

AUGUST 20, 2024

ORGCODE CONSULTING INC.

**COUNTY OF
RENFREW:
FRAMEWORK FOR
A 10 YEAR
HOMELESSNESS
AND HOUSING
PLAN**



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The County of Renfrew has a long-standing positive relationship with the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation. The County of Renfrew fully supports the journey along the path to truth and reconciliation and continues to advance discussions regarding reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership. This report has been created in Oakville, Ontario by OrgCode Consulting Inc. and we acknowledge the footsteps of Indigenous Peoples that have marked this land for time immemorial. We acknowledge the contributions of Indigenous Peoples past, present and future. We acknowledge the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for being stewards of this traditional territory.

AUTHORSHIP

This report was prepared by OrgCode Consulting Inc. primarily using data provided by the County of Renfrew. OrgCode Consulting Inc. is responsible for errors in analysis and omissions. Commentary and recommendations are the responsibility of OrgCode Consulting Inc.

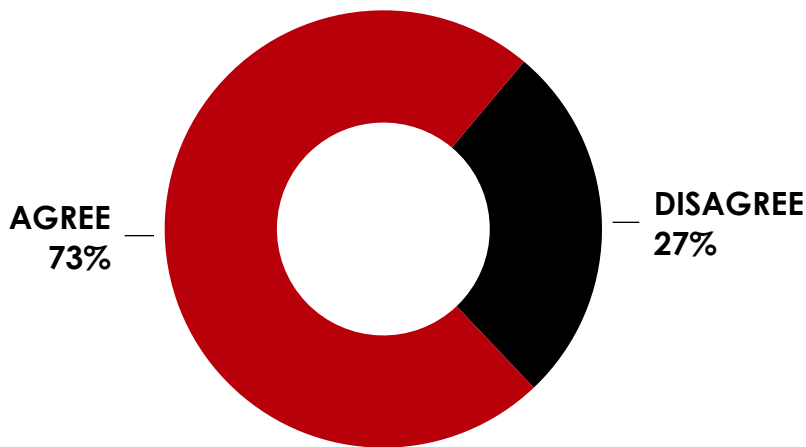
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like so many other regions across Canada, Renfrew County is facing growing challenges in effectively addressing homelessness. Despite efforts by local government and nonprofit partners to implement best practices based on proven approaches, gaps remain in the system, particularly in providing housing solutions for individuals with complex, co-occurring needs.

This 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan is designed to guide Renfrew County's efforts to better meet current needs through an enhanced homelessness response and the creation of permanent housing solutions. An extensive community engagement process was undertaken, gathering input from service providers, county staff, the business community, residents in community housing, community leaders, and individuals with lived and living experience of homelessness. The collective message is clear: the community desires a responsive system of care that supports individuals experiencing homelessness, from street outreach and enhanced sheltering options to permanent housing with the necessary supports.

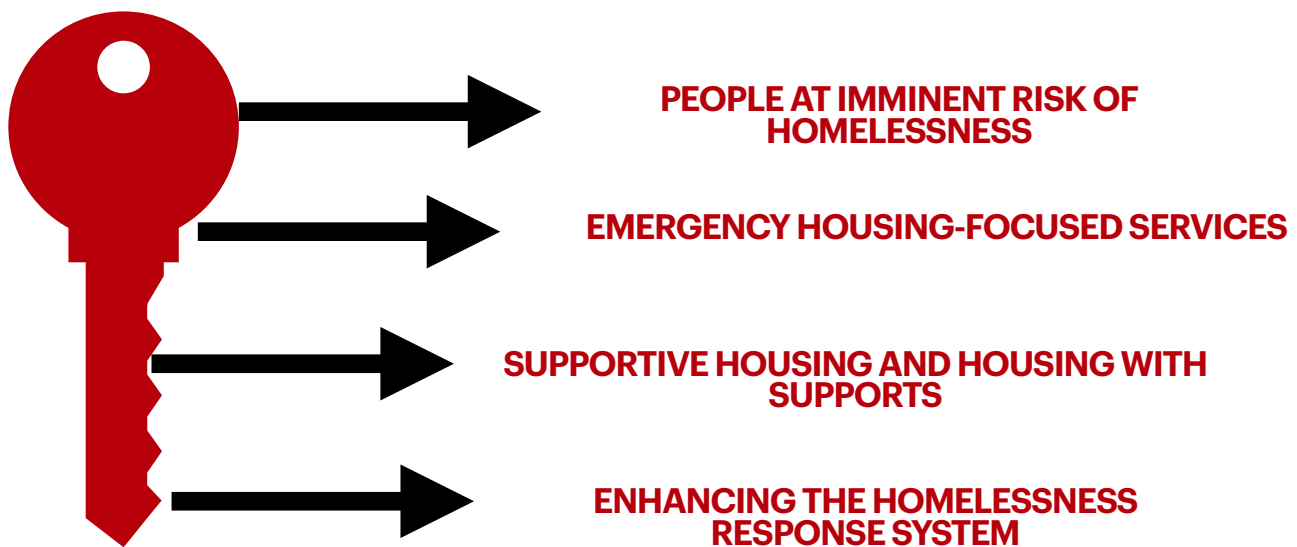
It became evident throughout the plan's development that homelessness and the shortage of deeply affordable housing are

A RENTER IN RENFREW COUNTY SHOULD NEVER HAVE TO PAY MORE THAN 30% OF THEIR MONTHLY INCOME ON RENT (N=586)



pressing issues for community members across the county.

The lack of a comprehensive homelessness response system and the shortage of affordable, supportive housing did not develop overnight, and these challenges are not unique to Renfrew County. While they cannot be resolved immediately, there is a clear opportunity to improve the homelessness response system, enhance services, and align more closely with best practices in service delivery. By building on the significant work already underway with initiatives like the MESA Team, the county and its partners can continue making meaningful progress in addressing homelessness. Based on an analysis of available data, interviews with key stakeholders across the county, a community-wide survey with a strong response rate, and multiple in-person engagement sessions, it is recommended that Renfrew County focus its efforts on the following key areas:



Renfrew County needs to prioritize homelessness prevention as a cost-effective and less disruptive approach compared to managing homelessness once it occurs. By focusing on keeping individuals and families housed, the county can adapt its services to the diverse needs of those at risk. Recent trends, including rising rent prices, inflation, and population growth, have increased pressure on the housing market and led to a

growing demand for prevention services. Expanding investments in these areas is essential, rather than concentrating solely on expanding shelter services.

The county is facing an urgent homelessness crisis, with increasing unsheltered homelessness and encampments, particularly in Pembroke. To address this, the establishment of a year-round, low-barrier Service Hub is recommended. This Hub would provide both immediate shelter when needed and long-term support for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness as well as those at risk of homelessness. By offering essential services such as food, hygiene, and bathrooms, removing barriers to housing, and providing greater access to mental health and addiction services, the Hub would help individuals transition toward stable housing and improved well-being. A central location in Pembroke, close to key resources, would ensure accessibility and effective utilization.

The integration of the MESA (Mental Health, Substance Use, and Addiction) Team into the Service Hub would further strengthen its impact, providing a holistic approach to addressing the root causes of homelessness. By embedding health, housing, and support services, the Hub would create a comprehensive solution for individuals experiencing homelessness.

There is an urgent need to expand supportive housing capacity to address both current and future demands. Investing in supportive housing is essential for preventing a rise in homelessness and encampments, as well as for reducing current homelessness rates. The growing demand underscores the importance of targeted housing solutions that cater to individuals and families with specific support needs, providing both stability and long-term housing security. Housing with supports and permanent supportive housing are critical to stabilizing vulnerable populations and ensuring they do not cycle through emergency services.

To meet this demand, Renfrew County should prioritize the development of site-specific supportive housing. This includes the creation of units for individuals with substance use disorders, cognitive or health needs, older adults, and youth—groups that often face heightened barriers to maintaining stable housing. These supportive housing units would offer tailored assistance to ensure that residents receive the necessary care and guidance to sustain their housing and improve their overall well-being. Additionally, implementing Bridge Housing would provide temporary shelter for individuals with high needs while they transition into permanent housing solutions, helping to address the immediate issue of encampments and a lack of a traditional emergency shelter in the county.

Renfrew County can also enhance housing stability by modifying its access to community housing policies. Prioritizing individuals experiencing chronic homelessness through a points-based system, rather than solely relying on a chronological waitlist, would ensure that those with the greatest need receive housing sooner. This approach has been successfully implemented in other Ontario regions and would allow Renfrew County to provide housing with wraparound support for those most at risk.

A Mobile Housing Support Worker will play a vital role in maintaining housing stability for individuals at various stages of need. By assisting clients in setting goals, liaising with landlords, and providing referrals to necessary services, these workers will help prevent tenancy breakdowns and support individuals in overcoming broader challenges related to housing security. This hands-on approach will not only prevent isolation but also foster stronger community engagement for vulnerable residents.

Given the financial constraints associated with developing new housing, Renfrew County should also consider repurposing existing community housing stock into permanent supportive housing for individuals with higher needs. This strategy would

allow the county to more quickly move people out of homelessness and into stable, supported housing, addressing both immediate needs and long-term housing challenges. By prioritizing supportive housing development and aligning resources effectively, Renfrew County can significantly strengthen its response to homelessness and provide sustainable housing solutions for its most vulnerable residents.

To strengthen Renfrew County's homelessness response system, several key actions are recommended, focusing on improving data management, case management, and professional, assertive street outreach. A critical step forward is the allocation of funding for a full-time Housing Coordinator in 2024, which will strengthen the county's capacity to respond more effectively. To further support this, the implementation of the Homeless Individual and Family Information System (HIFIS) is advised. This will provide essential data on individuals accessing a Service Hub, their needs, and service usage patterns, ensuring that services are targeted effectively. HIFIS will also help streamline case management and diversion practices, offering real-time insights to support decision-making and improve overall service delivery.

Additionally, Renfrew County should develop Intensive Case Management (ICM) services for individuals with moderate to high needs. ICM provides tailored, in-depth support over an extended period, helping individuals transition from homelessness to stable housing. Integrating ICM into both scattered site and site-specific supportive housing will ensure a comprehensive approach, particularly when incorporating health, mental health, and addiction services into the team. This model is cost-effective in the long run and will enable Renfrew County to provide sustained support to those with the greatest needs.

Ultimately, the Renfrew County 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan presents a strategic path forward, addressing the urgent needs within the community through

targeted, sustainable interventions. The recommendations outlined in this plan focus on improving prevention efforts, expanding supportive housing options, and enhancing the homelessness response system. By prioritizing the creation of a year-round, low-barrier Service Hub, increasing supportive housing capacity, and implementing more effective case management and outreach services, the county is positioned to make significant strides toward reducing homelessness and improving housing stability for its most vulnerable populations. The success of these initiatives will rely on coordinated efforts across all sectors, a commitment to data-driven decision-making, and continued investment in comprehensive, community-driven solutions. Through these concerted efforts, Renfrew County can create a more responsive and resilient housing system that ensures homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

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INTRODUCTION

The County of Renfrew is experiencing notable population growth and is projected to continue this upward trend in the coming decades. According to the Ontario Ministry of Finance, Ontario's population is expected to rise by 43.6% from 2022 to 2046, reaching nearly 6.6 million people. While the Greater Toronto Area will see the most substantial increases, counties like Renfrew are also anticipated to experience significant growth. The provincial population is set to grow rapidly in the near term, with rates of 2.7% this year and 2.1% in 2024-25, before stabilizing at around 1.3% by 2045-46.

Alongside this population growth, Ontario is also expected to see a shift toward an older age structure. In 2016, for the first time, seniors in Ontario outnumbered children aged 10-14. By 2046, the number of seniors is projected to rise from 2.8 million (18.4% of the population) to 4.4 million (20.3%). Specifically, the Provincial population of those aged 75 and over is expected to double to nearly 2.6 million.

During this period, the County of Renfrew is projected to see its population increase by between 15% and 30%, with the senior population expected to grow by 35% to 50% between 2022 and 2046. With 1601 individuals already on the Renfrew County Housing Registry waitlist, this growth will drive increased demand for deeply affordable housing, housing with supports, homelessness services, and supportive housing.

To address these needs, the County of Renfrew enlisted OrgCode Consulting Inc. to develop a comprehensive Homelessness and Housing Plan informed by real-time data and community values. This plan is designed to implement strategies aimed at achieving the following goals:

- **Provide Housing:** Secure stable housing - with supports if needed - for individuals without homes.
- **Prevent Future Homelessness:** Identify evidence informed strategies to assist people in retaining their current housing to prevent future homelessness.
- **Expand Housing Options:** Increase the availability of diverse housing options, particularly those with support services.
- **Enhance the Homelessness Response System:** Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall system for addressing housing crises and homelessness.

The project approach includes:

- **Data Analysis** of current relevant information on housing and homelessness across Renfrew County, including the following sources:
 - By Names List data
 - 2023 Point-in Time Count Surveys and Enumeration
 - 2024 Warming Centre Summary Report
 - County-wide Community Housing and Waitlist data
 - Waitlist data for Rent-Geared-to-Income housing
 - County-wide data on households receiving Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
 - Population growth projections, demographic changes, and housing demand
- **Key Informant Interviews:** OrgCode conducted 12 interviews with various community stakeholders identified by the County of Renfrew and its community partners.
- **Community Consultation Sessions:** OrgCode facilitated 8 sessions from June 17th to 21st for different audiences:
 - Renfrew County Housing Corporation and County Staff
 - Non-Profit Housing Service Providers

- Pembroke Area Business Community
- People with lived experience in social housing
- People with lived experience in homelessness
- Renfrew General Community (open session)
- Pembroke General Community (open session)
- Arnprior General Community (open session)
- **Community Survey on Housing and Homelessness:** 791 unique respondents participated, with 573 completing all 13 questions.

The 2024 Housing and Homelessness Plan aims to set a new course for the County of Renfrew and its housing partners, with the goal of ensuring every resident has access to safe, affordable, and suitable housing. It also seeks to identify approaches and strategies dedicated to making homelessness a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience. This Ten-Year Plan addresses changes in the local population, rising needs for homelessness support, as well as the evolving dynamics in the affordable and non-profit housing market.

To be effective, the plan must be grounded in community values and responsive to current conditions. Data from the June 2024 community survey reveals a strong local commitment to reducing homelessness, a critical factor for the plan's successful implementation in the years ahead.

HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The plan was developed through a multi-phased approach that blended extensive community engagement and careful analysis of data on housing and homelessness.

PHASE ONE: DEEPENING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRENT STATE

Objective: To gain a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the current trends and realities related to housing and homelessness in the County of Renfrew. This phase lays the groundwork for informed planning by providing a detailed snapshot of the existing conditions.

Actions Taken:

1. Data Analysis:

- **Point-in-Time Count:** This provides a snapshot of homelessness at a specific moment, capturing the number and characteristics of individuals experiencing homelessness.
- **By Name List:** Detailed information on individuals currently experiencing homelessness, which helps in understanding specific needs and gaps in services.
- **2024 Warming Centre Data:** Insights and data from the Warming Centre operated by The GRIND, offering information on temporary solutions and services provided to those in immediate need.
- **County Outreach Activities:** Data collected through outreach initiatives, including interactions with unsheltered individuals and Outreach staff, revealing patterns and challenges faced.
- **Updated County-level Census Data:** Provides demographic information crucial for understanding housing needs and economic conditions in the County.
- **Renfrew County Housing Corporation Data:** Includes information on rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing and affordable housing options, as well as waitlist data, illustrating the availability and demand for affordable housing.

Key Informant Interviews:

- **Period:** June 17th to June 21st, 2024
- **Participants:** Twelve key stakeholders from sectors crucial to addressing homelessness and housing, including:
 - Ontario Provincial Police
 - Mental Health Workers
 - Community Services
 - Ontario Works
 - Non-Profit Housing
 - County Health Services
 - Local Businesses
 - Non-Profit Service Providers
 - Municipal Leadership
- **Purpose:** To gain insights from those with in-depth knowledge and experience in housing and homelessness, providing a nuanced understanding of current challenges and opportunities.

PHASE TWO: CONSULTATIONS ON THE DESIRED FUTURE STATE

Objective: To engage with diverse stakeholder groups to discuss and define a shared vision for addressing homelessness and housing needs. This phase aims to align community perspectives and priorities with the overall goals of the 10-Year Plan.

Actions Taken:

- **Community Engagement Sessions:**
 - **Period:** June 17th to June 21st, 2024
 - **Format:** Each session lasted approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes.
 - **Components:**

- **Overview Presentation:** Provided a summary of the current state of homelessness in the County, setting the context for discussions.
- **Interactive Segment:** Facilitated discussions to establish key values, principles, and foundational elements that would guide the planning process.
- **Small Group Discussions:** Focused on brainstorming and developing solutions to address housing needs, particularly for those experiencing economic poverty or with complex support needs.
- **Participatory Exercise:** Allowed participants to prioritize ideas and potential solutions based on their feasibility and potential impact on the community.

