 funding and the provincial Social Services Relief Fund. This was one-time funding to support community response to COVID-19 and capital projects to increase housing facilities connected to Durham's By-Name List (BNL).

- a. In March 2023, the province announced an additional investment of \$202 million annually for the Homelessness Prevention Program and Indigenous Supportive Housing Program. The Region's 2023/2024 allocation increased by \$7.1 million to a total of \$18.7 million (Report #2023-SS-7).
 - b. The Regional investment to complement federal and provincial funding allocations for system planning and coordination increased from \$27,000 in 2021 to \$6.3 million in 2023.
 - c. The total amount of funding available to support programs and services within Durham's homelessness support system in 2023 is \$25.6 million. This amount excludes administrative funding and a portion of provincial HPP funding used to sustain the strong communities rent supplement through the Housing Services Division.
- This new, sustained Regional and Provincial base funding has significantly increased the ability to strategically plan and improve services across the system.

4.4 The graph below represents current planned funding allocations for sectors within the support system in 2023/2024.

- a. These allocations include placeholders for programs that are currently under development as well as the expansion of the Region's service manager staffing positions.
- b. Strategic planning is ongoing. Finalized program and system allocations will be determined within the next months.



4.5 Funding is targeted to deliver frontline services in partnership with community agencies across Durham. The support system includes programs to:

- a. Prevent people from becoming homeless through areas such as eviction prevention, rental and utility arrears support, support at the Landlord Tenant Board.
 - b. Support people who are experiencing homelessness through housing-focused shelter programs, service hubs, street outreach.
 - c. Provide a range of housing programs to end peoples' homelessness through transitional housing, housing first, supportive housing, housing outreach programs.
- 4.6 Increased and sustained investments are providing an opportunity to implement an improved homelessness response plan to achieve better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in Durham. This plan will include:
- a. System improvement plans in accordance with the OrgCode review and identified priorities for an improved coordinated homelessness system
 - b. Using information and data gathered through program reviews
 - c. Improvement priorities established at the DACH sector tables

This is a comprehensive, data driven process to develop a system of services that meet individual needs and align with community priorities in Durham.

To support strategic planning and program redevelopment, six-month service agreements are being issued in 2023.

5. Increasing Regional Staff Support

- 5.1 The Region is taking steps in 2023 to significantly expand direct support and oversight of the homelessness support system. This includes one new management lead within the Income, Employment and Homelessness Supports Division to manage the homelessness portfolio.
- 5.2 The Region is expanding the Service Manager team and hiring additional staff to increase capacity for oversight and coordination of funded programs as well as improving data integrity on the BNL.

6. Increasing Housing Outflow

- 6.1 A portion of the new investment in homelessness programming will increase targeted housing interventions for specific population groups on Durham's BNL. This includes 60 new housing placements that include different programs and support models to specifically target:
- a. Chronically homeless, high-acuity BNL clients: implementing a new partnership to add 20 program spaces to support pre and post-addiction treatment transitional housing, as well as post-treatment support for other transitional housing programs.
 - b. Chronically homeless, low acuity BNL clients: developing a housing benefit to target people with low support needs who do not require long-term support.

