

Peel's Housing and Homelessness Plan building a strong foundation

There are fewer Peel households on the centralized wait list for subsidized housing than there have been in previous years. That was a key finding of the Peel Housing and Homelessness Plan (PHHP) Year-Two (2015) report, released by the Region of Peel last month.

The Year-Two report highlights show how we are moving the needle on a range of programs and initiatives to achieve our long term goal that everyone has a home and homelessness is eliminated, said Human Services Director Juliet Jackson, whose area oversees Peel's housing system management responsibilities. The PHHP also supports Regional council's priority to increase affordable housing.

The key takeaways from the report include the fact that thousands of individuals and families in Peel received rent or income supports, helping them to obtain or stay in their homes, or preventing them from ending up in a shelter. There was also the introduction of the housing continuum to better understand individual and family needs and determine needed investments. It identifies a range of housing options from emergency shelter to rental housing to homeownership

There is also a continuing effort to engage community partners, including local municipalities, to achieve greater collective impact in meeting Peel's housing needs.

It has become increasingly important that we work together as a community to address the affordable housing needs in Peel, said Brampton Regional Councillor Elaine Moore, chair of Regional council's Human Services Committee. Government cannot address all service gaps alone. By collaborating with community partners and other levels of government, we are better able to help vulnerable residents to find or keep their housing. Having stable housing is critical to an individual or family's well-being, their ability to work and to connect with the broader community.

What lies ahead for the Peel Housing and Homelessness Plan?

We'll continue to work with our Community Reference Groups, local municipalities, and the provincial and federal governments to identify initiatives and priorities that will move the plan forward, ultimately improving the overall well-being of Peel residents, Jackson said.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the Peel's Affordable housing needs.

They include a rapidly growing population. Peel grew by 23,000 people each year between 2011 and 2015. As well, the population is aging. Seniors comprised 10 per cent of Peel's population in 2011, and they are projected to make up 19 per cent by 2031. Poverty is a factor too, as 17 per cent, or almost one in every five Peel residents, live in poverty.

There are also issues with accessibility needs. There are 2,423 residents with identified disabilities who are on the supportive housing wait list, with only 1,618 units available.

The building of rental housing is not keeping pace with the need, keeping vacancy rates low and rental rates high.

In addition, Peel's unemployment rate is 7.7 per cent, which is higher than Ontario's (6.8 per cent).

The report also listed some of the accomplishments from 2015. There were 813 supports through the Preventing Homelessness in Peel Program, 11,715 supports (including 4,720 rent supplements) through Rent Geared to Income Program, 1,204 supports through Choice-Based Rental Options (subsidies to help people keep their housing while reducing the centralized wait list) and 40 condominium units purchased, which helped 40 individuals come off the centralized wait list.

Going forward, the report stated the Region will continue to work with community partners, local municipalities, and all levels of governments to achieve common goals. They plan to ensure PHHP aligns with the Province's Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy and the Region of Peel's Strategic Plan and develop a web-based reporting tool to track and report progress of the PHHP.