



Hamilton  
Community Services



# ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT

*Measuring Homelessness in Hamilton*



ON ANY  
GIVEN  
NIGHT

IN HAMILTON...

*399 men, women and children stay in emergency shelters on any given night*

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*The social housing waiting list has 4,258 active applications*

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*2,436 women and children stayed in a Violence Against Women shelter during 2004/2005*

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*21.9% of renter households spend more than 50% of their income on shelter putting them at serious risk of homelessness*

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*Emergency shelter usage has more than doubled since 1995*

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*Due to a recent infusion of SCPI funding for shelter beds, Hamilton is meeting the immediate needs of single men seeking emergency shelter for the first time since 1998*



## Introduction

Hamilton, like many Canadian cities, faces a range of serious social issues which interact to create homelessness. This indicators report notes key factors impacting homelessness in Hamilton. Local information on factors contributing to homelessness, a demographic profile of people experiencing homelessness and some service utilization statistics are included in this report. Data presented here reflects the most recent information available.

The purpose of this document is to provide information about the nature of homelessness in Hamilton. It is not intended to be a policy statement but rather to inform the ongoing discussion about the best way for the City, the community and senior levels of governments to address the issue of homelessness in Hamilton.

### **A strategic plan to address homelessness in hamilton**

The City of Hamilton will embark on a series of planning initiatives that will culminate in a Strategic Plan for Homelessness in Hamilton (fall 2006). Findings from this report will be used to inform the strategic planning process. A key component of the community planning process will include consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders and community partners.

# Understanding Homelessness in Hamilton

## Who is homeless?

People experiencing homelessness are a diverse, mobile population encompassing many subgroups. Some people without housing have nothing in common but their lack of housing. Among those without housing are many single men and women, families, youth, visible minorities, aboriginal people, and some people with severe mental illnesses and other serious health problems. *(Source: Adapted from www.raisingtheroof.org)*

## Why does homelessness occur?

Two major contributors to homelessness are the lack of adequate income and the lack of affordable housing. Inadequate income makes it difficult for people to find and keep stable, suitable housing. Families or individuals may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless for any number of reasons such as:

- experiencing abuse or violence
- losing a job
- having an income too low to stay in suitable housing
- experiencing food insecurity
- suffering from mental or physical health conditions
- experiencing discrimination by landlords or neighbours
- facing challenges with substance use
- lack of appropriate support services
- excessive housing costs including utility costs

*(Source: Adapted from Keys to the Home, City of Hamilton, 2004)*

## What do we know?

While improvements have been made, homelessness continues to be a significant issue in Hamilton. Emergency shelters for men, women, youth and families continue to experience relatively high occupancy rates. Based on available data, we know that the number of people accessing Hamilton's emergency shelters has more than doubled since 1995. Hamilton's food banks report more than 15,000 visits per month. Just over half of those are families with children. Almost one in five Hamilton residents subsist on an income lower than the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) threshold. The high demand for affordable housing in our community is evidenced by Hamilton's social housing waiting list which currently has 4,258 active applications.

## The connection between health and homelessness

Homelessness seriously affects a person's physical and mental health. Foot, skin and dental problems are common among the homeless population. For some people, addiction and mental illness can exacerbate the experience of homelessness making it difficult to work and/or maintain housing. This situation was made worse by the process of releasing patients with mental illness from psychiatric institutions into the community where supports are inadequate. A recent study on health and homelessness in Hamilton noted:

- Rates of chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular and chronic respiratory problems are much higher than the general population.
- Over one third of participants reported not having enough energy to get through the day. These participants reported eating only one meal a day.
- Some participants (27%) reported not having an Ontario Health Card.
- Diagnosed mental illness was reported by 23.8% of respondents.

*(Source: H Thomas. Health and Homelessness: A Health Needs Assessment, 2004)*

# Definitions of Homelessness

Homelessness can be defined as the lack of safe, affordable, adequate and secure housing. A range of homelessness experiences exist which can be described as absolute, hidden or relative homelessness.

