

## What Can You Do To Help?

It's important to recognize that creating housing stability for everyone is effective social and economic policy. Homelessness is far more expensive than providing affordable housing with support.

- Learn how housing instability affects everyone in Waterloo Region.
- Refrain from using words that refer to people experiencing homelessness in negative ways.
- Donate money and other resources to organizations that work with people experiencing homelessness or work toward increasing housing stability in the community.
- Join a local committee or coalition that works to further housing stability in Waterloo Region.
- Offer your time and skills to organizations that work with people experiencing homelessness or work toward increasing housing stability in the community.
- Write a letter or approach politicians about the need for more resources in the areas of housing, income and support for people experiencing homelessness. Advocate for long-term solutions.

## What Can Government Do?

- A responsive housing stability system requires strategic investment and sustainable funding in a coordinated approach from all levels of government and community partners.
- Stable housing, income and support are needed to end homelessness. Affordable housing on its own is not the answer; short and long-term supports are also required.
- Senior levels of government need to implement policies to ensure housing affordability by increasing income (eg. minimum wage and social assistance rates) to align with the cost of living and/or reducing housing costs ( eg. increase funding for affordable housing and/or rent supplement programs).



## What is the Homelessness and Housing Umbrella Group?

The Homelessness and Housing Umbrella Group (HHUG) is a non-partisan group consisting of concerned individuals, including people with lived experience, agencies and groups committed to preventing and reducing homelessness in Waterloo Region. The HHUG serves as Waterloo Region's central homelessness and housing group. It functions as an umbrella to coordinate activities for all local groups working on issues of homelessness and housing.

Visit [www.hhug.ca](http://www.hhug.ca) to download a copy of this or past Report Cards and Booklets or for more information on HHUG. For questions or concerns, call the Initiatives Coordinator at 519.743.2246 x264.

HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING UMBRELLA GROUP 2012

# REPORT CARD

## BOOKLET

## Housing and Health: Exploring the Connection

In November 2007, All Roads Lead to Home: A Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy for Waterloo Region was released. The Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy identified 92 evidence-based strategies to strengthen the local housing stability system. One of these strategies recommended the development of an annual housing stability report card.

This is the fifth report card developed by the Homelessness and Umbrella Group. There are two parts: a two-page Report Card and this booklet. **The theme for the 2012 booklet is Housing and Health: Exploring the Connection.**



Homelessness &  
Housing Umbrella Group





## Housing and Health: Why Care?

We are all impacted by the health care issues facing those who are unstably housed.

People who are unstably housed or experiencing homelessness have a greater likelihood of accessing the most expensive forms of health care because of the various barriers they encounter in self-care and within the health care system itself. If they had safe, affordable and appropriate housing, they would have less need for such services. The costs of providing ambulance service, hospital emergency services, and psychiatric in-patient services are roughly ten times more expensive than residential-based care even with high levels of support. <sup>1</sup> We simply cannot afford to do nothing.

Even more importantly, as a caring and compassionate community, we need to be mindful that our health care system was intended under the Canada Health Act to “protect, promote and restore the physical and mental well-being of residents of Canada.” That includes all residents of Canada – even those who are unstably housed or experiencing homelessness. Yet, without proper housing, it is most unlikely they will benefit from those lofty standards and we, as a community, are lessened as a result. <sup>2</sup>

Everyone should be able to access – and keep – housing that supports their health. <sup>3</sup> It is truly in the best interests of us all.

### Barriers to Health Care

**Did you know?** 38% of people who are unstably housed have unmet health care needs compared to 12% of the general population. <sup>4</sup>

**Why?** People may be more likely to lack proof of health coverage as their ID may have been lost or stolen due to their unstable housing circumstances, or they may not have the money or health benefits to pay for medication. As a result they may be denied health care. The lack of appropriate housing can also mean ineligibility for treatment programs.

**Consider:** It is essential that people have appropriate housing, along with other supports, to have the best chance to complete treatment successfully. For example, the treatment for Hepatitis C is long (6 to 12 months) and difficult. Side effects can be severe. Lack of stable housing could prevent someone from being treated for Hepatitis C at all. <sup>5</sup>



Children experiencing homelessness are often undernourished. This has long term implications on their health and cognitive development. source: diet.com

### Housing and Mental Health

**Did you know?** More than 50% of people experiencing unstable housing struggle with mental health issues compared to 20% of the general population. <sup>6</sup>

**Why?** Unstable housing may create difficulty staying connected with family or other supportive community contacts that would help avoid deteriorating mental health. People experiencing significant mental struggles may also suffer from symptoms that lead to loss of housing.

