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## Niagara Region's Homelessness Newsletter November 2023



## Pathway to Functional Zero November 2023

This newsletter provides updates to the public about activities and progress made toward addressing homelessness in Niagara.

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### Don't Know Where to Call for Help?

[211 Ontario](#) can help you find homelessness supports for:

- Someone living outside in need of outreach services
- Finding a temporary bed at an emergency shelter
- Accessing income like Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program and Canada Pension Program

## A Local Priority - What is Chronic Homelessness?

A person who is Chronically Homeless is currently experiencing homelessness and has either experienced homelessness for six months (or 180 days) or more in the last year or eighteen months (or 546 days) in the last three years. Many people experiencing Chronic Homelessness are living at an encampment or staying at an emergency shelter.

To end homelessness, it is really important to make it a priority to help people experiencing Chronic Homelessness to return to housing and to house people before they become Chronically Homeless. Niagara is part of the national campaign to end Chronic Homelessness.

[National campaign to end chronic homelessness](#)

## Ending Homelessness - What is Functional Zero?

A community has reached Functional Zero when the number of people experiencing Chronic Homelessness has been reduced to three or fewer people for three or more months.

It doesn't mean that no one ever experiences homelessness. It means that when someone becomes homeless, they are likely to quickly return to housing and then not become homeless again.

[Video: What is functional zero?](#)

## We're Making Progress



### Niagara Reduces Chronic Homelessness in October

In October, 2023, Niagara reduced the overall number of people experiencing Chronic Homelessness.

At the end of October there were a total of 1,052 people experiencing homelessness in Niagara, including 472 people experiencing Chronic Homelessness, down from our baseline of 492. These numbers represent:

- Decrease of 30 people overall experiencing homelessness from the previous month
- Decrease of 24 people experiencing Chronic Homelessness from the previous month

On average, 28 people experiencing Chronic Homelessness moved into housing each month during 2023. Returns to homelessness each month by people who were previously housed have remained low throughout 2023.

We are cautiously optimistic with the direction in which the numbers are trending; however, due to two new initiatives—the opening of the new St. Catharines and Niagara Falls shelters and the updated homelessness status verification process with housing services—an increase to our By-Name List is projected due to a more accurate understanding of who in Niagara is experiencing homelessness.

Niagara Region and its partners track outcomes for individuals and the homeless serving system as a whole using a real-time By-Name List.

A By-Name List is a real-time list of all known people experiencing homelessness in a community. This list is needed to know who is experiencing homelessness and to coordinate access for them to the most appropriate housing programs. It also allows us to understand how many people are experiencing homelessness, becoming homeless and returning to housing every day. This information tells us how the system is performing overall.

[Read more about By-Name Lists](#)

## We're Working Together



**New Brunswick Leaders Learn from Niagara**

A delegation of 24 leaders in the homelessness sector from New Brunswick visited Niagara to learn about best practices.

Leaders from provincial and municipal government, as well as directors from homelessness service providers travelled to Niagara on a mission to learn about the significant progress Niagara Region and its community partners have made in addressing homelessness. The delegation toured sites across the region—including Bridge Housing, Buchanan Permanent Supportive Housing, Bethlehem and YWCA Transitional Housing buildings, the RAFT, and the Hope Centre—to learn from Regional staff and local homelessness leaders.

“Team NB gained a lot of insights to the multi-faceted approach the Niagara Region is embarking on to reduce homelessness. Our team, made up of municipal and provincial employees along with service providers appreciated the combination of physical tours of facilities along with the transfer of knowledge from the Niagara Homelessness team and their service providers” said Kent Staal, Homelessness Strategic Consultant, Social Development, Government of New Brunswick

Niagara is quickly becoming a leading community within the sector and, in addition to presenting at both the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference in Halifax and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association Policy Conference in November, is now fielding requests for consultation from other provinces.

## We're Helping People



### **New Permanent Shelter Beds in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls**

Niagara Region continues to move forward with work to replace its two seasonal shelters with permanent all-day shelter beds.

Beginning on November 13, 2023, the Summer Street site in Niagara Falls has provided 56 beds for men, women, and couples.