Stakeholder Groups Involved:

- **General Public and Community Members:** Provided broad community perspectives and concerns (Renfrew, Pembroke, Arnprior).
- **Renfrew County Housing Corporation and County Staff:** Offered insights into operational challenges and housing data.
- **Non-Profit Housing Providers:** Shared experiences and needs from the non-profit housing sector.
- **Local Business Leaders:** Contributed perspectives on economic impacts and potential support.
- **Individuals with Lived Experience in Supported Housing:** Provided first-hand accounts of supported housing experiences.
- **Individuals with Lived Experience in Homelessness:** Shared personal experiences and insights on the challenges of homelessness.

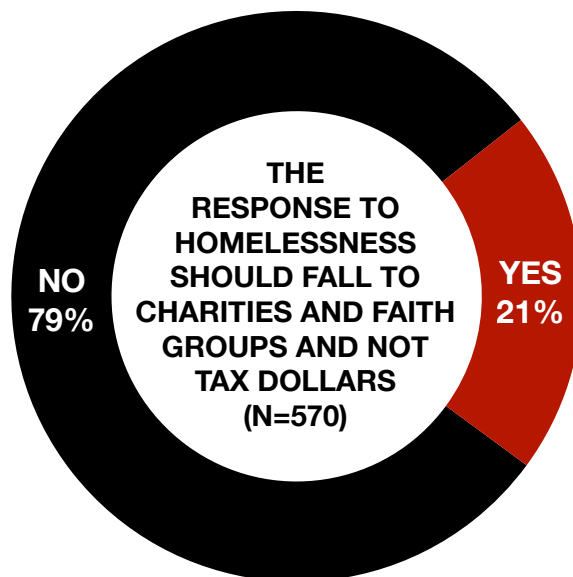
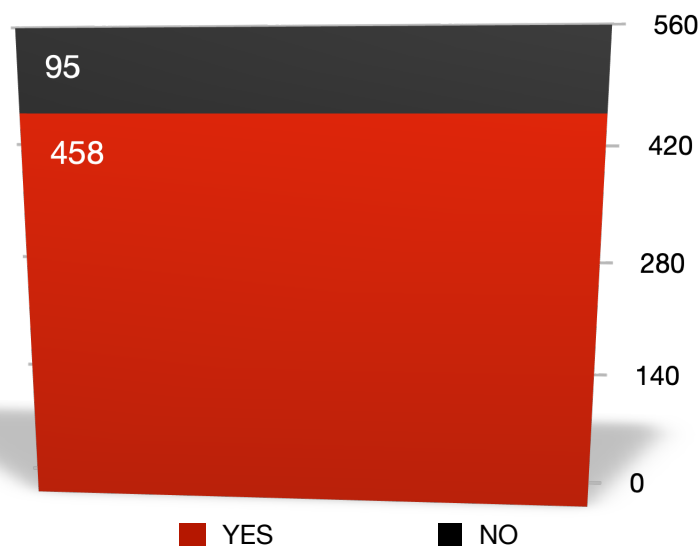
PHASE THREE: COMMUNITY SURVEY ON THE DESIRED FUTURE STATE

Objective: To further engage the community by collecting input on their vision for the future of homelessness and housing responses. This phase complements the in-person consultations by reaching a broader audience through an electronic survey.

Actions Taken:

- **Electronic Survey:**
 - **Period:** June 4th to June 23rd, 2024
 - **Participants:** 791 individuals (573 completed all questions)
 - **Purpose:** Capture a wide range of community feedback on the desired future state of housing and homelessness services. This anonymous online survey gathered diverse opinions and preferences regarding strategies and solutions for addressing homelessness and housing needs.

PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ARE DESERVING OF EMPATHY (N=553)



PHASE FOUR: ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

Objective: To synthesize and analyze the data collected from various sources to develop actionable recommendations for the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. This phase involves integrating community input with existing data to shape a coherent and effective plan.

Actions Taken:

- **Analysis of Inputs:**
 - Combined insights from key informant interviews, community consultation sessions, and the electronic survey.
 - Integrated findings from Phase One's data analysis to create a comprehensive view of the current state and desired future state.
 - Developed recommendations based on a thorough understanding of community needs, priorities, and the feasibility of proposed solutions.

ROLE OF THE SERVICE MANAGER

Throughout the Province of Ontario, there are 37 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) comprised of single tier or upper tier (Regional) municipalities, and 10 District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB) across Ontario's north. Each CMSM and DSSAB is the service manager for homelessness response in their respective communities. As the service manager, it is the responsibility of the CMSM/DSSAB to plan the homelessness response system in partnership with the community, develop policies related to the homelessness services, and receive and allocate funding from all orders of government with local strategic objectives and best practices related to preventing and reducing homelessness. The service manager is also responsible for collecting data from service providers and reporting out on that data to appropriate entities, including other orders of government.

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager, the County of Renfrew oversees a range of responsibilities related to housing and homelessness for the 17 lower-tier municipalities included in the County of Renfrew, plus the City of Pembroke. As the designated Service Manager, the County of Renfrew is dedicated to the following strategic roles and responsibilities:

- **Establishing Strategic Plans for Local and District Housing and Homelessness Responses:** Developing and implementing Local Housing and Homelessness Plans to achieve housing goals at both local and district levels.
- **Coordinating and Providing Housing Funding:** Managing and distributing funds for housing initiatives to ensure resources are used effectively to meet housing needs.
- **Developing and Administering Programs:** Creating and managing programs aimed at addressing housing and homelessness issues to reduce homelessness.
- **Managing Social and Non-Profit Housing Portfolios:** Overseeing and maintaining community housing assets to ensure their effective operation and sustainability.
- **Reporting on Progress:** Monitoring and reporting on the outcomes and effectiveness of housing and homelessness initiatives.
- **Community Housing Provider** with over 1000 community and/or rent-geared-to-income housing units as well as affordable housing and homelessness response oversight.

These responsibilities are essential for addressing local and district-level housing needs and implementing effective strategies to combat homelessness.

In 2011, Ontario mandated that Service Managers develop and implement a 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan starting in 2014. As these initial plans conclude, they must be updated annually and reviewed in detail every five years.

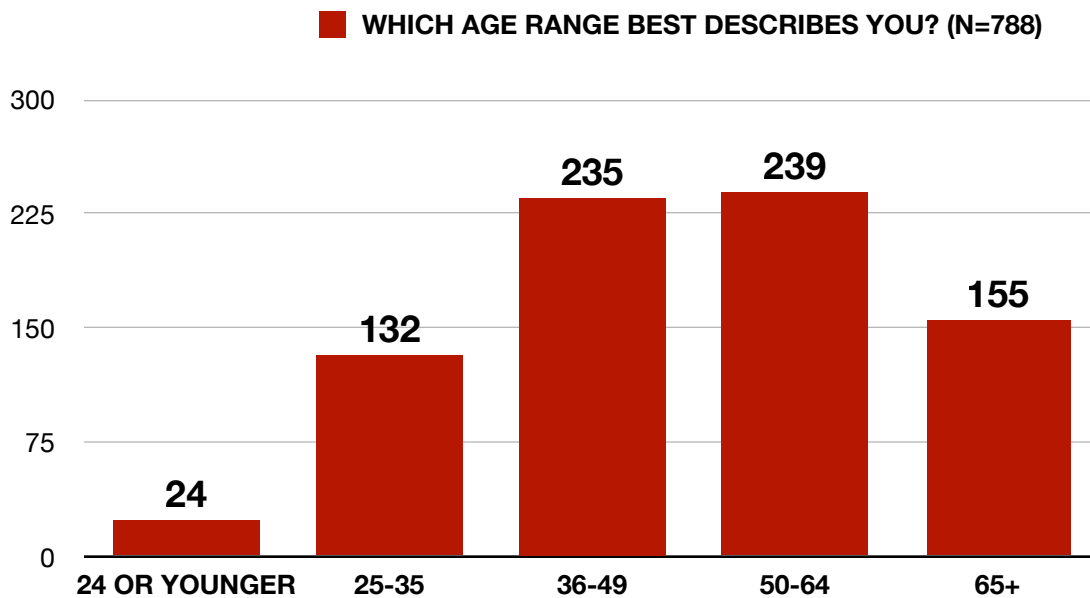
For 2024, the Province of Ontario allocated \$3,569,200 to Renfrew County specifically for homelessness prevention programs. This funding must be distributed according to need and intended outcomes across the following programs:

- Rent Supplement Program
- Rent Allowance Program
- Emergency Minor Home Repair Program
- Emergency Housing Assistance Program
- Homelessness Programming/Resources
- Supportive Bridge Housing

CURRENT STATE OF HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS IN RENFREW COUNTY

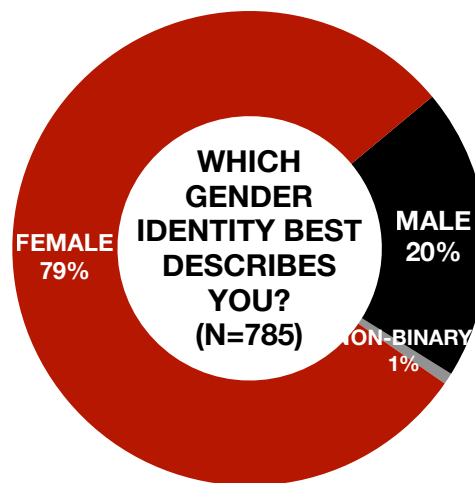
SURVEY RESULTS

The community-wide survey conducted from June 4th to June 23rd provided valuable insights into the values, beliefs, and current understanding of housing and homelessness issues impacting the County of Renfrew. The strong response rate underscores the community's deep engagement in seeking solutions. Out of 791 unique participants, 573 completed all 13 questions, resulting in an overall completion rate of 72%. The survey was distributed through various online platforms to reach a broad audience across Renfrew County, irrespective of their current housing situation. Notably, 80 unique respondents reported having experienced homelessness at some point while living in Renfrew County. This highlights that while the Point in Time Count enumeration and By Name List data are valuable, they do not capture the full extent of homelessness in the County. The below graphics provide a summary of the survey insights.

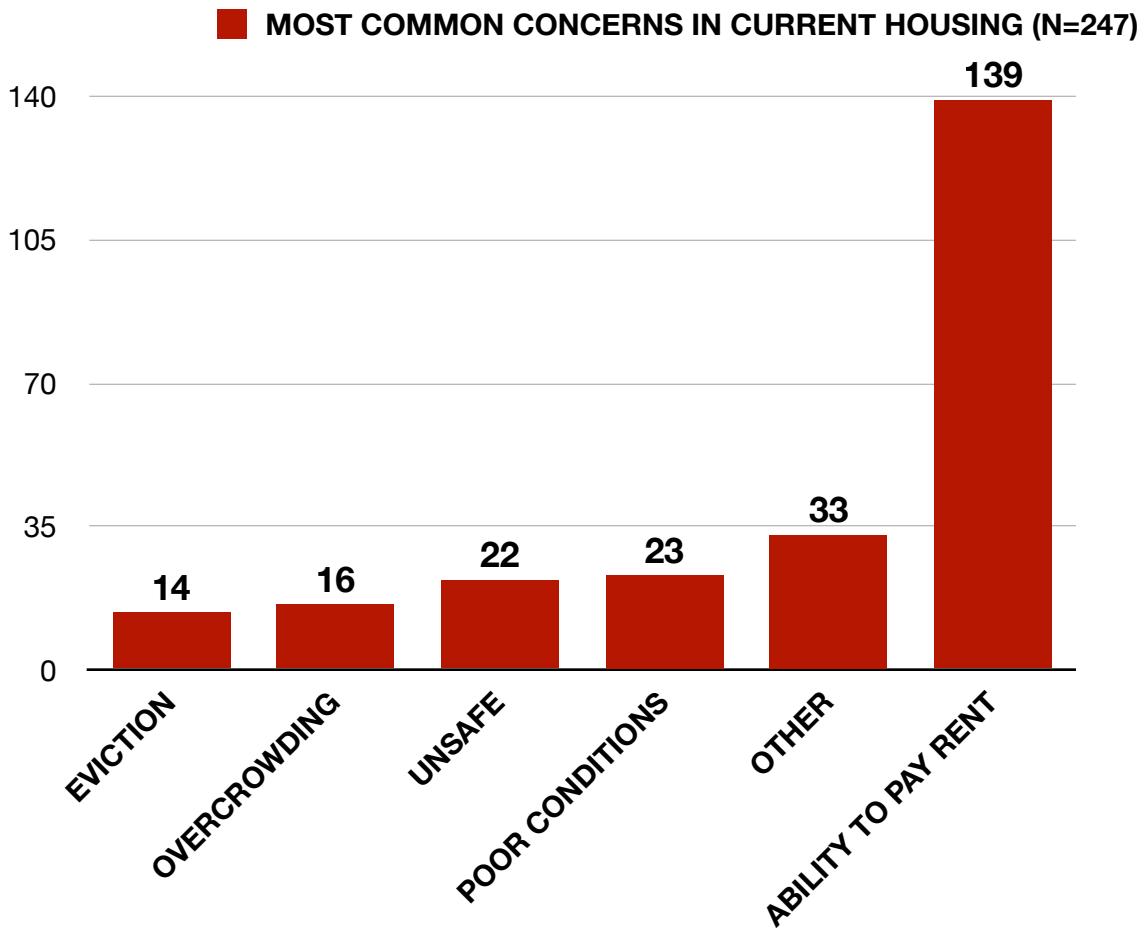


Although **515 respondents (65%)** have lived in Renfrew County for over twenty years and 694 (88%) have never accessed social housing, **247 individuals (31%)** still expressed concerns about their current housing. Among those with concerns, the majority were renters, but **99 homeowners** also reported issues. For homeowners, the primary concerns

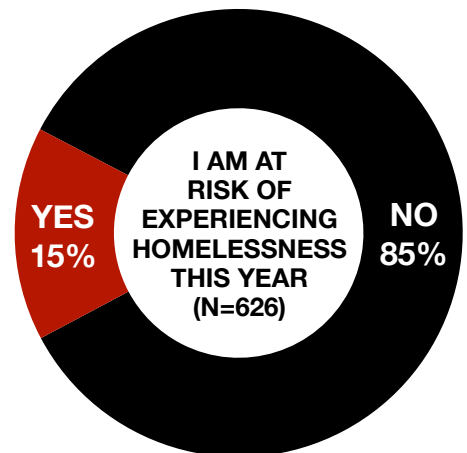
included the ability to pay rent and utilities, followed by feelings of insecurity in their housing, the overall condition of the property, overcrowding, and the fear of eviction.



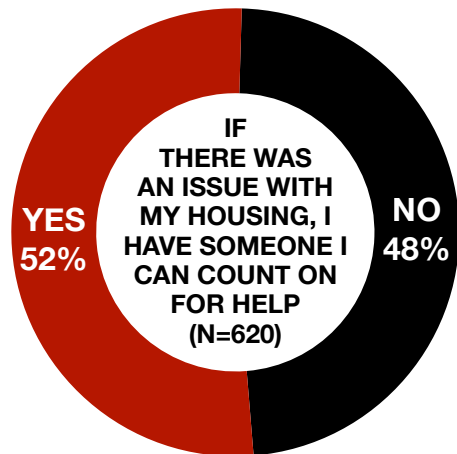
● FEMALE ● MALE ● NON-BINARY



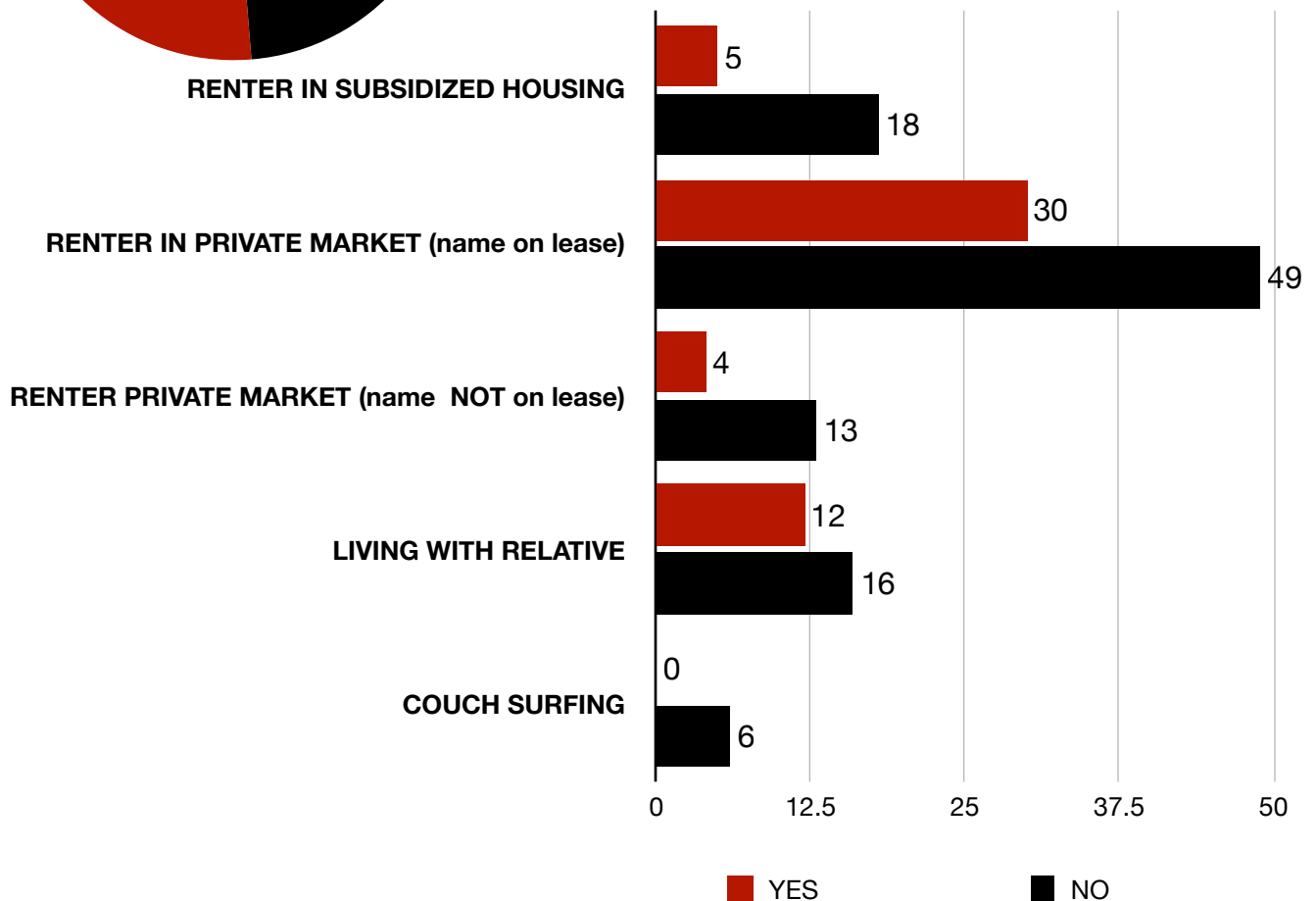
In addition to concerns about the quality of their current housing, **94 survey respondents** reported feeling at direct risk of becoming homeless this year. Furthermore, **298 respondents** indicated that if a problem with their housing arises, they do not have anyone they can rely on for assistance.