**Absolute homelessness:** refers to living on the street, or in places unfit for human habitation (e.g., abandoned buildings or vehicles).

**Hidden homelessness:** refers to a state in which a person is marginally, inadequately, and/or temporarily housed including “couch surfing” (i.e., staying temporarily with friends or family).

**At-risk of homelessness:** includes households that spend more than 50% of its total income on housing costs. Other risk factors for homelessness may include being in arrears with rent payments, living in precarious housing, experiencing serious health issues, family conflict and/or domestic abuse.

## Emergency Shelter System in Hamilton

Emergency shelters provide short-term lodging and other supports to people experiencing homelessness. In Hamilton, the emergency shelter system is comprised of three types of services:

- i. Emergency Shelters;
- ii. Violence Against Women (VAW) Shelters;
- iii. Seasonal Programs (i.e., *Out of the Cold*).

There are also a number of transitional housing programs that offer short to medium term accommodation to people experiencing homelessness. These numbers are not included in this report.

### Supply of emergency shelter beds/mats

There are 523 emergency shelter beds in Hamilton. The majority of emergency shelter beds are for single men (270). The second largest group of shelter beds are for women and children staying in a Violence Against Women shelter (100). The total number of shelter beds has increased by 80% between 2000 and 2004 largely due to an infusion of funding from the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) and the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS).

TABLE 1  
Supply of Emergency Shelter Beds - 2000, 2004

Sector	2000	2004	% increase
Family	–	53	–
Men	159	270	70%
Out of the Cold	–	40	–
VAW	87	100	15%
Women	24	24	–
Youth	20	36	80%
Total	290	523	80%

Source: City of Hamilton, Community Services, 2005

### Did you know?

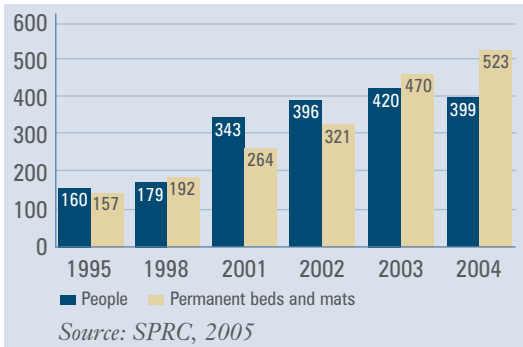
- *Most shelters close during the day which minimizes the opportunity to provide much needed support services to clients.*
- *There is a limit to the number of consecutive days one can stay at an emergency shelter.*
- *Staying in an emergency shelter for some means using a mat to sleep on the floor.*
- *Privacy and personal space in emergency shelter is at a premium. In some shelters you may be sharing your space with a large number of strangers.*



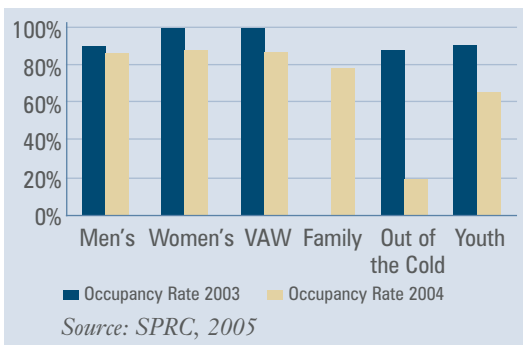
# Measuring Homelessness in Hamilton

It is difficult to provide exact measures of homelessness. While some people who are experiencing homelessness are included in service utilization figures, many others are on the street or “hidden.” The following information is based on data from the City of Hamilton’s Community Services department and the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC).

