



Housing and Shelter

Happening Now

Individuals and families having access to affordable, safe and reliable housing and shelter is fundamental to community well-being.

- In 2019, the 5-year review of Niagara Region's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP) identified a shift toward increased focus on: ending homelessness and chronic homelessness; preventing homelessness; supporting community housing development; engagement and collaboration with Indigenous partners; and addressing the housing and homeless services needs of equity-seeking groups, including those with complex needs, persons with a disability, persons with a developmental disability, older adults, youth, women, newcomers and refugees, and Franco-Canadians.
- In mid-2019, Niagara Region joined Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C), an ambitious national change effort helping a core group of 33 leading communities end chronic homelessness in Canada. In December, 2019 almost 300 service providers, people with lived experience of homelessness, political leaders, regional staff and others in the housing sector participated in a region-wide presentation on ending homelessness. Guest speaker Iain De Jong advocates for changing the service delivery paradigm from one of charity to one of justice. He provided insights for assessing alignment of community efforts with best practice.
- The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN) Affordable Housing Priority Table is focusing on tenant rights and responsibilities. Going forward, NPRN will increase emphasis on describing the housing crisis in Niagara through community experience and storytelling, with supporting data.



Happening Now cont.

- Peer Support Navigators are easing health systems navigation for individuals experiencing homelessness, through the Niagara HELPS (Homelessness Emergency Liaison & Peer Support) project. This initiative involves individuals with lived experience utilizing both their compassion and knowledge of community resources. It also helps hospital Emergency Department staff to deepen their understanding of barriers faced by the homeless population.
- In November, 2020 Niagara became one of 23 Canadian communities in the Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) movement to have quality real-time, person-specific data for everyone experiencing chronic homelessness. Using this By-Name List, which at the outset included 336 people, Niagara can coordinate support and services to end homelessness for these individuals and families. The system level data on inflow, outflow, and total active homelessness can be used to inform improvement projects, as well as monitor trends and progress toward achieving functional zero chronic homelessness.
- Niagara's second homelessness Point-in-Time (PiT) Count was conducted in late March 2018. This snapshot found 625 people to be experiencing homelessness, in emergency and Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, in transitional housing programs, and in unsheltered locations. This number includes 144 children aged 0-15 years. The third PiT Count, to be conducted in March, 2021 will help to ensure the comprehensiveness of Niagara's By-Name List, and further inform local response to homelessness during COVID-19.
- At the end of 2020, more than 6,500 households were on the Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) Centralized Waiting list, an increase of almost 2,000 households since 2017.
- In order to facilitate new affordable rental housing in Niagara, NRH now provides project management support to assist housing providers. Since 2017, 130 new units have been created by NRH, housing providers and developers. An additional 230 units are in the discussion stage.
- The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) provides a subsidy to applicants on the Centralized Waiting List toward rent to their current landlord in the private market. Since it was introduced in Spring 2020, 206 applicants in Niagara have been accepted into the COHB program through NRH.

What's Emerging

- Factors heightening the affordable housing crisis in Niagara, and related evidence, are being more fully-described. Ongoing low supply of rental stock; steep housing price increases; forecasted population growth; in-migration of population from the GTA to Niagara; demand for short-term vacation rentals; student housing; renovictions; the sizable waitlist for affordable housing units; the gig economy/trend toward working remotely; and the unmet needs of vulnerable groups are all factors.
- The RAFT (Niagara Resource Service for Youth) is significantly reducing the rate of youth going into homeless shelters by helping individuals to connect with family members who are able to provide housing support.



What's Emerging cont.

- Niagara Regional Housing (NRH), formerly acting as Service Manager on behalf of Niagara Region, is amalgamating with Niagara Region to enhance creative opportunities and benefit from the integration of human services. In addition, NRH and community partners have formed the Housing Development Committee, to explore innovative ways to provide new affordable housing across Niagara.
- The Niagara Affordable Housing Master Plan is currently being developed. The Plan will examine Canadian and international initiatives with consideration to workplans, incentives, processes, costs and final outcomes. This will assist in establishing new social housing stock and planning for the future of affordable housing in Niagara.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Strengthen supports for households with low, medium, or high complexity of needs (eg. mental health and addictions; trauma). Do this to address the impact of poverty on housing stability, in alignment with best practices and the Built for Zero Canada model.
- Continue to focus on the demand in Niagara for more rental supports, more affordable housing units and more supportive housing for households facing complex issues.
- Work together to explore options for providing client needs-based transitional housing that is flexible to support individual households.
- Pay attention to the continuum of housing and its affordability in Niagara; be mindful that incomes are not rising in pace with housing prices; and collaborate to ensure we have good-quality safety net systems in place.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- **Housing Availability**
- **Housing Affordability**
- **Homelessness Prevention**
- **Municipal Housing Policy and Regulations**