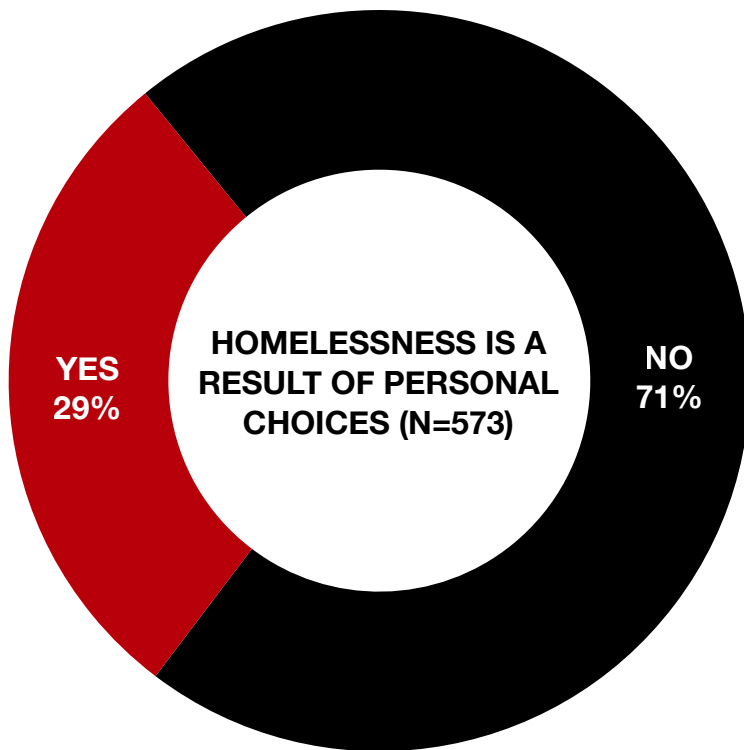
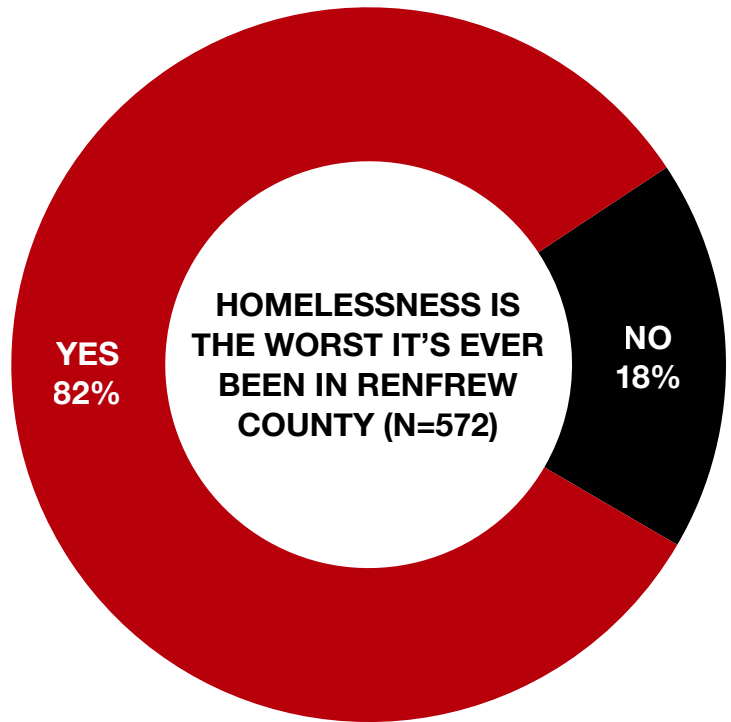
Having reliable support during times of need is a key indicator of community health and can help predict individuals at higher risk of future homelessness. While 298 respondents overall reported lacking someone to turn to if housing issues arise, this concern is particularly pronounced among renters in the private market. For these individuals, **the absence of a support network significantly increases their perceived risk of experiencing homelessness.**



IF THERE WAS AN ISSUE WITH MY HOUSING, I HAVE SOMEONE I CAN COUNT ON FOR HELP (Non Home-Owners N=153)

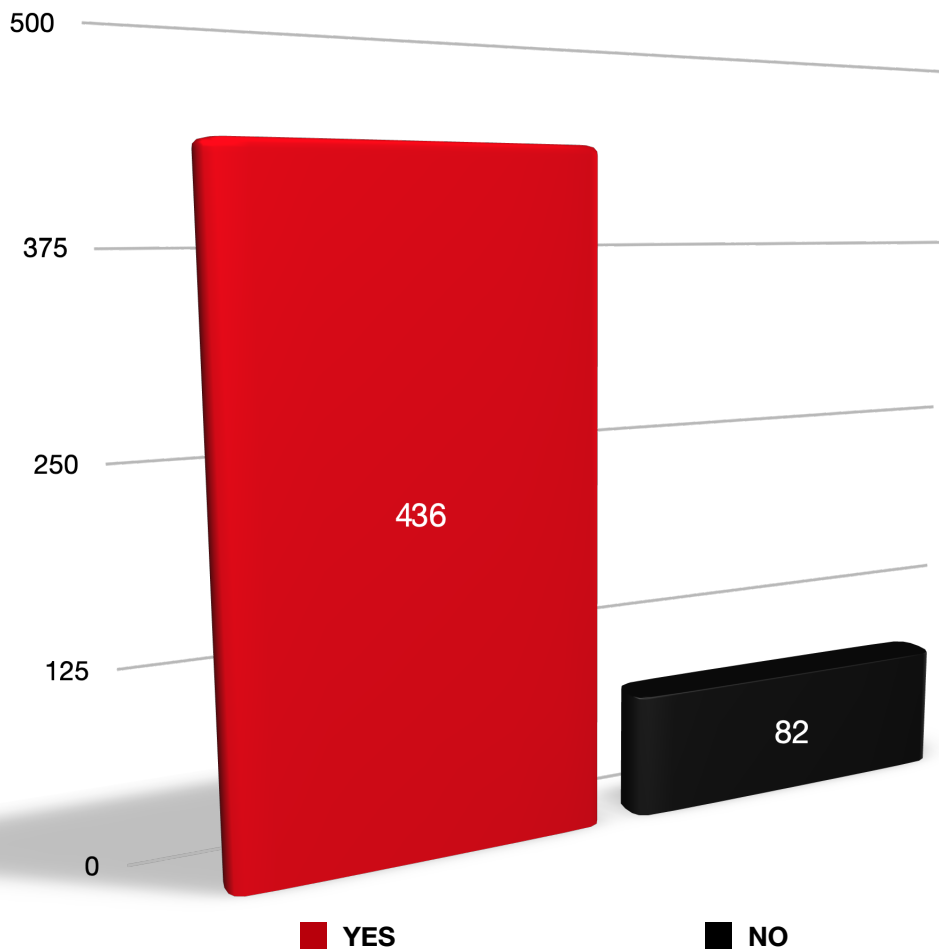


The survey revealed that residents overwhelmingly view homelessness as a critical issue throughout Renfrew County and do not believe it is simply a result of personal choices.

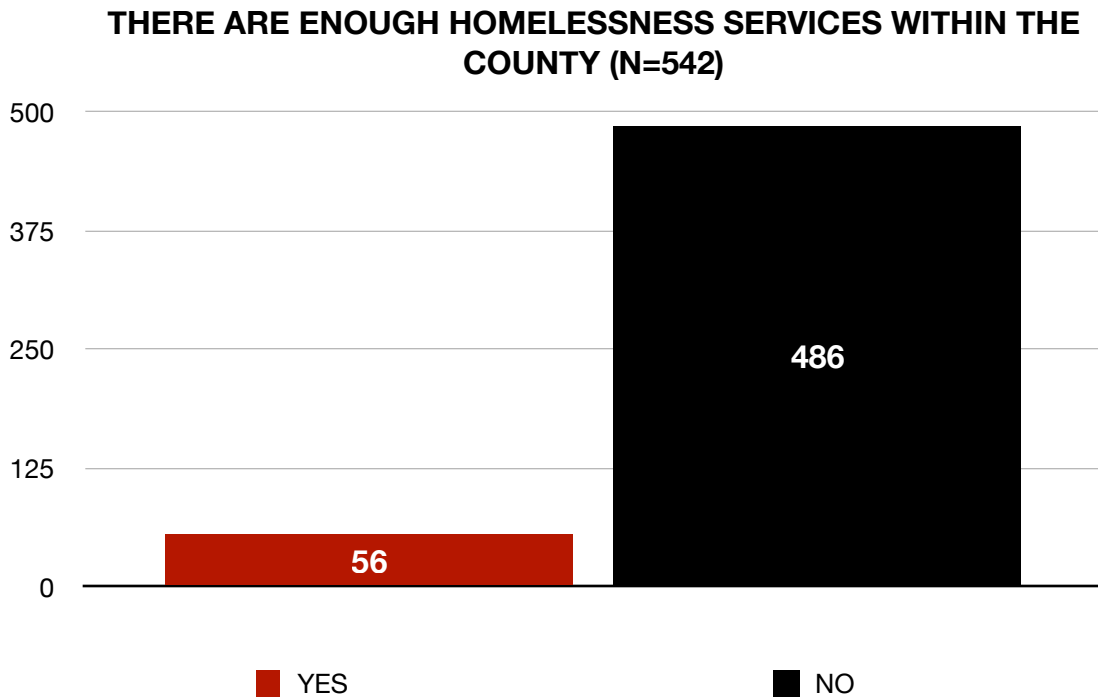


A common theme emerging from Key Informant Interviews, in-person community engagement sessions, and survey responses is that homelessness, particularly unsheltered homelessness, is more visible than ever before.

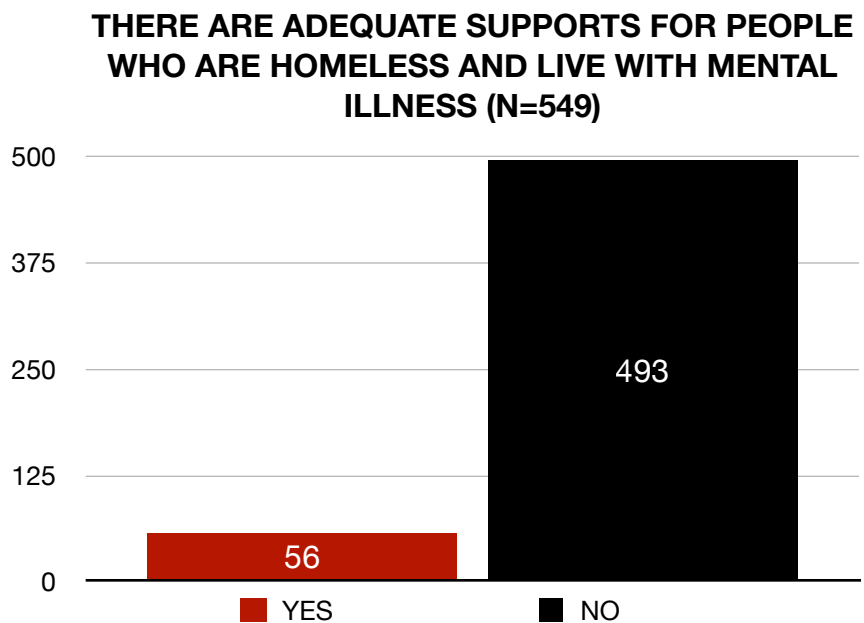
**THERE ARE MORE ENCAMPMENTS AND PEOPLE SLEEPING
ROUGH THAN EVER BEFORE (N=518)**



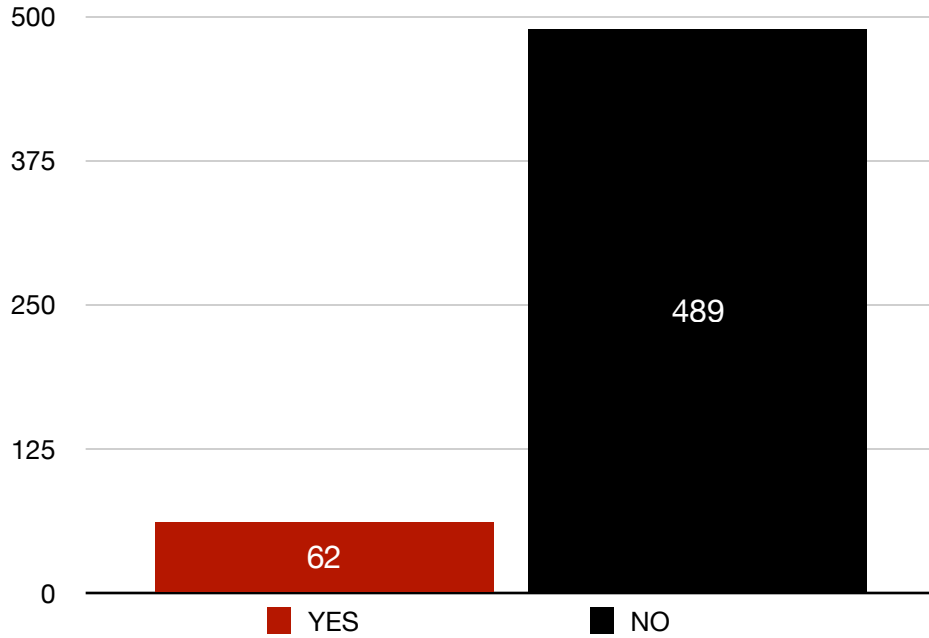
A persistent theme in the survey responses was the inadequacy of housing options for individuals with lower incomes, as well as the insufficient availability of direct services for community members currently experiencing homelessness.



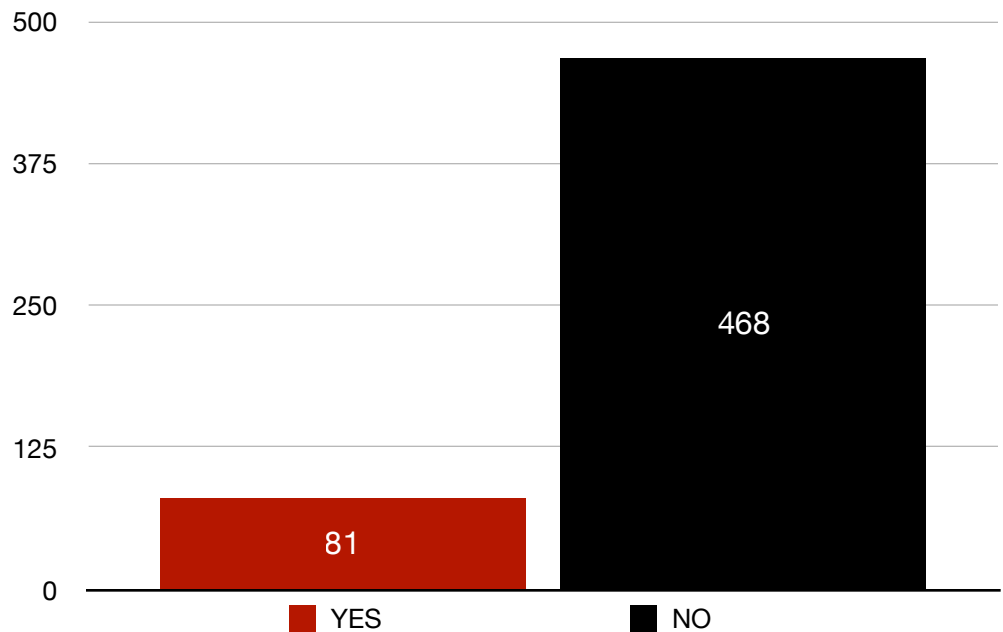
A recurring theme in both Key Informant Interviews and Community Engagement Sessions, as well as in the survey responses, was the reported lack of direct support for individuals with mental health, past trauma, and addictions concerns across Renfrew County.