**Consider:** It is clear that being stably housed has a positive effect on mental health. One reason for this is that stable housing can reduce anxieties related to meeting basic physical needs for shelter and safety. As basic needs are met, a person has the opportunity to focus on support and treatment for mental health issues. For example, one person with mental health issues had over 300 emergency hospital visits in the course of a year but, after moving into permanent, supportive housing their visits were reduced to three in a similar time period. <sup>7</sup>

- 1 Pomery, Steve (2007). Pro-Active versus Reactive Responses: The Business Case for a Housing Based Approach to Reduce Homelessness in the Region of Waterloo. Region of Waterloo.
- 2 Housing vulnerability and health: Canada's hidden emergency. Toronto: Research Alliance for Canadian Homelessness, Housing, and Health; November 2010.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Housing vulnerability and health: Canada's hidden emergency. Toronto: Research Alliance for Canadian Homelessness, Housing, and Health; November 2010.
- 5 (Sanguen Health Centre, Waterloo).
- 6 Housing vulnerability and health: Canada's hidden emergency. Toronto: Research Alliance for Canadian Homelessness, Housing, and Health; November 2010.
- 7 Anonymous (Person with Lived Experience), Personal Interview.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Dr. Stephan Hwang. "Homelessness and Health." CMAJ. 23 Jan 2001. Vol. 164 No.2.
- 10 Pomery, Steve (2007). Pro-Active versus Reactive Responses: The Business Case for a Housing Based Approach to Reduce Homelessness in the Region of Waterloo. Region of Waterloo.



### Housing and Physical Health

**Did you know?** 33% of people who are unstably housed cannot get enough to eat and the food they do get may be of poor quality and not provide a healthy, balanced diet. 30% of people who are unstably housed are diagnosed with arthritis, as opposed to 16% of the general population. 28% of those who are unstably housed are diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), compared to only 4% of the general population. <sup>8</sup>

**Why?** Poor nutrition contributes to many health issues and increases both the frequency of use of the health care system and the length of time needed for recovery. Those who cannot access a healthy diet are less resistant to illnesses such as cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Maintaining adequate dental hygiene, foot care, sleep, relaxation, clothing, footwear and even basic protection from the elements all become more difficult when unstably housed. People may lack the ability to safely store their medication where they live or may be unable to refrigerate it. The monitoring required for certain health issues, such as diabetes, is more problematic when the control of one's own environment is lacking. All these factors contribute to an increased reliance on the health care system and a shortened life expectancy. <sup>9</sup>

**Consider:** The cost of health issues for someone living with unstable housing is extraordinary. It can include more frequent use of expensive in-patient medical care including emergency room services, hospital admissions and transportation by ambulance. It only costs \$16/day to provide someone with affordable, stable housing as compared to \$425/day to have someone in the hospital. <sup>10</sup>

## Much to Celebrate...

### New Federal/Provincial Funds for Housing

The Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario entered into a new affordable housing agreement in July 2011. This agreement will see \$12.8 million in funds being delivered to our community for the creation and repair of affordable housing over the next four years.

### New Community Housing Sites

Housing Cambridge has developed 61 new affordable seniors housing units in Cambridge.

NEWO has developed a new affordable seniors building in Waterloo with 49 new units.

Commercial House in New Hamburg has created 16 affordable housing units in a former hotel.

MennoHomes created four units in Elmira to house large rural families.

## But More to Do!

### Significant Increase in Emergency Shelter Use

There was a 17% increase in emergency shelter bed nights, and a 10% increase in the total number of people served by emergency shelters last year. There have been a variety of reasons why shelter use increased, including an increase of families using emergency shelters.

### Affordability Gap Remains

The 'housing wage' is the amount a person working full-time must earn to afford the average market rent without paying more than 30% of their income on rent. At \$10.25, the rate for minimum wage remained unchanged from 2010, while average market rents have increased. This means a single person working full time needs to earn \$14.44 per hour to afford a one bedroom unit.

### Vacancy Rate

Once again, the vacancy rate for Waterloo Region dropped to a low of 1.7% in 2011 from 2.6% in 2010. A lower vacancy rate means that there are fewer available private rental units.

### Supportive Housing

The wait list for places with support has increased significantly and we have not been able to come close to meeting the need.