- c. Chronically homeless youth BNL clients: expanding a successful Housing First model for youth to add an additional 15 placements.
 - d. Veteran BNL clients: implementing a new partnership to target all veterans on the BNL including the ability to double capacity to sustain.
- 6.2 The Beaverton Supportive Housing Project is scheduled to open in the second half of 2023. This new location will provide 47 units of supportive housing.
- 6.3 Continuing to explore opportunities to increase transitional and supportive housing opportunities across Durham.
- 7. Improving and Expanding Durham's Street Outreach Continuum**
- 7.1 The Region's Street outreach strategy is being updated to increase the number of dedicated teams across Durham, including Regional teams and partnerships with community agencies. Increasing investment in street outreach programs will ensure more appropriate coverage across Durham to support the increased instances of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- 7.2 Housing focused street outreach teams look for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness with the goal of developing trust, meeting basic needs and ensuring people are connected to Durham's BNL and Coordinated Access System. The goal of housing-focused street outreach is to help people accept offers of help with housing while meeting basic needs to ensure people can move from unsheltered homelessness to housing.
- 7.3 The Region is developing a direct delivery street outreach program, including 10 frontline Regional staff and two supervisors, to operate across Durham. Regional Council endorsed a motion at the May Committee of the Whole to create a Regional Outreach Team mid year. The team is in the process of being hired and is expected to launch in the summer of 2023. Coverage will be piloted on a 24/7 schedule
- 7.4 Community agency street outreach teams are also being expanded to continue to improve capacity and increase housing outcomes. There are currently two community agency street outreach teams through Cornerstone and Carea. These teams operate Monday to Friday.
 - a. Cornerstone's Bridges Street Outreach team consists of two staff and operates from Monday to Friday. The team works in partnership with Cornerstone's retention staff to work with clients once they are housed to retain their housing.
 - Cornerstone's Bridges Street Outreach team successfully housed 50 unsheltered clients in 2022.

- b. Carea's Street Outreach team consists of four staff and operates from Monday to Friday. The team includes a retention staff to work with clients once they are housed to retain their housing.
 - Carea's Street Outreach team successfully housed 34 unsheltered clients in 2022.

7.5 The Region has specialized outreach teams that are mobile across Durham.

- a. The Primary Care Outreach Program (PCOP) includes two teams, each comprised of an Advanced Care Paramedic and Social Worker providing social and primary care to people who are homeless and/or at risk of homelessness.
 - The program operates 7 days a week providing service 10hrs per day between 8:00 am-6:00 pm with the flexibility to adjust start/end times to meet operational/service needs between the hours of 7:00 am-8:00 pm. The new hours/shift rotation launched at the end of April 2023.
 - The PCOP team had 2,952 client interactions in 2022.
- b. The Mental Health Outreach Program (MHOP) includes one team consisting of two Social Workers/Psychotherapists who provide outreach clinical counselling/psychotherapy services to vulnerable populations in Durham, including those who are unsheltered or under-housed and who may have mental health and addictions challenges.
 - The MHOP team had 346 client interactions in 2022. It is important to note that the program was not at full capacity in 2022.
- c. The Adult Protective Services Program supports vulnerable at-risk individuals with developmental disabilities to access and maintain housing through homelessness prevention support.
 - In 2022 this program supported 95 vulnerable at-risk individuals with developmental disabilities to maintain their housing through homelessness prevention support.
 - Ongoing provincial funding has been confirmed under "Support to Access Housing" to expand housing and homelessness supports for individuals with developmental disabilities.

8. Improving System Coordination

- 8.1 Updating Coordinated Access matching process to leverage case conferencing by establishing a continuum of supports model for Durham's BNL and Coordinated Access System to better coordinate the pathway between engagement, street outreach, shelter, case management and flow between housing programs. This will clearly define how clients are supported along the continuum. This includes:

- a. Updating Durham's Community Priorities, used to prioritize access to housing opportunities within the Coordinated Access System.
- b. Strengthening data integrity of the BNL by adding Regional staff data integrity checks for each new BNL intake.
- c. Regular case conferencing will be used to support this new matching process to ensure barriers to achieving housing stability are addressed and to support troubleshooting barriers.
- d. This will be tested to identify whether this model is able to reduce the length of time it takes to match BNL clients to housing programs and result in more suitable matches.

8.2 Improving training and coordination between programs and agencies.

- a. The annual review process highlighted the need to provide Mental Health First Aid and Crisis Prevention Institute training for all frontline positions within the support system. Regional staff will be organizing this training for 2023.
- b. Recognized need for improved coordination across system sectors and agencies. Regional staff will support shadowing between system sectors and programs to help build relationships and collaboration across the support system.