**THERE ARE ADEQUATE SUPPORTS FOR PEOPLE WHO
ARE HOMELESS AND LIVE WITH PAST TRAUMA
(N=551)**

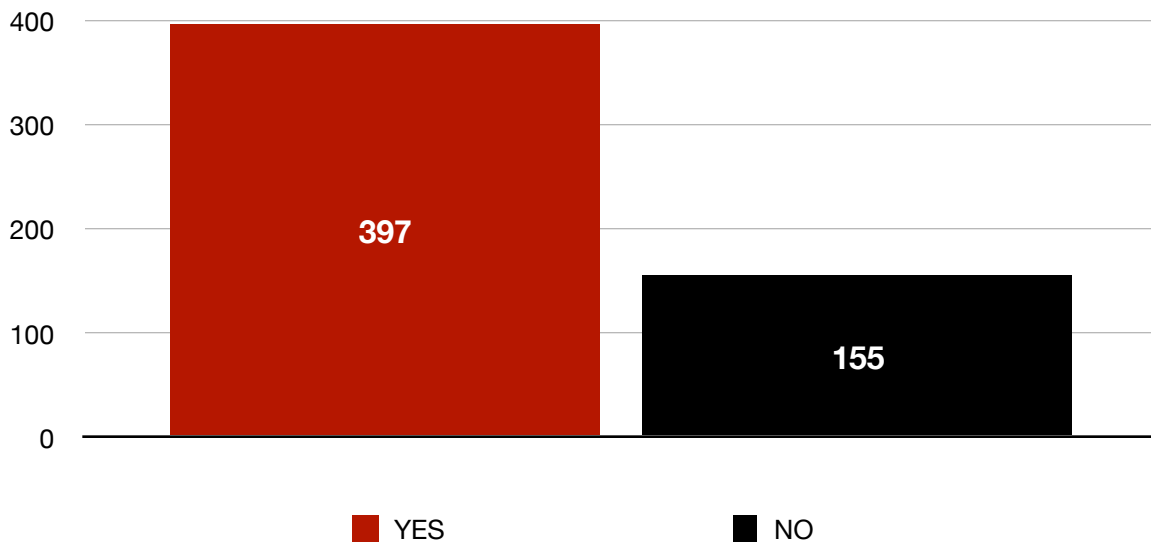


**THERE ARE ADEQUATE SUPPORTS FOR PEOPLE WHO
ARE HOMELESS AND LIVE WITH ADDICTIONS (N=549)**

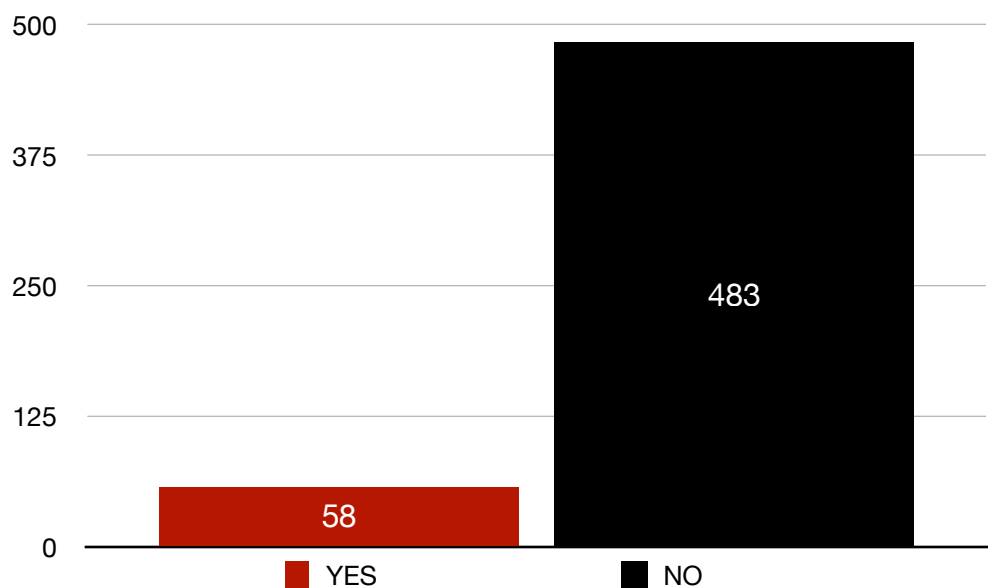


When asked specifically about potential responses directly related to homelessness, 72% of survey respondents believed that Renfrew County needs a large enough permanent Emergency Shelter to meet the growing needs. Additionally, there was a widespread belief that individuals currently experiencing homelessness lack adequate access to public washrooms.

RENFREW COUNTY NEEDS A LARGE ENOUGH EMERGENCY SHELTER TO MEET THE CURRENT NEEDS (N=552)

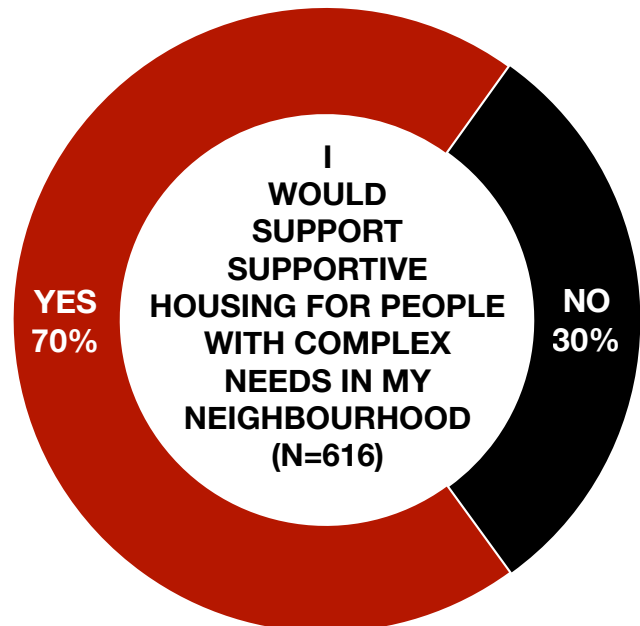
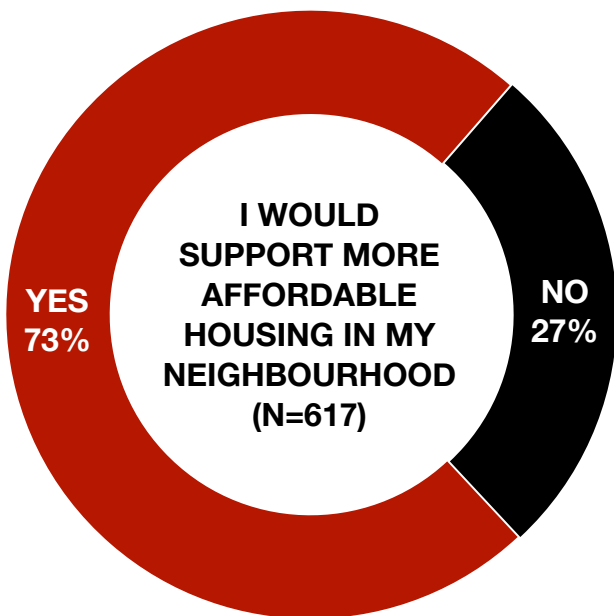
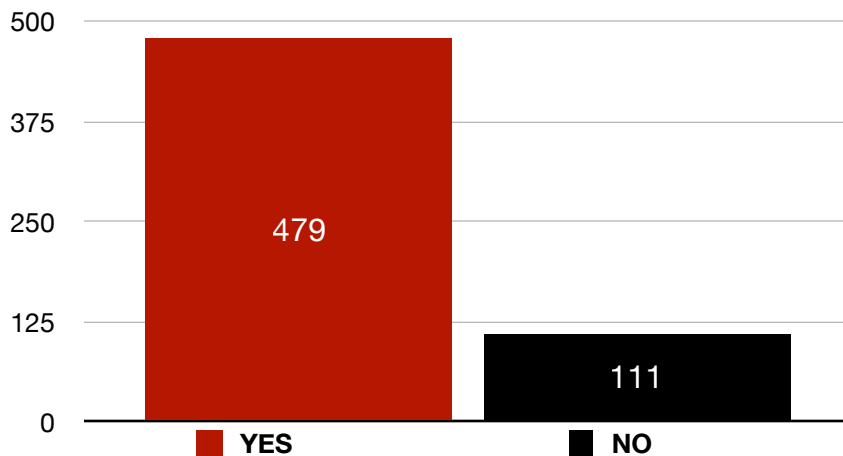


PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS HAVE ADEQUATE ACCESS TO PUBLIC WASHROOMS (N=541)

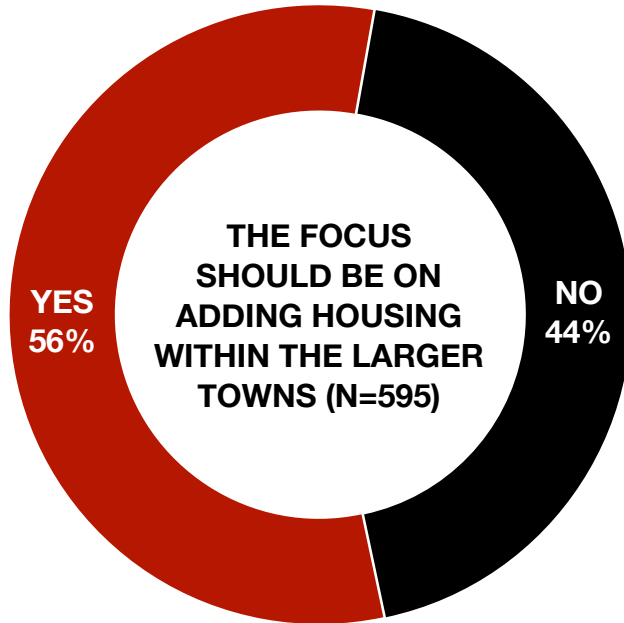


In addition to the belief that more housing should be available with rent adjusted to household income, a significant number of respondents would support the development of additional affordable housing in their neighbourhoods, even for individuals with complex support needs.

**RENFEW COUNTY REQUIRES MORE HOUSING
WHERE RENT IS GEARED TO THE MONTHLY
INCOME OF THE HOUSEHOLD (N=619)**

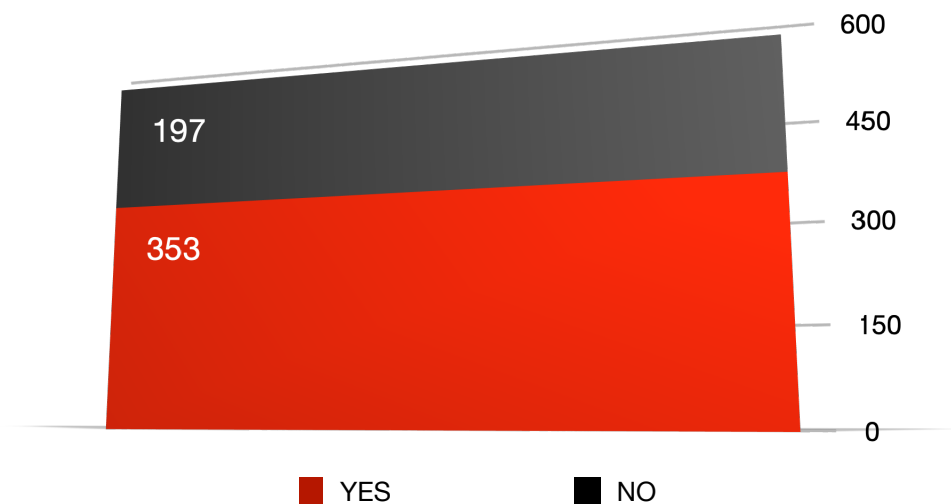


When asked about adding housing specifically within the larger towns across Renfrew County, responses were evenly split.



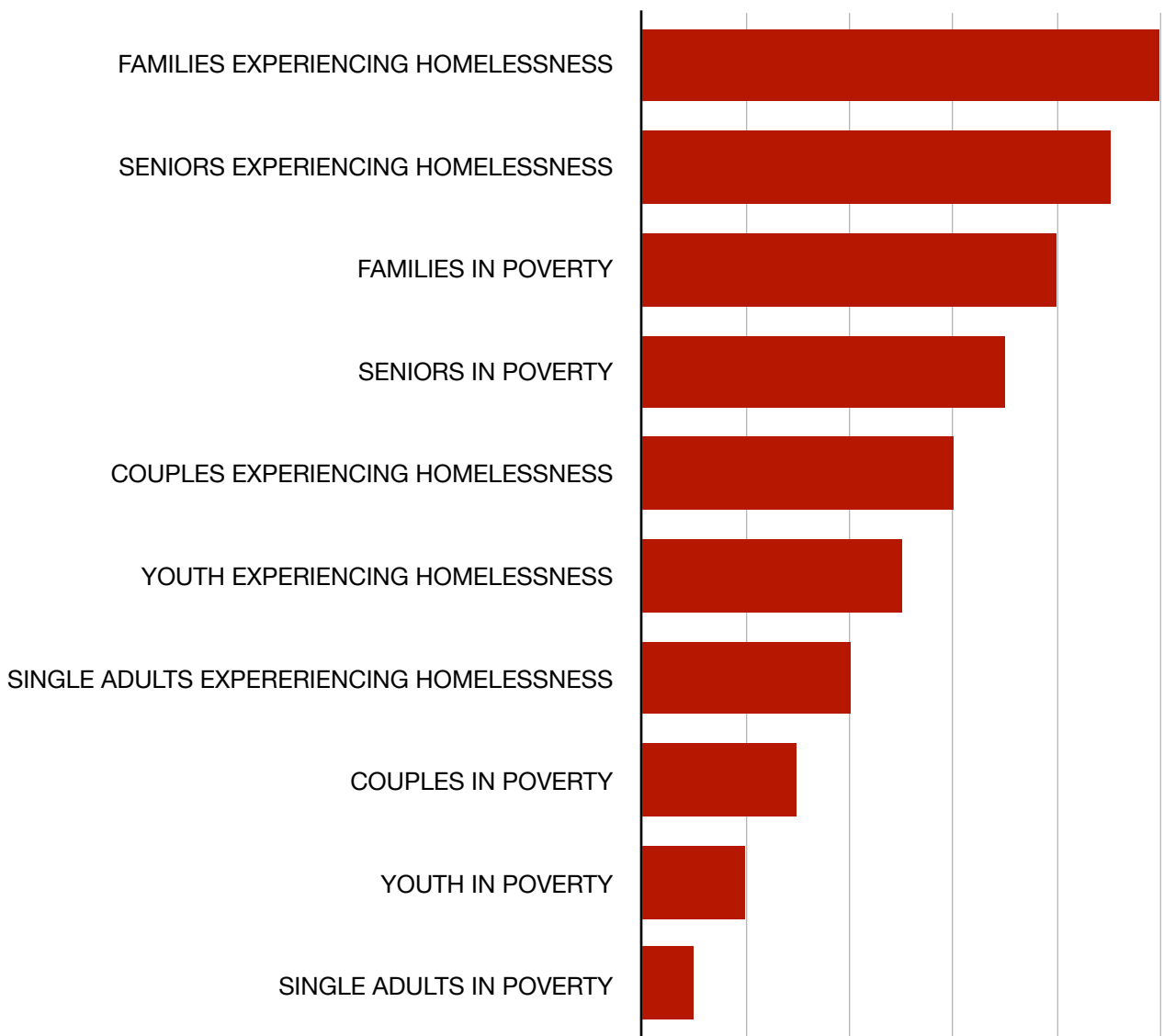
When asked about prioritizing individuals experiencing homelessness for vacancies in government-funded housing, 64% of respondents expressed support for this approach.

I AM IN FAVOUR OF PRIORITIZING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS FOR VACANCIES IN GOV'T FUNDED HOUSING (N=550)



Given that most community members supported prioritizing people experiencing homelessness for available housing, the chart below shows their preferred order for housing different groups. Families and seniors facing homelessness are ranked as the top priority, while single adults and youth in poverty are considered the lowest priority.