**FIGURE 1**  
Emergency Shelter Use ‘On a Given Night’  
in November in Hamilton, year by year



**FIGURE 2**  
Occupancy Rate ‘On a Given Night’  
in November, 2003, 2004



## Annual homeless shelter count

The SPRC conducts an annual survey of emergency shelters usage in Hamilton. The “On a Given Night” survey data provides the most recent and complete source of shelter utilization data in Hamilton. It should be noted, however, that this data only reports on one night in November and may not be representative of fluctuations in occupancy rates throughout the year. While this data provides a snapshot of shelter use on a given night, it does not capture the magnitude of homelessness in a given year. Since 2003, occupancy rates have dropped, in part, due to an increase in beds and mats available in the emergency shelter system. The total number of people experiencing homelessness on any given night in November also fell slightly from 420 in 2003 to 399 in 2004.

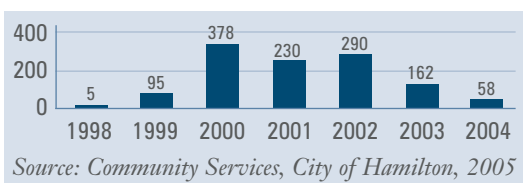
## Single men

Single men comprise the largest group of people experiencing homelessness in Hamilton. In 2004, 57% of the total number of emergency shelter beds used in Hamilton was by single men. On any given night in November there were 237 men accessing an emergency shelter bed or mat. There are four emergency shelters in Hamilton that provide refuge for single men. These shelters are the Good Shepherd Men’s Centre, Mission Services Men’s Residence, Salvation Army Booth Centre and Wesley Drop-In Centre.

## Single women

Emergency shelter beds are available for women experiencing homelessness for reasons other than domestic violence. Good Shepherd Mary’s Place provides 9 beds and the Wesley Drop-In Centre provides 15 mats for women experiencing homelessness. On any given night in November 2004, there were 20 women staying at an emergency shelter in Hamilton. Mary’s Place, as the only single gendered shelter for homeless women, is often at capacity and has to turn women away. In 2004, Mary’s Place turned away women 630 times.

**FIGURE 3**  
Number of families staying in emergency  
motel and hotels in Hamilton, annually



## Families

Historically, families experiencing homelessness in Hamilton have been accommodated through the use of contracted space at local motels and hotels. The number of families seeking emergency shelter increased dramatically in 2000 to 378 from 5 in 1998. The use of emergency motel and hotel beds was seen to be a short-term solution. It is important to note that the number of families accessing emergency motel and hotel beds is not reflected in the ‘On a Given Night’ data. Utilization rates dropped dramatically in 2003 and 2004 in part due to the opening of temporary emergency family shelter beds in Hamilton.



In 2003, 53 temporary emergency shelter spaces opened. This project provided short-term emergency accommodations for families up to a maximum of 6 weeks. On any given night in November 2004 there were 39 people staying in the temporary emergency family shelter. In December 2005, a new permanent family emergency shelter opened that can accommodate up to 20 families (or up to 80 individuals).

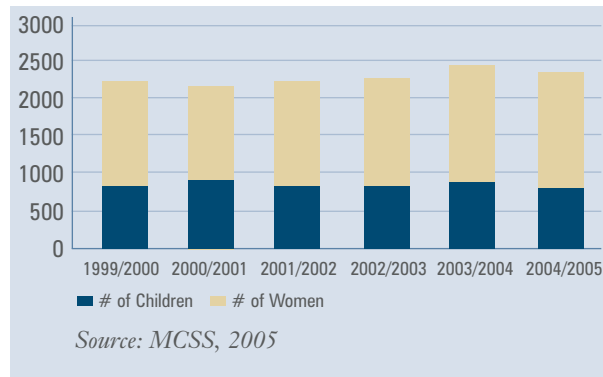
### Women and children who are victims of domestic violence

Women and their children who are victims of domestic violence can stay in one of four Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters. There are 100 beds available in the VAW system in Hamilton. In 2004, 1,626 women and 780 children stayed in a VAW shelter. Note that we do not know if these numbers represent one time or multiple stays.