8.3 Improving homelessness system outcomes by hosting a strategic planning day using the Theory of Change framework. This event will include internal and external stakeholders who have an interest or a mandate to support vulnerable populations. This event is being planned for the second half of 2023.

9. Additional System Capacity Improvements

9.1 Establishing a centralized phone line and e-mail to support residents to navigate homelessness support services 7 days a week.

- a. This centralized point of contact will ensure coordinated responses for all referral sources and reduce the number of touchpoints that a resident has before their concerns can be addressed.

9.2 Developing a community resource for residents and businesses on homelessness including who to call, what resources are available, etc. This resource will be held on durham.ca and flyers with QR codes directing to the toolkit will be made available.

9.3 Expanding shelter capacity and locations across Durham to support increasing demand.

- a. A new family shelter in Whitby is being established as Durham's first family shelter and will provide dedicated capacity for up to 5 families. This will help create capacity to respond to the significant increase in families experiencing homelessness in Durham.

- b. Continuing to support the new shelter location in Ajax and redeveloping the program model from a winter warming program to a housing-focused shelter program.
 - c. Improving and expanding shelter supports for seniors experiencing homelessness through partnerships with Cornerstone, Carea and Lakeridge Health. This includes expansion of the seniors motel program and aftercare supports as well as nursing, personal support worker and health-led case management.
 - d. Exploring a potential opportunity to establish a supportive, low barrier emergency shelter that includes holistic onsite services to better support clients with complex and concurring needs.
- 9.4 Increasing affordable and supportive housing outcomes is critically important as shelter capacity expands. To prevent creating bottlenecks within the shelter system, each new shelter bed should be accompanied by approximately six housing outflow opportunities. This ensures that there can be appropriate turnover within the shelter system that results in positive housing outcomes for clients.

10. Supporting Staff Across the System

- 10.1 It was identified in report #2023-SS-6 that there are persistent challenges with recruitment and retention of frontline staff due to limited funding for staff wages and increasing levels of client acuity across the support system. Frontline staff are increasingly required to respond to mental health and addictions crisis – advanced levels of training and education are now required for these frontline roles. To support staffing across the sector, the Region is taking steps to work with partner agencies to develop a workforce strategy.
- a. Additional training opportunities are being explored to deliver across the support system to ensure staff have the training required to support their clients.
 - b. The Region is exploring a model for frontline services to support the workforce demands within the system by continuing to support and value community based service providers and increasing involvement in direct delivery of homelessness supports across Durham.
 - c. Regional staff are developing plans to compile and analyze wage information from funded agencies to identify disparities in wages and highlight the need for targeted funding to specifically support increases in wages for staff within the sector.

11. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 11.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:
- a. Goal 2: Community Vitality – To foster an exceptional quality of life with services that contribute to strong neighbourhoods, vibrant and diverse communities, and influence our safety and well-being.

- b. Goal 4: Social Investment – to ensure a range of programs, services and supports are available and accessible to those in need, so that no individual is left behind.
- c. Goal 5: Service Excellence – To provide exceptional value to Durham taxpayers through responsive, effective, and fiscally sustainable service delivery.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 Durham's homelessness support and coordinated access system will continue to experience significant challenges throughout the foreseeable future due to increasing rental market pressures, stagnant social assistance rates, ongoing mental health and addictions pressures.
- 12.2 Regional staff are committed to system improvements to:
 - a. Increase outflow from Durham's BNL by increasing the number of housing opportunities connected to the BNL.
 - b. Preventing more inflow into our BNL through homelessness prevention.
 - c. Improving supports for people who are actively homeless by redeveloping Durham's street outreach strategy and working to expand housing-focused shelter opportunities.
 - d. Strengthening service system partnerships with identified priorities, outcomes and planning
- 12.3 New, sustained investments in homelessness programs have significantly increased the Region's ability to strategically plan, strengthen and increase the response to homelessness in Durham.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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Commissioner of Social Services

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
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