■ WHICH POPULATION WOULD YOU PRIORITIZE FOR HOUSING (N=626)



In summary, the recent survey garnered responses from **791 community members**, with an average completion time of 11 minutes and 5 seconds. The feedback reveals a strong concern among Renfrew County residents regarding housing and homelessness issues, with a clear call for more decisive action and solutions.

Respondents expressed a heightened awareness of homelessness, noting its increased visibility and severity. There is a widespread consensus on the urgent need for a permanent emergency shelter to meet the escalating demand. Additionally, residents highlighted the necessity for improved support services addressing mental health, addiction, and trauma.

While there is significant opposition to the creation of new encampments, community members are supportive of developing affordable and supportive housing options for individuals with complex needs within their neighbourhoods. This approach is seen as a crucial component of the broader solution.

The survey also highlighted pressing concerns about the current housing situation: 92 respondents are at risk of homelessness within the year, and 274 reported having no immediate support if housing issues arise.

Although opinions vary on the specific locations for new housing, there is strong agreement that expanding housing options, particularly for those households with very low incomes, is a priority. Emphasis should be placed on addressing the needs of families and seniors who are experiencing homelessness.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Throughout June 2024, OrgCode conducted twelve Key Informant Interviews with stakeholders from various sectors related to housing and homelessness within Renfrew County. The stakeholders included:

- Ontario Provincial Police
- Mental Health Workers
- Community Services
- Ontario Works
- Non-Profit Housing Organizations
- County Health Services
- Local Businesses
- Non-Profit Service Providers
- Municipal Leadership

Objectives of the Interviews: The interviews aimed to collect insights on the current state of housing and homelessness, assess the County's role in addressing these issues, and gather recommendations for managing the complex needs of individuals requiring intensive support. Stakeholders were also asked to suggest optimal locations within Renfrew County for new facilities and programs to address homelessness directly.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Emergence of a Housing and Homelessness Crisis:

- A common theme was that Renfrew County is at the early stages of a severe housing and homelessness crisis, with conditions worse than ever witnessed before. The full extent of visible homelessness and encampments is not yet fully understood, though it is currently concentrated in Pembroke with concerns about potential spread to smaller communities.

2. Shortage of Affordable Housing:

- The severe lack of affordable housing is identified as the main driver of the crisis. Short-term solutions, such as motel stays, are considered

inadequate. There is a pressing need for public education to enhance understanding of the crisis, effective practices for solutions, and to address misinformation contributing to negative public sentiment towards those experiencing homelessness and those working to address the issue.

3. Need for Enhanced Collaboration:

- Improved collaboration and a collective impact approach are crucial for developing effective solutions. The County's MESA initiative is highlighted as a model for the type of collaborative effort needed. Although the County has started taking a more proactive leadership role and addressing funding and service gaps, it is acknowledged that the County cannot tackle these challenges alone.

4. Concerns About Existing Services:

- There are concerns about The GRIND being the sole direct service provider for people experiencing homelessness, particularly regarding its limited expertise and location. A clearer mission and a more specialized staffing complement could address some of these concerns.
- The shortage of deeply affordable housing forces people into unsafe and inadequate conditions. Rising rents and growing waitlists are increasing stress on community resources such as food banks, local businesses, and homelessness prevention services. Protecting existing housing and addressing the gap in understanding the needs of precariously housed individuals is critical.

5. Housing and Eviction Challenges:

- High renovation costs and delays are leaving private and non-profit units empty for too long. Increasing eviction notices are leaving individuals uncertain about how to navigate the system and what steps to take next, leading to overcrowding and unsafe conditions without adequate recourse.

- The rising costs of housing are not matched by increasing income supports and rental assistance, necessitating policy changes on eligibility for rent-geared-to-income housing and other forms of housing assistance.
6. **Emergency and Supportive Housing Needs:**
- There is insufficient emergency housing, and current motel/hotel stays lack the necessary supports, contributing to the rise in encampments.
 - Defining supportive housing within the County is challenging amidst growing support needs. County staff are struggling to keep up with demand and are working on adjusting internal policies, but resources are insufficient.
7. **Community Sentiment and Service Location:**
- Concerns about NIMBYism potentially hindering new supportive housing models exist, but the community survey indicated that 70% of respondents would support housing for people with complex needs in their neighbourhoods.
 - The lack of transportation services makes it logical to place new services where the greatest needs are. Pembroke is considered the most suitable location for a permanent emergency shelter despite potential political challenges.
8. **Quality of Services:**
- The quality of new services is seen as more crucial than their location. Implementing evidence-informed practices and employing well-trained staff are essential for the success and acceptance of new services. If services are not professionally managed, concerns will arise regardless of the location.

These findings underscore that the County is facing a severe crisis, exacerbated by a critical shortage of affordable housing and inadequate short-term solutions. There is a

pressing need for public education to counter misinformation and enhance understanding of the causes and solutions of homelessness. Collaboration among agencies, modelled by the County's MESA initiative, is deemed essential for effective problem-solving and innovation. Concerns were raised about the existing service landscape, particularly regarding The GRIND's capacity and current ability to serve the population of people experiencing a homelessness and housing crisis. High renovation costs, increasing evictions, and insufficient emergency housing further strain community resources. Despite some resistance, a majority of community members support integrating new supportive housing models in their neighbourhoods. Effective service delivery is prioritized, emphasizing the need for well-trained staff and evidence-based practices over debates regarding location of services.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

From June 17th to June 21st, OrgCode hosted a series of Community Engagement Sessions to gather insights from various stakeholder groups. Each session lasted approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes and comprised the following elements:

- **Project Overview and Current State Presentation:** An introduction to the project, including a summary of the current homelessness situation in Renfrew County.
- **Interactive Component:** A collaborative exercise to identify key values, principles, and foundational elements for the plan.
- **Small Group Discussions:** Focused discussions aimed at generating ideas for addressing the housing needs of individuals in economic poverty and those with complex support needs, as well as improving the county's response to homelessness.
- **Prioritization Exercise:** An activity to rank ideas based on their feasibility and potential community impact.

The sessions engaged a diverse range of stakeholders, including:

- General Public/Community Members
- Renfrew County Housing Corporation and County Staff
- Non-Profit Housing Providers
- Local Business Leaders
- Individuals with Lived Experience in Supported Housing
- Individuals with Lived Experience in Homelessness

OrgCode upholds the principle of "nothing about us, without us," emphasizing the importance of including individuals with lived experience in both subsidized housing and homelessness in the engagement process.

KEY FINDINGS:

Beliefs about Individuals Experiencing Homelessness in Renfrew County

- Individuals experiencing homelessness are deserving of both empathy AND the necessary supports and services to resolve their housing needs.
- System Failures and Trauma: A lack of housing often results from systemic failures and past trauma.
- Right to Safe Housing: Everyone deserves safe, secure, and appropriate housing that meets their needs.
- Dignity and Empathy: Everyone is entitled to dignity and compassion.
- Universal Vulnerability: Homelessness can affect anyone, and it is not a choice. The high cost of living today increases the risk of homelessness.
- Complex Causes: There is no single cause of homelessness; it is a multifaceted issue. Solutions to homelessness must be as dynamic as the causes and realities of the problem.
- Experiences Not Labels: Homelessness is an experience, not a defining characteristic of an individual.

Additional Insights from People Experiencing Homelessness:

- **Victimization Risks:** Individuals experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk of being victims of abuse, theft, and violence rather than perpetrators.
- **Misconceptions:** Not everyone without a home is a “bum,” and it is challenging to focus on community concerns while struggling for survival on a daily basis.

Beliefs about Individuals with Very Low Incomes in Housing:

- **Daily Struggles:** They face daily challenges to make ends meet and need significant support to achieve self-sufficiency.
- **Isolation and Fear:** They often feel isolated and fear losing their housing at any moment.
- **Need for Comprehensive Support:** There is a need for more access to mental health, addiction, and hoarding support.

Ideas for Addressing Housing Needs:

- **Increase Supportive Housing:** Expand the availability of supportive housing options in the County.
- **Improve Housing Maintenance Resources:** Enhance resources to help individuals maintain their current housing.
- **Life Skills Programs:** Develop more programs focused on life skills.
- **Hub Model:** Create centralized hubs where multiple resources are available in one location.
- **Shared Database:** Establish a shared database of available help and supports.
- **Better Data Systems:** Improve data systems to better understand the true scope of need across the County.
- **Enhanced Availability of Support Workers:** Increase the number of mental health support workers and case managers who can visit clients in their homes.

- Incorporate Lived Experience in the Design of New Initiatives: Ensure that new programs include input from individuals with lived experience.
- Revise Rental Allowances: Improve rent allowances and eligibility requirements for subsidies.
- Focus on Homelessness Prevention: Prioritize prevention efforts to maintain housing stability.
- Enhance Efforts to Improve Food Security: Expand food security programs to support people during the housing crisis.
- Strengthen Partnerships: Enhance collaboration among service providers and government departments.
- Increase Assistance for Senior Citizens: Provide more support to seniors to help them stay in their homes.
- Prioritize Homelessness for Housing Options: Ensure people experiencing homelessness are prioritized for available housing if appropriate supports are in place.

Ideas for Addressing Homelessness:

- Housing Waitlist Prioritization: Change the priority status on the housing waitlist to include people experiencing homelessness.
- Increase Professional Staff: Ensure funding and training opportunities focus on hiring and retaining professional staff to work directly with individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Expand Outreach Services: Develop additional outreach services beyond those provided by the Paramedics team.
- Establish Permanent Shelter: Create a permanent, lower-barrier, housing focused emergency shelter.
- Develop Bridge Housing: Implement Bridge Housing to address complex needs and foster stabilization before transitioning to permanent housing.

- Designated Case Workers: Assign specific case workers to individuals experiencing homelessness to connect them with all available services and resources.
- Enhance Addiction Supports: Work with Provincial departments to increase addiction support, detox, and rehabilitation programs across the county.
- Improve By Name List Processes and Communication: Enhance the By Name List process for better understanding and management to coordinate movement of people experiencing homelessness to the finite housing and support options available locally.
- Public Awareness Campaign: Launch a public awareness campaign to address the realities and stigma of homelessness as well as the importance of housing options as the only solution to homelessness.
- Homelessness Prevention Programs: Increase programs and resources to prevent homelessness. This must include housing loss prevention and shelter diversion activities as well as targeted eviction prevention activities.
- Leverage the Insights of People with Lived Experience: Continuously engage and listen to individuals with lived experience of homelessness and housing crises with designing, enhancing and evaluating homelessness response and housing initiatives.
- Landlord-Tenant Assistance: Provide resources to assist with landlord and tenant disputes.

IDENTIFIED PRIORITIES:

During each consultation session, participants reviewed all suggested ideas and selected their top priorities. The key priorities identified across all sessions are:

1. **Prevention:** Focus on activities and resources to maintain housing stability and prevent homelessness.

2. **Permanent Emergency Shelter:** Establish a permanent, accessible, and professionally managed emergency shelter with a lower-barrier, housing-focused approach.
3. **Bridge Housing:** Develop Bridge Housing specifically for individuals with complex and co-occurring needs.
4. **Better Data Collection:** Enhance data collection and analysis to better understand the scope and scale of homelessness and housing needs.
5. **Ongoing Supports:** Increase professional staff to provide continuous support both during homelessness and after individuals are housed.
6. **Housing Prioritization:** Prioritize individuals experiencing homelessness when allocating available housing.
7. **Enhanced Collaboration:** Strengthen collaboration among service providers, housing providers, and government departments.

DATA ANALYSIS

Although detailed data on homelessness across Renfrew County is limited, there is enough information to establish a baseline for actions and strategic plans for housing solutions and homelessness response services.

POINT IN TIME COUNT

The most recent **POINT IN TIME (PiT) COUNT**, conducted in November 2023, reported at least 55 households experiencing homelessness. Of these, 65% were located in Pembroke, 53% were experiencing chronic homelessness (defined as more than six months), and the majority were between the ages of 30 and 64. Additionally, 27% were youth aged 16 to 29. These PiT Count findings are consistent with results in other Canadian communities in recent years.

Key findings from the surveys include:

- 40% were unsheltered (rough camping)

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- 31% were couch surfing
- 20% were in emergency shelters or hotels
- 2% had exited a health facility (hospital)
- 7% did not disclose their current situation

Reasons for homelessness were reported as follows:

- 22% were victims of intimate partner violence
- 22% experienced relationship breakdowns
- 18% were kicked out of recent housing
- 16% were evicted
- 4% cited unsafe or poor building conditions
- 4% did not disclose the reason
- 14% identified other reasons

Regarding household type:

- 60% were single
- 18% were single with children
- 13% were couples
- 7% were couples with children
- 2% did not disclose

Contributing factors to homelessness included:

- 56% had mental illness
- 49% had medical conditions
- 42% struggled with substance use concerns
- 35% faced learning or cognitive limitations
- 25% had physical limitations

BY NAME LIST

Renfrew County maintains a **BY NAME LIST (BNL)**, a critical tool for managing homelessness. This list provides:

- 1. Detailed and Accurate Information:** Includes names, contact details, specific needs, and relevant housing/homelessness history for all those who consent to being added to the BNL
- 2. Real-Time Updates:** Regular updates ensure current housing and support statuses are reflected, with information being updated as people are housed or newly homeless.
- 3. Coordination and Prioritization:** Facilitates service coordination and prioritizes support based on urgency and need.
- 4. Tracking and Accountability:** Monitors intervention effectiveness and ensures necessary follow-ups.
- 5. Resource Allocation:** Helps match and allocate resources effectively by understanding individual housing and support needs.
- 6. Integration with Other Systems:** Often integrated with other data systems like Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) for a comprehensive view.

As of July 2024, the Renfrew County BNL identified **27 unique individuals experiencing homelessness, with 14 classified as chronically homeless**. In Canada, chronic homelessness refers to persistent or long term homelessness where people have been homeless for at least 180 days at some point over the course of a year (acute chronicity) and/or recurrent episodes of homelessness over three years that total 18 months (prolonged instability)¹, often accompanied by significant barriers to housing stability and higher support needs.

¹ Reaching Home: Homelessness Glossary for Communities (May 2024) as cited: <https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/library/resources/glossary-for-communities/>

In November 2023, there was a significant influx of 28 newly identified individuals on the BNL, likely coinciding with the PIT activities. This highlights the need for consistent data collection throughout the year. From January 1, 2024, to July 2024, there has been an average of 5 newly identified individuals per month, including 2 chronically homeless individuals monthly. The inflow numbers surpass outflow numbers, resulting in a net monthly increase in homelessness and a net percentage increase of 59% from January through July.

The population of people experiencing chronic homelessness on the BNL is currently being housed at an average rate of 2 individuals per month, but 3 individuals are being moved to inactive status each month, indicating that the system is losing contact with more people than it is successfully housing. Similar trends are observed with the overall homeless population. Since the start of the year, 12 individuals who were housed have returned to homelessness, indicating a need for more robust homelessness proofing and prevention resources.

WARMING CENTRE DATA

The WARMING CENTRE was operational for 140 nights from December 1, 2023, to April 18, 2024. Managed by the GRIND staff and volunteers, it was set up in a rented ATCO office trailer (12' x 50') at the Pembroke Farmers Market equipped with 27 recliner chairs for people to rest in throughout the night. The trailer was outfitted with a 100 amp electrical service, connected to the Market's building for power and heating. Facilities included a double washroom trailer for sanitation. The area was equipped with continuous video security monitoring and live smoke detection equipment to ensure safety.

Throughout its operation, the Warming Center provided:

- Total Warming Stays: 1,309
- Unique Individuals Served: 101

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- Average Length of Stay: 8 nights
- Longest Stay: 30 of 31 nights (March)
- Busiest Single Night: 19 guests

Meals Provided:

- Dinners: 1,309
- Breakfasts: 979

Demographics of Individuals Served:

- Gender:
 - Male: 70
 - Female: 31
- Age
 - Youngest: 16
 - Oldest: 86

Residency:

- Local (Renfrew County): 89
- Non-local: 12 (with only 2 remaining in the area)

OUTREACH SERVICES

Observing **OUTREACH SERVICES** in Pembroke provided valuable insights into both the extent of unsheltered homelessness locally and the effectiveness of current outreach methods. During the observations, four main encampment sites were identified, each including between 2 to 8 unique individuals, along with several abandoned campsites showing no recent activity. In the County, a dedicated MESA Team provides the primary outreach supports available to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This provides a unique situation for Renfrew County when compared to other outreach approaches in other Canadian communities.

The MESA (pronounced "mey-suh") initiative in Renfrew County is a phased, evidence-based approach aimed at addressing the root causes of homelessness, substance abuse, addictions, and mental health issues. By fostering a resilient and healthier community, MESA is a collaborative effort involving Community Services, Paramedic Services, the Development and Property Department, and various partner organizations. The initiative employs an "escalator model" to guide individuals from harm towards a more equitable community. Its goal is to provide innovative care and secure housing, supporting residents in achieving health, well-being, and a safe place to call home.