Data from VAW shelters in Hamilton show that women are staying longer during each visit which means there is also less turnover. In 2004, the average length of stay was 24 days. Women’s shelters also report there are fewer women with children which led to a decrease in the overall occupancy rates. As well, 15 new beds were added to the system in 2004.

*(Source: Women’s Emergency Shelter Utilization, 1999-2005)*

FIGURE 4  
Violence Against Women Shelter Utilization (1999-2005)



### Homeless and street-involved youth

According to a study prepared by the SPRC and community partners in 2005, there were at least 600 street-involved youth (or 1.5% of total youth population). Street-involved youth are young people between the ages of 16 to 21 who are absolutely homeless or precariously housed using services for street-involved youth and/or spend the majority of their time on the street. Homeless youth, a sub-group of street-involved youth, are those with no place to live and might stay at emergency shelters. On any given night in November 2004, there were 21 youth staying at an emergency shelter. The following are some key data findings from the report:

- Almost as many female as male street-involved youth;
- Data from one youth service agency suggests that one in five street-involved youth is absolutely homeless
- Aboriginal youth are over represented compared to the overall population.
- 10% of street involved youth have completed less than grade school.

*(Source: SPRC, Addressing the Needs of Street Involved Youth, 2005).*

### Urban aboriginal homelessness

Urban aboriginal homelessness continues to be a serious issue in communities across Canada. Hamilton is no exception to this assertion as recent estimates suggest that 20% of people experiencing homelessness in Hamilton are aboriginal. According to the 2001 census, 1.3% of Hamilton’s population were self-identified as aboriginal indicating that this population is overrepresented in the homeless population.

*(Source: HEDAC, Homelessness Trail: “The Voice of the People”, 2001)*

### Out of the Cold program

*Out of the Cold* is a drop-in program for people seeking temporary shelter and is operated by local faith groups. In Hamilton, the Out of the Cold program provides 40 mats per night at various locations across the City. On any given night in November, nine people sought shelter through this program in 2004. The low occupancy rate reported on a given night in November may not be reflective of typical usage throughout the year.

*Housing is security and a retreat from the pressures of the outside world; housing is source of pride and personal identity; housing is a prerequisite for social inclusion and for healthy beginnings for children; and housing is a source of economic stability for families and individuals.*

*(Source: Toronto Food Report – 2004).*



# Access to Adequate Income

People who experience relative homelessness often do so because of insufficient income to pay for adequate housing and nutritious food. The following sections examine a number of factors that put someone at risk of becoming homeless.

*Homelessness is not only a housing problem but it is always a housing problem. D. Hulchanski and M. Shapcott, 2004*

## Income security

Low income affects access to necessities such as shelter, nutritious foods, warm clothing and education. It can also affect the overall well-being of an individual as low income may increase stress, lower self-esteem and limit participation in the community.

The Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) is used as a tool to define low income levels in Canada. For a single person in Hamilton, the LICO is \$16,979. Compared to Ontario, a substantially higher proportion of the population in the City of Hamilton live below the LICO (18.8% in the City of Hamilton vs. 13.6% in Ontario).

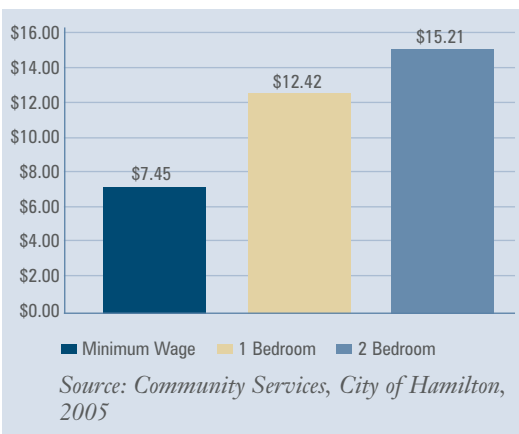
- Almost one out of every five Hamilton residents has an income below the LICO.
- Along with Toronto, Hamilton has the highest rate of poverty in Ontario.
- 16% of families and 46% of unattached individuals live on incomes below the LICO.