Through a temporary arrangement with Silver Spire Church, 50 seasonal beds have been provided in St. Catharines since November 01, 2023. Shelter spaces at Silver Spire will be available nightly until a temporary modular shelter solution is installed at a site on Riordon Street in January 2024.

The temporary modular shelter on Riordon Street will operate all day year-round until a permanent emergency shelter in St. Catharines is built. St Catharines has been more challenging due to limited sites and a two-to-three-year timeline to source, purchase and renovate an appropriate long-term shelter site.

Eight additional hotel rooms have also been added this winter to the emergency shelter in Welland being operated by the Hope Centre.

The new permanent beds will increase year-round access to best practice supports for people experiencing homelessness to return to housing. This change was recommended in the shelter capacity review completed for Niagara Region Homelessness Services by OrgCode in early 2023.

### **Temporary Housing-Focused Shelter at 29 Riordon Street in St. Catharines**

## **Veterans Exiting Homelessness to Housing**

Niagara is working to end Veteran Homelessness in our community.

Niagara Region was recognized in October of 2022 as a leading community and the 7th across Canada to reach the Built for Zero milestone of developing a Veteran Quality By-Name List. Establishing and maintaining a Veteran Quality By-Name List means that Niagara has processes in place to identify and then connect homeless veterans to available community supports. It also means our community has the reliable real-time data necessary to inform system responses and act on them to support individuals in our community.

Starting in December of 2022, a focused Veteran Housing Worker has been working with the Niagara Assertive Street Outreach team through a funding grant from [True Patriot Love](#). A key piece in this work is that the Veteran Housing Worker is a Veteran themselves. This speaks to the power and impact of connection in ending homelessness. Veterans experiencing homelessness facing housing loss identified, supported and connected to services while being rehoused. Niagara work is done through our strong partnerships with the [Royal Canadian Legion](#) and [Veterans Affairs Canada](#).

### **Video: Pathways to Functional Zero - Assertive Outreach Veteran**

## We're Housing People



### Centralized Waitlist Referral Process Improved

Effective November 1, 2023, to be eligible for Homeless Status on the Niagara Region Centralized Waitlist, where people experiencing homelessness are prioritized for available and suitable community housing units, agencies must complete a new Homeless Status Referral Form.

This form was updated based on best practices in the Homeless-Serving System to align with Niagara's By-Name List, a real time list of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Niagara Region.

To be eligible for Homeless Status on the Centralized Waitlist for community housing, applicants must be:

1. Currently experiencing homelessness, including those in transitional housing; **AND**
2. Actively working with one of the following organization types in the Niagara region that support people experiencing homelessness to find housing:
  - Emergency and domestic violence shelters
  - Transitional and supportive housing programs
  - Homeless prevention and rehousing services
  - Street outreach services
  - Indigenous organizations

There is much optimism that this change in process will show progress in helping to identify and match individuals currently experiencing homelessness with available and suitable community housing units in as timely a manner as possible.

#### Recommendations made to council by the Public Health and Social Services Committee

### Niagara Region Invests \$260 Million in Affordable Housing Over Five Years

Niagara Region's total investment in affordable housing from 2019 to 2023 was \$260 million. This represents 47% of the total capital and operating costs of \$557 million for local affordable housing. The remaining investment during the same years included \$96.9 million in Provincial grants, \$97.5 million in federal grants, \$18.5 million in development charges and \$83.7 million in rents from tenants and other sources.

Staff shared this information in a presentation about the Region's Affordable Housing Strategy at the Committee of the Whole meeting on September 7, 2023. The presentation included information about the Niagara Region's role and the strategies and activities being used to address the current housing crisis.

The affordable housing strategy includes a variety of housing options to address homelessness, community housing, and attainable market housing. A large part of the investment goes toward maintaining Niagara's existing community housing stock of 8,096 units. This stock includes 3,072 Niagara Regional Housing units, 3,224 private non-profit and co-operative housing units and 1,800 rent supplement units.

The presentation also described eight new housing projects that are underway and upcoming in Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, and Welland. Together these projects have the potential to create 36 to 48 bridge housing, 14 supportive housing, and 422 affordable units.

#### [Affordable Housing Strategy](#)

If your colleagues or another interested party would like to sign up for this newsletter, visit [Housing and Homelessness Services](#).