The MESA Team leading the outreach have developed strong rapport and trust with the residents of these encampments, which significantly enhances their ability to deliver appropriate health services. These encampments are located discreetly, mainly off the Algonquin Trail, yet remain within reasonable proximity to resources and services like the GRIND. Residents of the encampments frequently utilize the GRIND's meal program and drop-in services.

While the MESA Team's outreach efforts are highly beneficial, the model is still in its infancy and will take time to build the comprehensive support network envisioned. A combined paramedicine and housing focused approach would be advantageous for both the Pembroke community and the individuals living in the encampments.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PROGRAMS IN RENFREW COUNTY

In 2023, Renfrew County faced a significant demand for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing:

- Current Wait Time for RGI Units: Ranges from 7 to 10 years

- Total Names on Local RGI Waiting List: 1,601 (current as of June, 2024) *Note this includes 87 households with special priority status.

The Special Priority Policy (SPP) under Ontario's Housing Services Act is designed to give priority access to social housing for individuals experiencing domestic violence or human trafficking. The goal is to help these individuals escape unsafe living conditions and quickly secure housing that offers safety and stability.

Housing Movement:

- **Households Moved into RGI Units:** 76 (39 from the chronological list, 37 with special priority)
- **Average Wait Time:**
 - Special Priority Status: 24 months
 - Chronological Waitlist: Approximately 7–10 years
- **Internal Transfers:** 18
- **Move-Outs: 84 (stable over the past four years)**

Applications by Bedroom Size:

- 1-Bedroom: 59 senior, 852 adult, 0 family
- 2-Bedroom: 4 senior, 43 adult, 213 family
- 3-Bedroom: 0 senior, 4 adult, 161 family
- 4-Bedroom: 0 senior, 1 adult, 82 family
- 5-Bedroom: 0 senior, 0 adult, 46 family

Provincial Funding Allocation (2023)

In 2023, the Province of Ontario allocated \$3,569,200 to Renfrew County for homelessness prevention and housing stability programs:

- Rent Supplement Program: \$200,000

- Rent Allowance Program: \$845,000
- Emergency Minor Home Repair Program: \$200,000. This provided grants of up to \$7,500 for essential repairs. In 2023–2024, 13 households received \$69,769.42, with remaining funds allocated to a Transitional Housing Plan.
- Emergency Housing Assistance Program: \$845,740 (administered by Ontario Works). This program has eligibility criteria that includes up to \$1,500 for households without children and \$2,000 for those with children for urgent expenses. In 2023–2024, 1,117 applications were approved.
- Warming Centre: \$80,000 was allocated for emergency shelter in Pembroke

Rent Programs and Services:

- Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI): Available at RCHC-owned and managed properties, typically 30% of household income. About 12% of RCHC tenants pay the maximum rate.
- Rent Supplement (Private-Market RGI): Provided subsidies for private-market rentals. In 2023, 74 households benefited from this initiative.
- Rent Allowance Program: Offered \$300 for households without children and \$400 for those with children. The 2023–2024 allocation was \$845,000, supporting 147 households monthly.
- Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB): Provided a monthly subsidy of \$449.16 to 272 households, with a 2023–2024 allocation of \$287,600.

Housing Improvement Funds:

- Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative (COCHI) and Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI): Supported housing renewal and improvement.

Affordable Home Ownership: Supported through home improvement and emergency fund programs, including the Emergency Minor Home Repair Program.

Funding Changes for 2024–2025

For the 2024–2025 period, the following changes in funding allocations are proposed by the RCHC:

- Emergency Minor Home Repair Program: Decreased to \$150,000 from \$200,000.
- Rent Supplement Program: Maintained at \$200,000, with a slight increase in caseload.
- Rent Allowance Program: Reduced from \$845,000 to \$822,000 due to decreased caseload.
- Emergency Housing Assistance Program: Increased to \$850,000 from \$845,740.
- She C.A.N: Continues at \$100,000 with grants of up to \$5,000 to help victims of intimate partner violence with housing stability
- Hoarding and High Content Supports Pilot: New allocation of \$105,000.
- Homelessness Coordinator – Contract: New allocation of \$90,100, aimed at improving homelessness response and coordination.
- Supportive Transitional Housing: New funding of \$823,640 for capital and/or operating expenses.
- Food Security and Winter Warmth Programs: Consistent at \$250,000.
- Capital (affordable housing units): Decreased from \$1,000,000 to zero.
- Administration: Remains at \$178,460, the maximum allowed.

The 2023 data highlights the critical need for affordable housing and the substantial demand on existing programs. With wait times for RGI housing stretching up to 10 years, the proposed funding changes for 2024–2025 reflect a strategic adjustment to address emerging needs. The introduction of the Homelessness Coordinator position and the Hoarding and High Content Supports Pilot underscore a focused effort to enhance specialized support and overall coordination. These adjustments, alongside continued investments in key programs, aim to leverage existing program success while putting needed attention on immediate response gaps.

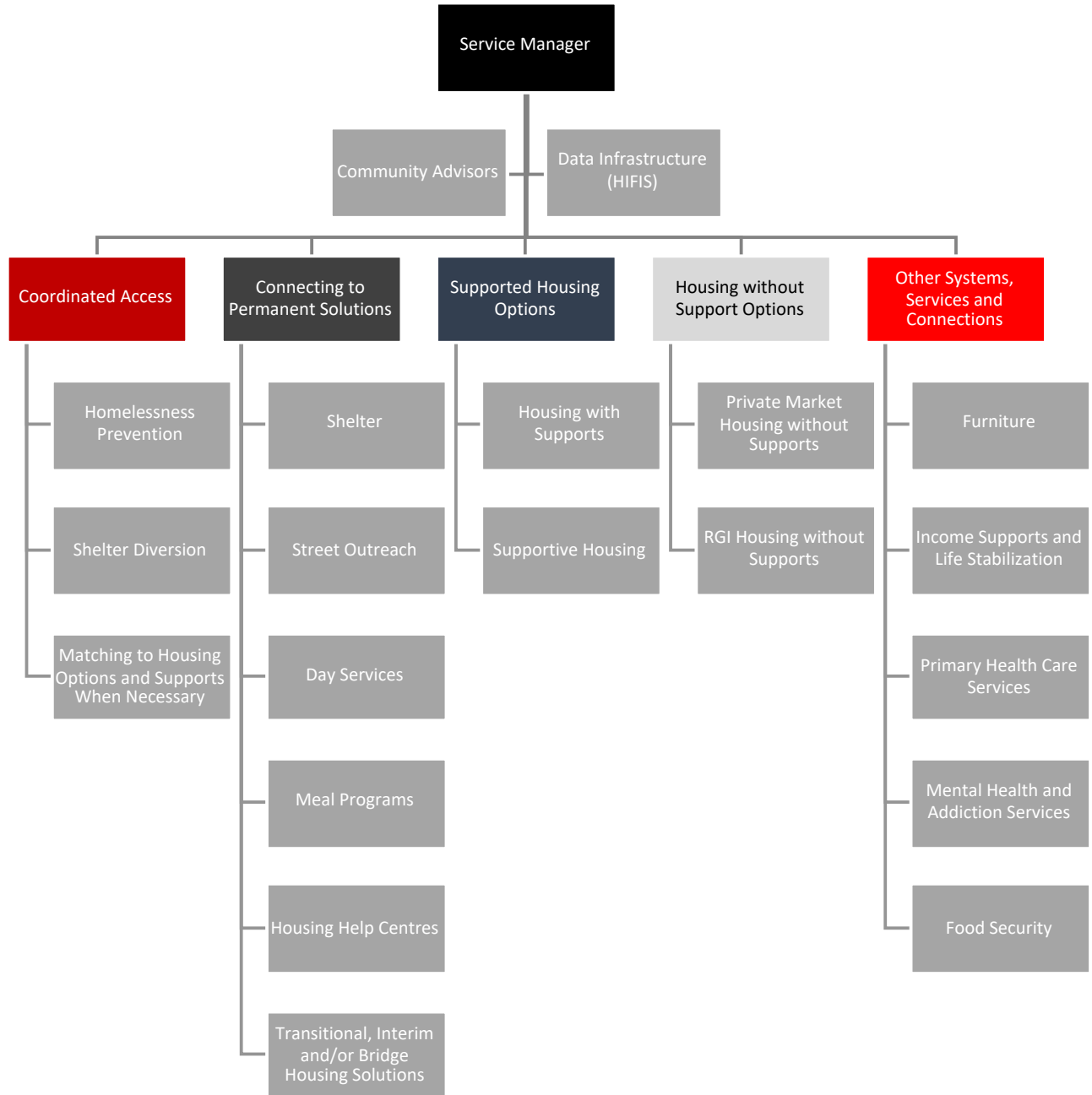
GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES: KEY CONSIDERATIONS, BEST AND PROMISING PRACTICES, AND A PATHWAY FORWARD

With the foundational elements already in place and the plan to add a full-time Homelessness Coordinator, Renfrew County is poised to move forward with implementing a more effective homelessness response and housing stability program.

A responsive and effective homelessness response and housing stability system begins with strong leadership and management by the Service Manager. Renfrew County, as the Consolidated Municipal Services Manager, is responsible for planning and implementing an effective homelessness and housing stability response. This process involves input from community and non-profits partners, other systems of care such as the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Correctional Services, businesses, and the general public. Planning and implementation occur in accordance with the guidelines and intended outcomes set by Provincial and Federal governments, which provide the primary financial resources for homelessness prevention, homelessness services, housing stability programs, and supportive housing.

The below graphic demonstrates a system of care and its components that have proven to be essential in high functioning homelessness response and housing stability system achieving the prevention and reducing of chronic homelessness locally.

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As expected, **data** is crucial for driving performance in an effective community response to homelessness. Renfrew County currently manages a By Name List using Excel and implements a regular Point in Time survey and enumeration. Currently, Renfrew County does not have a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) dedicated to gathering real time data collection and reporting on households experiencing homelessness and seeking supports. HIFIS 4 (Homeless Individuals and Families Information System) is a comprehensive software platform designed to support communities in managing homelessness and housing services. It is an updated version of the earlier HIFIS systems, providing more advanced tools and features to help organizations and municipalities track and manage their efforts to prevent and address homelessness.

Key Features and Functions of HIFIS 4:

- 1. Client Management:** HIFIS 4 allows for detailed tracking of client information, including demographics, service needs, and interactions with various support services. This helps organizations manage cases more effectively and provide personalized support.
- 2. Service Coordination:** The system facilitates coordination among different service providers by sharing relevant client information and service histories, which enhances the overall effectiveness of the homelessness response system.
- 3. Data Collection and Reporting:** HIFIS 4 enables comprehensive data collection on homelessness trends, service usage, and client outcomes. It provides robust reporting tools to analyze data, generate reports, and monitor performance against targets and objectives.
- 4. Coordinated Access:** The system supports the implementation of Coordinated Access processes, helping to prioritize and match individuals and families with appropriate housing and support services based on their needs.

5. **Real-Time Updates:** HIFIS 4 is cloud-based, allowing for real-time updates and access to information from multiple locations. This ensures that all stakeholders have access to the most current data.
6. **User-Friendly Interface:** Designed with an emphasis on usability, HIFIS 4 provides an intuitive interface for users, making it easier to navigate and manage client information and services.
7. **Security and Privacy:** The platform adheres to strict data security and privacy standards to protect sensitive client information and ensure compliance with relevant regulations.

HIFIS 4 offers several key benefits that significantly enhance the response to homelessness. By integrating data from various service providers, the system improves coordination and ensures that clients receive thorough and effective support. The insights and data it provides allow organizations to better understand client needs and evaluate the impact of their services, leading to more positive outcomes for individuals and families facing homelessness. Additionally, HIFIS 4 facilitates efficient resource allocation by identifying trends and patterns, enabling more informed decision-making. Overall, it serves as a crucial tool for communities and organizations, improving service delivery and strengthening the overall approach to addressing homelessness.

Coordinated Access is a requirement for any community receiving Federal or Provincial funds for homelessness. Essentially, Coordinated Access ensures that only individuals who genuinely need homelessness services enter the system and that those experiencing homelessness are matched with the housing and support services best suited to their needs, facilitating a swift exit from homelessness. Prevention services focus on preventing housing loss in the first place, often through eviction prevention efforts. Diversion services seek safe and appropriate alternatives to shelter when a household experiencing homelessness has a friend or family member who can provide

temporary accommodation. Matching people to housing and support options is done through a By Name List that includes all individuals actively experiencing homelessness in Renfrew County. The more intensive the needs of the household, the greater the support resources allocated.

Connecting to Permanent Solutions extends the concept of Coordinated Access. It encompasses all programs and services that address immediate needs while working towards securing stable housing with appropriate supports. This category includes shelters, outreach services, day services, meal programs, housing help centres, and non-permanent housing options. Each service is an opportunity to engage with and support individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability, aiming to transition them to housing with the necessary supports. None of these services should be used by the same household indefinitely.

Supported Housing Options for people experiencing homelessness differ from general supported housing available in Renfrew County, which may assist a broad range of households (e.g., seniors needing assistance from a Personal Support Worker or individuals with developmental disabilities in supportive group settings). In the context of homelessness, supported housing options refer to:

- **Housing with Supports:** These are scattered-site apartments throughout the community where individuals experiencing homelessness are housed in market-rate apartments with a financial subsidy for rent. They also receive case management services to promote life and housing stability.
- **Supportive Housing:** Sometimes called Permanent Supportive Housing, these dwellings are within buildings that exclusively house individuals receiving support services, typically available on-site 24/7. Rental payments are generally geared to income, with households paying no more than 30% of their monthly income on housing.

Housing without Support Options pertains to assistance for households moving out of homelessness into housing when they do not require time-limited or permanent supports. Community housing (social housing) is rent-geared-to-income but does not include case management supports. This option is ideal for households experiencing homelessness due to economic poverty but not requiring case management. Private market housing may offer rental assistance for affordability but does not include case management supports. While this option can increase affordable housing availability, it may not be as affordable as community housing.

Other Systems, Services, and Connections include access to income supports, low-cost or free furniture, food programs, and a wide range of health services. These resources benefit individuals exiting homelessness but are not exclusively for those who have experienced homelessness. The homelessness response system aims to ensure access to these vital services to enhance life and housing stability.

UNDERSTANDING SHELTERING

For many years, shelters were primarily seen as destinations where people could receive services and programs to prepare them for housing. The focus was on treating shelter stays as an end in themselves rather than as a temporary measure on the path to permanent housing. Historically, the belief was that individuals needed to resolve the issues that led to their homelessness before they could transition to stable housing. This often meant that people had to "fix" their situations or "heal" before being considered ready for independent living.

However, over the past decade, there has been a shift towards a more housing-focused approach. Shelters are now viewed as interim steps rather than final destinations. The goal is to help individuals, couples, or families exit shelters as quickly as possible and return to stable housing. This change in perspective has been supported by organizations such as the National Alliance to End Homelessness in the

USA, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, and the Canadian Shelter Transformation Network.

Shelters play a crucial role in the overall system of care, addressing immediate needs and facilitating progress out of homelessness. It's essential for shelters to engage with guests frequently and purposefully to encourage a swift transition to housing. Ideally, efforts should be made to assist individuals in leaving shelters before their homelessness becomes chronic. When there is an increase in homelessness, especially unsheltered homelessness, there might be a push to expand shelter services. However, it is often more cost-effective and impactful to invest in resources that help people move from shelters to permanent housing rather than simply increasing the number of shelter beds.

To operate effectively within a system of care, shelters should aim to be as low-barrier as possible. This approach ensures that individuals with the most significant needs, including those with substance use issues or mental health challenges, can access shelter services. For instance, while a shelter may prohibit on-site substance use, it should still permit entry for individuals who have used substances, allowing them access to essential services and a place to stay.

SHELTER GAPS

Given the absence of a permanent shelter in Renfrew County and a notable 59% increase in individuals listed as actively homeless on the By Name List since January 1, 2024, coupled with the Warming Centre in Pembroke serving over 100 unique individuals last year—including 19 in a single night—it is clear that the current response to local demands for shelter options is facing significant challenges. The Warming Centre's seasonal operation, limited to the winter months, leaves those experiencing homelessness without access to safe shelter or specialized housing services during the rest of the year. Surveys reveal that 90% of respondents feel the existing services for people experiencing homelessness are insufficient, and 72% specifically identify a

pressing need for an emergency shelter in Renfrew County. Unsheltered homelessness is often linked to various shelter-related issues, such as rejection of or by shelters, restrictive rules, limited space, negative reputations, or proximity concerns. Nevertheless, the primary issue is that unsheltered homelessness is increasingly prevalent in a county with no permanent shelter options.

UNDERSTANDING STREET OUTREACH

Street outreach is a crucial community-based effort where experienced outreach workers engage with individuals living in unsheltered conditions or in housing unsuitable for human habitation. The primary aim is to address immediate needs while working towards long-term solutions to end homelessness.