*(Source: Social and Health Issues Report, City of Hamilton, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2001)*

## The working poor

Working individuals who subsist on wages below the LICO are sometimes referred to as the “working poor”. In Hamilton, the working poor makeup more than one quarter of the population living below the LICO (or 25,015 people). In other words, many individuals who are working still don’t have enough money to pay for the basic necessities of life such as housing and food.

FIGURE 5  
“Housing Wage” vs. Minimum Wage,  
Hamilton, 2005



## Housing wage vs. minimum wage

The minimum “housing wage” is defined as the amount required for a one-wage earner household to afford a one-bedroom or two bedroom apartment and not pay more than 30% of their gross income on rent. In 2005, the difference between minimum wage (\$7.45/hour) and the housing wage for a one-bedroom apartment (\$12.42/hour) or two-bedroom apartment (\$15.21/hour) is substantial.

## Social assistance and basic needs

In May 2004, the Ontario government increased social assistance rates by 3%. This increase was the first since social assistance rates were reduced by 21% in 1995. Despite this increase, families and individuals in receipt of social assistance are not able to afford basic necessities such as housing and/or nutritious food. In 2004, the total number of beneficiaries in receipt of Ontario Works was 25,411. Hamilton has a higher percentage of clients in receipt of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) than the Ontario average.

# Access to Affordable Housing

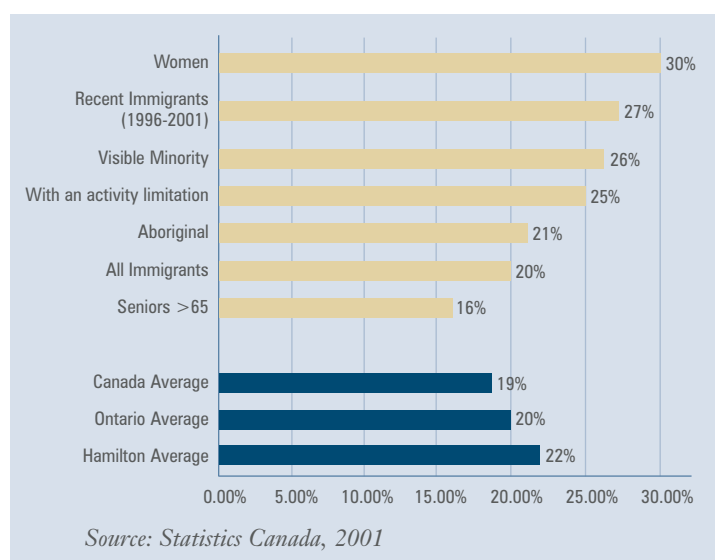
The lack of affordable housing in Hamilton puts many residents at risk of homelessness.

- In Hamilton, 21.9% of renter households spend more than 50% of their income on shelter putting them at serious risk of homelessness.
- Approximately 45% of renter households spend more than 30% of their household income on shelter.
- The social housing waiting list reveals the pervasive need in Hamilton for rent-g geared-to-income housing. There were 4,258 active applications on the social housing waiting list in 2005.
- Some groups, such as women, recent immigrants, visible minorities and people with a disability, are more likely to pay more than 50% of their income on rent putting them at-risk of becoming homeless.