Historically, many street outreach programs in Canada have prioritized rapport-building and meeting immediate needs without sufficiently focusing on securing permanent housing solutions. Additionally, these roles have often been regarded as entry-level positions. However, effective street outreach requires highly trained and seasoned professionals who can navigate complex barriers to accessing housing, shelters, and essential services such as income support and healthcare.

Since the end of the pandemic, the frequency of homelessness encampments has surged across Canada, including in smaller and suburban communities that previously experienced few or no encampments. Renfrew County has also witnessed this increase. This trend highlights the pressing need for enhanced street outreach services, improved shelters equipped to support individuals with complex needs—particularly those facing co-occurring mental health and substance use challenges—and the creation of more specialized supportive housing to help individuals transition from encampments to stable, supported living situations.

STREET OUTREACH GAPS

As of June 2024, approximately 12 individuals were known to be sleeping unsheltered, specifically in Pembroke, with additional individuals likely residing unsheltered across other parts of Renfrew County. This estimate serves as a baseline, acknowledging that the coverage of street outreach services is not yet comprehensive throughout the region. Therefore, there are likely areas where unsheltered individuals remain unengaged. This increase in unsheltered homelessness, particularly through encampments, highlights the critical need for effective street outreach. This requires professionals who are not only skilled and trained but also compassionate, to ensure meaningful initial engagement and to address homelessness effectively. Pairing a specialized paramedic health team alongside a professional street outreach worker/team would greatly improve housing and support outcomes for unsheltered individuals across Renfrew County.

UNDERSTANDING DAY SERVICES

Day services, such as drop-in centres and meal programs play a crucial role in addressing the daily needs of those experiencing homelessness. These services offer essential support outside of the shelter environment and facilitate social connections, which are particularly important in communities with significant unsheltered homeless populations, a high number of street-involved individuals, or where shelters operate only in the evening and overnight.

DAY SERVICES GAPS

In Renfrew County, where there is no permanent shelter, day services become even more vital as they represent the primary form of support available for much of the year. The GRIND, which provides transactional day services in Pembroke, is currently doing an excellent job in offering support to the community. For day services to be most effective, staff must actively and deliberately engage with service users and have purposeful conversations about housing solutions and the process of securing

appropriate housing options. Without this targeted engagement, day services risk missing opportunities to assist what is often a captive audience.

While day services are beneficial for those experiencing homelessness or those who have recently exited homelessness, their priority may be balanced against other needs within the broader homelessness response system.

UNDERSTANDING PREVENTION

Currently, homelessness prevention activities are primarily delivered by non-profit organizations and Social Assistance delivery staff. Proactively assisting households in housing focused problem solving to maintain current housing options or to identify other safe and appropriate places to stay in community, is preferable to waiting for a household to experience literal homelessness before offering assistance. Prevention offers several advantages: it minimizes trauma for the household, conserves resources that would otherwise be required to support individuals once they become homeless, helps maintain affordability by keeping existing tenants in place rather than facing rent increases due to unit turnover, and alleviates pressure on shelters and street outreach services. Thus, homelessness prevention is a crucial aspect of the overall system of care.

Historically, the concept of prevention in homelessness services has been somewhat fragmented across Canada. Prevention involves activities and supports designed to help individuals and families maintain a safe and appropriate living situation when they are at risk of losing their housing. This applies to situations where a household is a leaseholder or in more informal arrangements, such as staying with relatives or as a roommate without a formal lease. In both cases, prevention aims to intervene before eviction or housing loss occurs.

When activities align with evidence informed practices, Homelessness Prevention serves as the initial step in a system-based approach known as progressive engagement. When possible and appropriate, it is the preferred method to address households with the greatest risk of experiencing literal homelessness if homelessness prevention supports are not provided. By focusing on prevention, the goal is to reduce the number of individuals requiring assistance from the homelessness response system and to mitigate the trauma associated with experiencing homelessness. Financially, prevention is often more cost-effective than managing homelessness once it has occurred. Additionally, it helps sustain affordable housing in the private market, as retaining existing tenants typically results in lower rent increases compared to market adjustments for new tenants.

Renfrew County has established several programs that effectively support prevention efforts. Programs such as the Emergency Minor Home Repair Program and the Emergency Housing Assistance Program—which assisted 1,117 households in 2023—provide proactive measures to help individuals remain in their current homes. However, these programs may not always effectively target the highest-risk households.

Research by Shinn et al.² on the matter of prevention has fundamentally changed the way that prevention is understood and what is demonstrably effective. For example, prevention should be targeted to higher-risk households, not lower-risk households. Those households that previously experienced homelessness should be a priority to keep housed. Amongst those people that have not experienced previous homelessness, the priority should be on supporting higher-needs households that have

² Shinn, M., & Baumohl, J. (1999). Rethinking the prevention of homelessness. Paper presented at the 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research, Arlington, Virginia.

Shinn, M., Baumohl, J., & Hopper, K. (2001). The prevention of homelessness revisited. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 1, 95–127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1530-2415.00006>.

Shinn, M. B., Greer, A. L., Bainbridge, J., Kwon, J., & Zuiderveen, S. (2013). Efficient targeting of homelessness prevention services for families. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103(S2), S324–S330. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301468>.

characteristics of the existing chronically homeless population. As the research demonstrates, very few households that were not previously homeless or with lower-needs become homeless. Most of those households figure out how to avoid homelessness even when no prevention assistance is provided.

PREVENTION GAPS

A more robust data tracking system across in Renfrew County will enhance the ability to target prevention activities more effectively towards higher-risk households, particularly those who have previously experienced homelessness. By leveraging detailed data, prevention efforts can be better tailored to address the specific needs of individuals most at risk, thereby improving overall outcomes and efficiency in the homelessness response system.

Key considerations for homelessness prevention, include the following:

<p><i>Is there imminent risk of homelessness?</i></p>	<p>Prevention is about “imminent risk” in the case of non-profit prevention activities, where “imminent risk” is generally understood as housing loss likely to occur within 60 days. This differentiates homelessness prevention from other more “upstream” prevention activities or ongoing poverty assistance activities.</p>
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<p><i>Is there a direct link between the prevention activities and the actual prevention of homelessness?</i></p>	<p>Prevention, whenever possible, should not be an inference when determining effectiveness, but rather the ability to demonstrate how a prevention activity clearly resulted in homelessness being avoided. The actions taken through homelessness prevention should clearly tie into efforts to avoid eviction or housing loss.</p>
<p><i>Are the activities provided within the sphere of expertise of non-profit prevention services?</i></p>	<p>Consideration must be given to whether the non-profit prevention service has a role to directly play in preventing homelessness, compared to the work of a community-based legal clinic or the work of Social Assistance staff.</p>

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSION

Diversion is a proactive approach designed to assist individuals, couples, or families facing a housing crisis before they enter the homelessness response system. The goal of diversion is to identify safe and appropriate alternatives to shelter, thereby maximizing the household's resilience and avoiding unnecessary shelter use. This often involves leveraging natural supports, such as family or friends, to provide temporary housing while the household secures a more permanent solution.

Historically, access to shelter was typically granted based on meeting eligibility criteria and available space. For instance, if an individual met the general criteria for shelter and a bed was available, they would be admitted. However, this approach does not align with best practices in shelter management. The recommended practice is to

resolve the housing crisis without resorting to shelter whenever possible and appropriate.

Effectively implementing diversion offers significant advantages to the homelessness response system. Consistent application of diversion strategies can reduce current and future demands for shelter space. Diversion should be employed with any household seeking shelter services, not just when shelters are at capacity. It involves a series of progressive questions to explore alternative options before shelter intake is considered. The process begins with understanding why the household is seeking shelter, their previous night's accommodations, and whether it is possible and safe to return to their prior location. If returning is not feasible, the process explores other potential temporary housing options, such as staying with friends or family. Additionally, the household's available resources and previous efforts to avoid homelessness are assessed. If diversion is not successful, the process culminates in developing a housing plan. Even if the household eventually enters a shelter, having a plan in place ensures a focused effort on exiting the shelter as quickly as possible.

DIVERSION GAPS

In the absence of a permanent emergency shelter, implementing diversion services according to best practices becomes essential but also creates challenges. While some diversion efforts can be integrated into activities at day services like the GRIND, through existing prevention programs offered by community partners and through transformational street outreach, achieving optimal results is more difficult compared to when diversion is consistently applied within a housing-focused shelter setting.

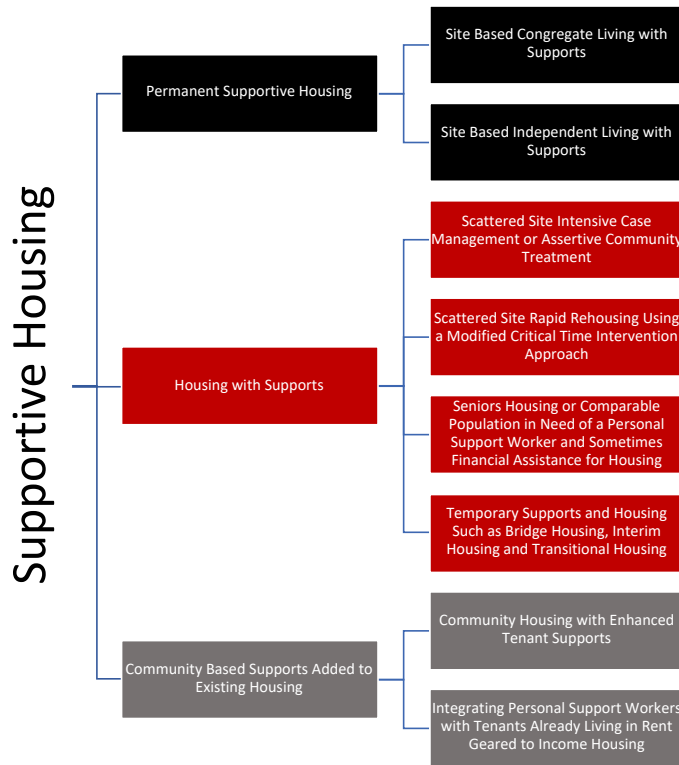
UNDERSTANDING SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Supportive housing encompasses two essential features: affordability and customized support services. It is designed to help individuals maintain their housing and enhance

their overall well-being. Residents of supportive housing often experience greater life stability, increased resilience in facing life's challenges, improved health, mental health, and substance use outcomes, and the ability to achieve personal goals. This type of housing may be tailored to specific groups, such as women, youth, older adults, individuals with mental health or substance use issues, or Indigenous Peoples.

Supportive housing generally falls into three categories:

- 1. Permanent Supportive Housing:** This option provides both a permanent housing unit and ongoing support services, often within a place-based program. It is typically reserved for individuals with the highest levels of need and acuity. All residents in these buildings receive continuous support services.
- 2. Housing with Supports:** This type involves scattered-site apartments integrated within the community, where individuals live independently but receive time-limited support services. This can include both transitional and permanent housing solutions, with support services designed to be temporary.
- 3. Community-Based Supports Added to Existing Housing:** This approach involves providing additional support services to tenants who already have secure housing but need extra assistance due to changes in their health status or aging. This method is often used as part of a homelessness prevention strategy and is appropriate for individuals who have not previously experienced homelessness but require added support.



INTENDED OUTCOMES OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

The intended outcomes of supportive housing are to enhance life stability, improve resilience, and facilitate personal and health-related achievements for its residents. While the personally anticipated outcome of each tenant in supportive housing can be unique to the person being supported, as a concept supportive housing focuses on five core outcomes:

CORE OUTCOME SOUGHT	DESCRIPTION OF OUTCOME
<p>People do not return to homelessness or housing instability</p>	<p>Both Housing with Supports and Permanent Supportive Housing go to great lengths to help ensure the household does not return to homelessness again. Even if the household needs to move, the intention is to have a seamless move from one address to another without a period of homelessness in between. The type, duration, frequency and intensity of support services are provided all share the same purpose: to help the household stays housed.</p>

CORE OUTCOME SOUGHT	DESCRIPTION OF OUTCOME
<p>People believe their overall health improves (physical health, mental health, and/or addiction)</p>	<p>Improvements in overall health can include stabilization of a health condition, access to treatment or supports for a health condition, improved education and strategies for responding to a health condition, and/or lessening harm associated with a health condition. In Supportive Housing, health assistance can be provided “in house” or by connecting households to “mainstream” health and community resources. With a stable roof over one’s head and enhanced affordability, it is hoped that people can make informed choices in their health care and reap the benefits of that access to health care.</p>
<p>People are satisfied with the quality of supports</p>	<p>Households receiving support services in housing have an active voice in determining what type(s) of support they want, how often they want to receive those supports, how long the supports will last, and how intense the support assistance will be.</p>
<p>People are satisfied with the quality of affordable housing</p>	<p>Housing provided to households in need of supports must be affordable. Most often the rental amount is relative to the amount of gross monthly income the household receives, usually from social assistance. People should feel the housing is as affordable as possible, and that they dwelling is in good condition with all aspects of the dwelling in good working order.</p>
<p>People are socially connected</p>	<p>Support staff, peer supports workers, and recipients of support services work collaboratively to create meaningful opportunities for socio-recreational engagement. This can include a broad range of activities, from acknowledging birthdays and seasonal holidays to partnering with the local senior’s centre or other day services to expand tenant’s social connections.</p>

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF OLDER ADULTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

In Renfrew County, older adults facing homelessness fall into two distinct groups: those experiencing homelessness for the first time in their later years, and those who are aging within the homelessness response system.

Older Adults Experiencing Homelessness for the First Time

Older adults who become homeless later in life do so for various reasons, including rising rental costs, "reno-victions" (evictions due to renovations), the loss of a spouse, emerging health issues, increased need for support with daily activities, and limited

income. Many of these individuals are encountering the social services system for the first time. Their health and service needs are generally lower to moderate, with fewer co-occurring issues. The primary driver of their homelessness is often insufficient income relative to the cost of housing. With the population of older adults expected to grow between 35-50% in Renfrew County in the next 20 years, it should be anticipated this cohort will also see an increase.

Older Adults Aging Within the Homelessness Response System

This group includes older adults who have experienced chronic homelessness, either continuously or intermittently, and who are now dealing with additional complexities. Their needs are often higher due to a combination of health issues, insufficient income, cognitive impairments, and substance use. These older adults typically have moderate to high acuity because of the interplay between mobility issues, health conditions, financial constraints, substance use, and cognitive decline. Mainstream senior services often lack the training and resources needed to address these complexities effectively.

Unique Challenges for Older Adults Experiencing Homelessness

For both groups, the challenges are significant. Age-eligible income assistance often falls short of covering current rental market rates and high cost of living expenses, while older adults' income-generating potential is typically limited. In Renfrew County, the absence of an emergency shelter exacerbates these issues, leaving older adults without access to immediate, supportive services. Additionally, accommodations like Seniors' Housing, long-term care, and nursing homes may not be equipped to handle the needs of older adults who use substances or are street-involved.

Preparing for future needs, Ontario's aging population compounds the homelessness risks for seniors across the province, including in Renfrew County. In 2016, seniors outnumbered children aged 10-14 for the first time in Ontario. By 2046, the number of

seniors is expected to increase from 2.8 million (18.4% of the population) to 4.4 million (20.3%), with the population of those aged 75 and over projected to double to nearly 2.6 million.

In Renfrew County, the demand for suitable housing solutions is evident. Last year, 59 seniors applied for a single-bedroom unit, highlighting a significant need for appropriate housing options and underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to support older adults experiencing homelessness and to address the broader challenges posed by an aging population.

UNDERSTANDING HOUSING FIRST

Housing First emerged in New York City during the early 1990s as a revolutionary approach aimed at addressing homelessness. This model prioritizes placing individuals experiencing homelessness, particularly those with mental illness, directly into permanent housing. Once housed, participants receive comprehensive support services to help them maintain their housing stability. The approach includes rent subsidies to ensure affordability.

The essence of Housing First lies in rapidly providing permanent housing without preconditions, followed by tailored support services designed to foster stability and personal growth. The critical component of Housing First is not merely the provision of housing, but the support services that facilitate the individual's successful adaptation and thriving in their new home.

Core Principles of Housing First³

- 1. No Housing Readiness Requirements:** Housing First does not impose prerequisites such as transitional housing stays, participation in life skills training, or sobriety.

³ To learn more about Housing First Principles and approaches, explore such sources as <https://homelesshub.ca/collection/programs-that-work/housing-first/> and <https://housingfirsttoolkit.ca/>

Participants are not required to attend treatment, engage in mental health care, or take medications unless they choose to. Employment status, financial records, or volunteer work are not conditions for receiving services. Housing is provided without conditions related to behaviour or gratitude.

2. **Empowered Personal Choice:** Participants retain full control over their housing decisions. They are provided with information and support to make informed choices, but the final decision remains theirs. Housing options are presented as choices rather than assignments, and participants are not penalized for rejecting any particular housing unit.
3. **Recovery-Oriented:** Housing First aligns with the principles of mental health recovery, promoting overall wellness. It supports individuals in recovering from homelessness, trauma, and substance use, while also fostering economic stability and a sense of purpose. The approach emphasizes holistic recovery, tailored to individual needs and preferences, whether through harm reduction or abstinence.
4. **Person-Centred and Participant-Driven Goals:** Goals are not predetermined. Instead, each participant collaborates to create a personalized case plan based on their unique strengths and needs. This plan focuses on achieving housing stability and overall life improvement. The approach is non-judgmental and adaptive, ensuring supports evolve with the participant's needs without coercion or undue pressure.
5. **Social and Community Integration:** Housing First is not just about providing a roof; it's about fostering community connections. Participants are encouraged to engage with community resources, meaningful activities, and expand their social networks. Integration into the community is a deliberate and supportive process, involving both targeted and general community opportunities, often with a focus on accessible, low-cost or free services. One of the direct indicators

of community integration was asked in the community survey, with 298 respondents reporting they don't have anyone to count on in times of need.

By embedding these principles into its framework, Housing First provides a robust, compassionate, and effective approach to ending homelessness and supporting long-term stability.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Emergency Sheltering demands, services for individuals at imminent risk of homelessness, and supportive housing with supports are all interconnected in Renfrew County. An investment in one part of the system can significantly impact other areas. For example, expanding shelter services without simultaneously investing in prevention and supportive housing will result sheltering options quickly reaching capacity with limited options for people to exit to permanent housing. Conversely, investing in supportive housing without boosting prevention services addresses the outflow from the system but fails to manage the inflow into it.

To address these interconnected needs effectively, Renfrew County should prioritize enhancing prevention services, creating more options to provide emergency shelter, and developing site-specific supportive housing. These three areas are crucial for maintaining system stability. Creating a year round, housing focused Service Hub that can provide emergency accommodation when needed will provide a reliable, year-round, accessible resource for those in immediate need. Focusing on prevention services will help keep individuals, particularly those at higher risk, from becoming homeless in the first place. Additionally, developing site-specific supportive housing will relieve pressure across the system and offer more targeted support for those with complex needs.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEOPLE AT IMMINENT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS⁴

Maintaining system stability requires prioritizing the prevention of homelessness whenever feasible and safe. Preventing homelessness is not only more cost-effective but also less distressing for households compared to addressing homelessness after it

⁴ To explore evidence informed homelessness prevention strategies, check out the 2022 [Diversion and Housing Loss Prevention Guide](#) on the CAEH website.

occurs. To effectively manage this, Renfrew County must focus on keeping individuals and families housed by investing in prevention efforts and adapting support services to the diverse needs of those at risk.

Current indicators suggest an increasing demand for prevention services due to rising rental rates, inflation driving up the costs of food and utilities, and in-migration putting pressure on the existing rental stock in Renfrew County. While working to expand shelter services, it is essential to enhance investments in prevention and service efforts.

Flexible funding for housing loss prevention is more effective than rigid programs with extensive eligibility requirements and bureaucracy that can delay assistance.

Prevention efforts should be adaptable to cover various needs, such as utility or rental arrears, vehicle repairs to maintain employment, minor repairs in rental units, short-term storage rentals, mobility devices, and accessibility features. Since it is challenging to predict every potential situation leading to homelessness, providing discretionary funding with clear parameters (e.g., maximum amount per household per year) and documentation requirements for justification ensures timely and effective support.

Context and Need: Recent indicators suggest a rising demand for prevention services due to increasing rental rates, inflation, and heightened pressure on the existing rental market. As these factors contribute to a higher risk of housing instability, it becomes crucial to focus efforts on prevention rather than merely expanding shelter options.

Key Recommendations:

- **Flexible Funding Mechanisms:** Establish funding mechanisms that are flexible and can address a wide array of prevention needs. Unlike rigid programs that impose strict eligibility criteria and bureaucratic hurdles, flexible funding can cover various needs such as utility or rental arrears, essential vehicle repairs to maintain employment, minor repairs in rental units, short-term rental of storage

lockers, mobility devices, and installation of accessibility features. This flexibility ensures that aid can be provided promptly and effectively, responding to the specific needs of individuals and families at risk.

- **Discretionary Assistance:** Allow internal departments and external service providers to exercise discretion within defined parameters (e.g., maximum amount per household per year) and maintain necessary controls (e.g., documenting the justification for funding). This approach will accommodate diverse and unpredictable situations that could lead to homelessness, ensuring that support is both timely and appropriate.
- **Develop Prevention Expertise and Programming:** Start by having the new Housing Coordinator develop in-depth expertise in eviction prevention and establish a clear pathway for individuals in the county who are at imminent risk of homelessness (within the next 60 days) to access prevention resources. Over time, hiring a dedicated Prevention Specialist based at the Service Hub would be a strategic investment to prevent an increase in first-time homelessness and reduce the number of people returning to homelessness after being housed.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMERGENCY HOUSING-FOCUSED SERVICES

Without dedicated, lower-barrier, and housing-focused emergency sheltering services, Renfrew County will likely continue to experience increasing unsheltered homelessness and encampments. Pembroke is identified as the most strategic location for establishing and enhancing a greater network of emergency services.

Context and Need: Current demands indicate that housing-focused emergency sheltering services with the capacity to accommodate up to 30 individuals, including all genders, couples, and pets, is needed to provide an effective emergency

response. While transportation for individuals outside Pembroke presents challenges, these can be addressed through strategic regional partnerships.

Key Recommendations:

- **Establishment of Year Round, Lower Barrier Service Hub:** Develop a year-round, low-barrier Service Hub that provides immediate and long-term assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness, those at risk of homelessness, and those struggling to meet basic needs. This Service Hub would not only offer a safe overnight space when required but would also integrate vital services to help individuals address other immediate needs and overcome obstacles to securing permanent housing.

The Service Hub should actively engage with users, offering **personalized support** that covers both short-term essentials—such as food, hygiene, and shelter—and long-term goals like securing housing, mental health support, and addiction services. By connecting individuals to a broader network of social services, the Hub would help facilitate access to critical resources, enabling them to move toward stable housing and improved well-being.

The success of the Service Hub depends on its location. It should be within walking distance of key resources, such as The Grind, the income support office, other social service agencies, and existing encampment sites. Service Hubs placed on the outskirts of communities, as seen in other Canadian and U.S. examples, tend to be under-utilized due to transportation barriers and their distance from essential services. Keeping the Service Hub central would ensure it remains accessible, reducing the frustration of having a funded service that is not effectively used due to its location.

Feedback from community consultations highlights a lack of clarity around available services and how to access them. It is often unclear what services are offered, where they are located, and whether they are available by drop-in, referral, or appointment. A well-organized Service Hub could serve as a **central access point**, providing clear information and eliminating confusion for both service providers and those experiencing homelessness.

Additionally, Renfrew County's lack of a standalone shelter makes this Service Hub an important resource for **data collection** and understanding the needs of those experiencing homelessness or at high risk of it. By identifying these individuals, the Hub could help target resources where they are most needed.

Integrating the **MESA (Mental Health, Substance Use, and Addiction) Team** into the Service Hub model would further strengthen the support system. The MESA initiative already works to tackle the root causes of homelessness, addiction, and mental health challenges in Renfrew County, making it an ideal complement to the Hub's objectives.

The MESA Team, in collaboration with Community Services, Paramedic Services, and other partners, follows an "escalator model", guiding individuals from harm toward stable housing and community support. Their harm-reduction expertise, coupled with their established relationships with residents in encampments, positions them to deliver health services effectively while building trust. Many of these individuals already engage with The Grind's services, so integrating the MESA Team into the Hub would improve continuity of care.

By embedding the MESA Team in the Service Hub, Renfrew County would create a comprehensive, **holistic approach** that combines health services, housing support, and paramedicine. This collaboration would benefit both the community and the individuals living in precarious situations. Moreover, the Hub

could serve as a base for the MESA Team's outreach efforts, enhancing the coordination and effectiveness of services for the homeless population.

A year-round, low-barrier Service Hub that integrates immediate and long-term services in collaboration with the MESA Team would address the critical needs of Renfrew County's homeless population. With a central, accessible location and a proactive, personalized approach, this Service Hub would ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness receive the comprehensive support they need to transition to permanent housing with appropriate services in place.

- **Professional Operation and Diversion Practices:** The Service Hub must prioritize professional and effective diversion practices. Diversion should be a core component of daily operations, aiming to find safe and appropriate housing alternatives for all new people experiencing homelessness. Diversion should not be perceived as turning people away but as a proactive measure to resolve their housing crisis through alternative solutions. Well-trained, mission-driven staff are essential in implementing these practices and addressing community concerns.
- **Creation of a Community Liaison Committee (CLC):** To ensure the Service Hub integrates smoothly into the community, establish a Community Liaison Committee. This committee will consist of diverse stakeholders, including Hub staff, local government representatives, community members, non-profit agencies, and individuals with lived experience. The CLC will facilitate communication, gather feedback, resolve issues, coordinate resources, and advocate for the Hub within the community. Regular meetings and transparent communication will help build trust and support for the Hub, addressing concerns and enhancing its responsiveness to community needs.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING AND HOUSING WITH SUPPORTS

Renfrew County is facing both current and future demands for supportive housing and addressing these needs is essential to preventing an increase in homelessness and encampments. Investments in supportive housing options are crucial to maintaining or even reducing homelessness rates.

Context and Need: The growing demand for supportive housing highlights the need for strategic investment in housing solutions that cater to various populations with specific support needs. Housing with Supports and Supportive Housing can play a pivotal role in stabilizing individuals and families who are at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.

Key Recommendations:

- **Development of Site-Specific Supportive Housing:** By December 31, 2028, Renfrew County should focus on the development or acquisition of supportive housing units for targeted populations:
 - **Substance Use Concerns:** At least 12 units of permanent supportive housing for individuals with substance use disorders who have experienced homelessness.
 - **Cognitive and Health Needs:** At least 10 units for individuals with cognitive, chronic health, mobility, or other intensive support needs.
 - **Older Adults:** At least 12 units for older adults (50+) who have health concerns, excluding those with primary addiction or cognitive issues.
 - **Youth:** At least 15 units for young people (under 24) who need additional support alongside housing to address their homelessness.
- **24/7 Support:** Ensure that supportive housing facilities have trained staff available around the clock to provide the necessary support services. This

includes negotiating with provincial authorities to ensure adequate staffing and resource allocation.

- **Site-Specific Bridge Housing:** Implement Bridge Housing as a short-term supportive solution for individuals with higher needs who are experiencing homelessness. This approach, used effectively in other Canadian jurisdictions, provides temporary housing while permanent supportive housing or other long-term solutions are secured. It is particularly valuable for addressing encampments and helping long-term shelter residents transition to permanent housing.
- **Modified Chronological Access to Community Housing:** Updating the policy regarding chronological access to community housing with rent geared to income (RGI) would help alleviate the burden on households experiencing chronic homelessness. While there is a requirement for Service Providers to prioritize access to social housing for individuals experiencing domestic violence or human trafficking, some regions in Ontario (Kawartha Lakes and Salt Ste. Marie) have had success by adapting policies to also prioritize chronic homelessness in community housing.

Establishing a prioritization matrix that allows for a portion of Community Housing to be filled based on these modified special needs, as opposed to chronological order, will see more people experiencing absolute homelessness access housing where appropriate supports can then be wrapped around.

Some communities have approached this by assigning a point structure to housing applications where verified variabilities like Employment/Education Status, Military or Veteran Status, being Involuntarily Displaced and Chronic Homelessness are all assigned a certain number of points and applicants with

the greatest number of points, rather than length of time on the waitlist, are prioritized when appropriate housing becomes available.

- **Mobile Housing Support Workers:** The establishment of at least one dedicated Mobile Housing Support Worker position to provide support for households at various stages of housing stability.

Mobile Housing Support Workers assist clients by helping them set and reach objectives related to life and housing stability. They act as a liaison with landlords, addressing issues and ensuring that rent is paid on time and in full. In cases where tenancy problems arise, they provide support in troubleshooting and resolving these issues. Additionally, they make referrals to other community-based services, such as mental health care, harm reduction programs, or financial management assistance, to address broader needs.

These workers also offer practical support by accompanying clients to appointments when necessary and helping them find meaningful activities to participate in throughout the week. This not only helps prevent isolation but also encourages engagement with the community.

Given the high costs associated with developing new housing amid an ongoing affordable housing crisis, Renfrew County should consider leveraging existing assets, such as community housing that is already built and rent-geared-to-income. By repurposing a portion of the current community housing stock into permanent supportive housing for individuals with higher acuity needs, Renfrew County can more swiftly move people with significant service needs out of homelessness and into supportive housing. This approach allows for comprehensive support to be provided, helping individuals maintain their housing stability. Implementing this strategy would require a policy change to prioritize individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with higher acuity.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING THE HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

To strengthen the homelessness response system in Renfrew County, several key actions are recommended, focusing on improving data management, case management, and street outreach.

Key Recommendations

- **Data Management and System Improvement:** The funding allocated for 2024, which supports the hiring of a full-time Housing Coordinator, represents a significant advancement in enhancing the direct response to homelessness. To further refine this effort, it is recommended that Renfrew County adopt the Homeless Individual and Family Information System (HIFIS) and implement the By Names List. HIFIS is a comprehensive data management tool that will be crucial for tracking and understanding the needs of individuals accessing the shelter. As a permanent emergency shelter becomes operational, having real-time data on who is accessing the shelter, their reasons for doing so, and their specific needs will be vital for effective service delivery and for helping individuals transition out of homelessness successfully.

HIFIS offers specialized modules for emergency shelters, case management, and diversion practices, which will enhance the consistency and effectiveness of service administration. Implementing this system will provide valuable insights, facilitate better coordination of services, and support informed decision-making.

- **Development of Intensive Case Management (ICM) Services:** Another critical enhancement involves the development of Intensive Case Management (ICM) services. ICM is designed for individuals with moderate to high needs, offering in-depth support during the transition from homelessness to housing. Unlike other models, ICM provides a more intensive level of support, often extending for up

to 24 months or longer, depending on individual needs. This approach involves a high level of engagement between case managers and participants, focusing on stability and long-term success.

ICM services should be integrated into both scattered site housing with supports and site-specific supportive housing. The inclusion of health, mental health, and addiction workers as part of the ICM team will ensure a comprehensive support system. Given the complexity of needs, ICM services cost approximately \$14,000 per participant per year. Until these dedicated positions are established, it is recommended to adapt the roles of existing Ontario Works case managers to adopt a more client-centred approach, meeting clients where they are.

- **Enhancement of Street Outreach Services:** To effectively address the needs of unsheltered individuals, it is essential to enhance street outreach efforts. Establishing at least one dedicated position for professional, assertive street outreach is recommended. This role should work closely with the County's MESA team, which already provides essential health-focused services. The street outreach position will focus on removing barriers to housing for unsheltered individuals, implementing diversion practices when safe and feasible, and facilitating access to a Service Hub or housing with supports when it becomes available.

The outreach worker will play a critical role in engaging with unsheltered individuals, assessing their needs, and connecting them to appropriate services. If a Service Hub is established, this role will also help maximize utilization, ensuring that unsheltered individuals are directed to the Hub to connect to needed resources.

Overall Integration: Integrating these recommendations into a cohesive strategy will enhance the overall homelessness response system in Renfrew County. By improving data management, establishing a year round Service Hub,, and strengthening the existing street outreach approach, the County can better address immediate needs, support individuals through their transition to stable housing, prevent homelessness more effectively, and utilize available data to drive future reductions.

APPENDIX A: APPROACH TO ARRIVING AT ESTIMATES OF PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING NEED, BRIDGE HOUSING NEED SHELTER CAPACITY NEED

Considerations in arriving at the estimates for Permanent Supportive Housing, Bridge Housing and Emergency Shelter Needs are as follows:

- Interviews with key community stakeholders
- Results from Community Consultation Sessions
- Examination of By Names List inflow and outflow data
- Examination of returns to homelessness on the By Names List for both episodically and chronically homeless households across Renfrew County
- Examination of Point in Time Enumeration data, especially as it pertains to unsheltered homelessness Examination of 2023/24 Warming Centre Data
- Examination of most recent Census data, especially data on projected population level increases
- Observation of existing Street Outreach activities with County Paramedics
- Direct engagement of community members currently living in homelessness and those living in social housing
- An examination of existing housing data and prevention program services administered by the RCHC

APPENDIX B: MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Attached to this report is the Renfrew County 10-Year Plan Progress Tracker. This Excel spreadsheet outlines all the identified action items across the four Priority Areas:

- Homelessness Prevention
- Emergency Housing-Focused Services
- Supportive Housing and Housing with Supports
- Strengthening the Homelessness Response System

The Progress Monitoring sheet is designed to track the advancement of each key objective within the four priority areas. It includes a status column to monitor progress, as well as sections to assign responsibility for each objective and record both the target and actual completion dates.

Each of the four priority areas is further detailed in individual sheets, which include specific action steps and a corresponding status tracker for each identified task.