(Source: Statistics Canada, 2001; Community Services, City of Hamilton, 2005)

Quick Facts about Subsidized Housing	
# of social housing units	14,692
# of social housing units where tenants pay rent geared to income	10,000
# of active applications on the social housing waiting list	4,258
# of new applicants per month	272
average # of people housed per month	130
# of people who have homeless status on the waiting list	906
# of rent supplements	1,286
# of new social housing units built 1995–2005	34

**FIGURE 6**  
Percentage of Tenant Households in Hamilton paying >50% Gross Income on Rent by Demographic Group

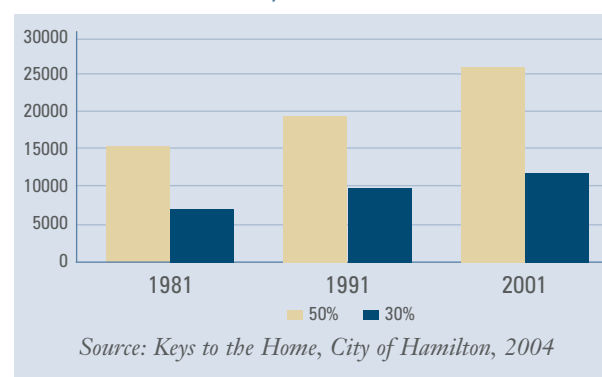


Affordable housing in Hamilton, particularly in the rental market, is a key concern for maintaining a healthy, productive workforce. Households that are experiencing affordability concerns are said to be in “core housing need.” The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) defines this as living in housing that falls below at least one of the adequacy, suitability or affordability standards (i.e., spending more than 30% of total household income on housing costs).

## Supply of affordable rental housing

- In 2005, vacancy rates for apartments were high at 4.8% for the City of Hamilton.
- Average rent for a 1 bedroom apartment in Hamilton was \$612 in 2005.
- In Hamilton, rents have increased by approximately 20% since 1996.
- There have been very few new affordable rental housing starts in Hamilton over the past decade.
- Based on population projections for the City of Hamilton, 650 new rental units are required annually to meet housing demand.

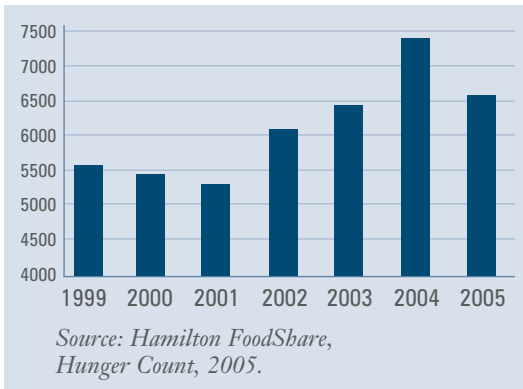
**FIGURE 7**  
Renter Households Experiencing Housing Affordability Concerns, Former City of Hamilton



## Food insecurity

Food insecurity in Hamilton, and Canada, is primarily the result of poverty. Food insecurity can be defined as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

**FIGURE 8**  
Number of Visits to Hamilton Food Banks  
in March, by Year



The need for emergency food programs and services is highly correlated to the low levels of social assistance payments: three out of four households using food banks reported OW or ODSP as their primary source of income. There is a disproportionate experience of food insecurity for lone mother families, recent immigrants, visible minorities, youth, and Aboriginal people.

*(Source: Hamilton Emergency Food System Assessment – Phase II, SPRC, 2005)*

Low incomes for the working poor, the high cost of housing, and inadequate social assistance payments all help to create and maintain poverty.

## Food banks and hot meal programs

Indicative of worsening food insecurity in Hamilton is the increased and persistent reliance on the emergency food system. Food banks provide necessary emergency assistance to thousands of people each month and still must turn some people away. Those who have come to rely on food banks are often not able to meet all of their nutritional requirements. Originally set up as temporary “stop-gap” measures to assist people facing emergency situations, food banks have become a more permanent fixture in the community. Food banks in the community are an integral piece of the puzzle when it comes to people staying housed.

*(Source: Hamilton Emergency Food System Assessment – Phase I, SPRC, 2005)*

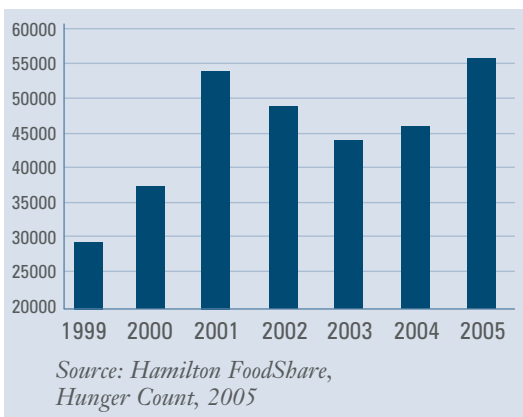
*Homelessness can affect people of any age, gender or ethnic background. It does not discriminate.*

*(Source: National Homelessness Initiative – www.homelessness.gc.ca)*

- In March 2005, there were 6,597 household visits to local food banks.
- In March 2005, over 55,000 hot meals were served at meal programs.

*(Source: Hunger Count, Hamilton FoodShare, 2005)*

**FIGURE 9**  
Number of Meals Served at Hamilton  
Meal Programs in March, by Year



Housing costs that absorb more than 30% of household income put many people at-risk of becoming homeless. Rent is often the single largest expense for food bank recipients. In Hamilton, 62% of food bank recipients reported that they would lose their housing without food bank services.

*(Source: Hunger Count, Hamilton FoodShare, 2004)*



# Addressing Homelessness in Hamilton

Further dialogue, analysis and action are required to deepen our understanding of the complexities of homelessness in Hamilton.

## Supporting Community Partnership Initiative II (SCPI) – 2003 to 2007:

As part of SCPI II, Hamilton is receiving \$17.1 million dollars over a four-year period ending March 31, 2007. SCPI II invested funding in the following areas:

- Prevention of Homelessness (\$1.2 million)
- Family Shelter (\$3 million)
- Transitional/Supportive (\$3.9 million)
- Improving access to and coordination of healthcare (\$1.1 million)
- Priority infrastructure for needs of food banks (\$432,000)
- Transitional Housing for Youth (\$2 million)

In addition, 18% of all SCPI II funding was allocated to the aboriginal community to address urban aboriginal homelessness in Hamilton.

## Prevention of homelessness:

- CityHousing Hamilton's Eviction Prevention Policy will be released in spring 2006 and is the recognition that early intervention is an effective means to prevent homelessness.
- The Rent Bank Program, which received \$569,463 in funding from the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in 2005/2006, continues to help low-income individuals and families remain housed during a financial crisis.

## Creating affordable housing:

- The Community Rental Housing Program has funded the development of four new rental housing developments totalling 159 units.
- Under the Strong Start Component of the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (AHP), three projects totalling 210 affordable rental units will be under construction by summer 2006.
- Further affordable housing developments are anticipated with assistance from the AHP and the City's HAHPI Housing Partnership Fund.

## Strategic initiatives:

- Moving forward with the implementation of the recommendations in Hamilton's affordable housing strategy "Keys to the Home".
- Implementation of "Addressing the Needs of Street Involved Youth" report.
- Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction addresses and creates solutions on key poverty issues.
- Affordable Housing Flagship is a community collaboration that addresses affordable housing and homelessness.

## Issues/data for future consideration:

- Data from the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) will provide a more complete demographic profile of the people using emergency shelters. A more in-depth assessment of program usage will also be made possible by analyzing HIFIS data.
- Demographic and program data from the Access to Housing (ATH) database will provide insight into the demand for social housing in Hamilton.
- Analysis of transitional housing in Hamilton is needed to better understand its role in the system of services to address homelessness.
- Comparison to similar municipalities will help to assess how Hamilton is faring next to other places.



Hamilton  
Community Services

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This report can be downloaded from the City of Hamilton's website:  
[www.hamilton.ca/socialservices/homelessness](http://www.hamilton.ca/socialservices/homelessness)

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