District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board Housing Loss Prevention and Encampment Response Strategy

Prepared By:

ORGCODE CONSULTING INC.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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1. Introduction and Background Information

In February 2025, the District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board contracted with OrgCode Consulting Inc. to assist with an Encampment Response Strategy focused on an assessment of unsheltered realities in the District, current strategies and approaches to address housing crisis and homelessness as well as a chance to identify opportunities for continuous service enhancements. OrgCode spent time with local staff, assessing unsheltered homelessness and identifying the scope and realities facing homelessness prevention and response efforts.

During the OrgCode time in the District, unsheltered homelessness within encampments was not as prominent an issue as expected. However, it was evident that people living in severe economic poverty and limited, unaffordable housing options are increasing the literal homelessness risk for local households. As the District of Parry Sound face increasing pressures from rising housing costs, insufficient housing supply, and widening income and health disparities, a structured and integrated strategy becomes crucial. Like many Canadian communities, the District and its community partners are working to respond to increasing requests for eviction prevention supports and demands for emergency housing. In the midst of high living costs and limited affordable housing, homelessness prevention for vulnerable households and a focus on ensuring that any homelessness episodes are rare, brief and non-recurring remains a primary focus for the District moving forward.

Housing loss prevention to households at the greatest risk of entering sheltered and unsheltered homelessness (not just those with eviction notices) and strategic responses to prevent and assess unsheltered homelessness are essential components of a compassionate, effective, and housing-focused approach to addressing homelessness. This strategy offers a comprehensive framework for preventing housing loss, reducing the inflow into homelessness, and responding to unsheltered homelessness with dignity, empathy, and a human rights-based lens. By promoting early intervention, cross-sectoral partnerships, and evidence-informed action, the plan aims to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

2. A Strategic Response Reducing Homelessness, with a Focus on Preventing Unsheltered Homelessness

With the incorporation of evidence-informed homelessness prevention and homelessness resolution approaches, OrgCode believes that the District of Parry Sound is a community where homelessness can be rare, brief, and non-recurring. This includes the prevention of unsheltered homelessness and proactive responses to encampments that are coordinated, housing focused and aligned with human rights-based responses. The below principles are recommended for all homelessness response activities and programming in the District:

Evidence-Informed and Strengths-Based:
- Programs and policies are guided by current research, best practices, and real-time system data to ensure interventions are effective and responsive to community needs.

Evidence-Driven and Data-Informed:
- Solutions to homelessness are most effective when developed and implemented collaboratively with service users, local agencies, Indigenous partners, health services, and people with lived experience.

Housing Focused and Human Rights-Based:
- A rights-based approach ensures that all individuals have access to adequate housing, food, water, and services, in accordance with international human rights standards.

Culturally Safe and Inclusive:
- Cultural safety requires awareness of power imbalances, systemic racism, and historical trauma. Services must be respectful of and responsive to the cultural identities of those served, particularly Indigenous Peoples.

Community-Led and Partnership-Based:

- Transparency includes clear communication about goals, challenges, and progress. Accountability ensures that services meet standards, achieve outcomes, and responsibly use public resources.

Transparent and Accountable Commitment to Ending Homelessness:

- Housing First is a philosophy and approach that prioritizes access to permanent housing without preconditions such as sobriety, treatment, or service participation. It is grounded in the belief that housing is a basic human right and serves as a stable foundation for recovery and community reintegration. Prevention-focused systems aim to reduce inflow into homelessness through early identification, diversion, eviction prevention, and rapid problem-solving.

3. Definitions

To support local collaboration and coordinated efforts in addressing housing crises and homelessness across the District, it is essential to use shared definitions grounded in evidence and national best practices. The following definitions are adapted from the Diversion and Housing Loss Prevention Guide (OrgCode & CAEH, 2022), the Reaching Home Glossary for Communities (Government of Canada, 2024), and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

Homelessness

Homelessness is the situation of an individual or family without stable, safe, permanent, and appropriate housing, or the immediate ability to acquire it. It includes those staying in emergency shelters, living unsheltered in public or private spaces not meant for habitation, provisionally accommodated (e.g., couch surfing), or discharged from institutions with no housing to return to.[1] Homelessness exists on a spectrum from hidden and episodic to chronic and unsheltered, shaped by structural inequities and system gaps.[2]

Prevention

Homelessness prevention includes a range of evidence-informed policies and interventions aimed at stopping housing loss before it occurs. This includes:
- Assistance with rental or utility arrears
- Conflict resolution and mediation services

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- Legal aid and eviction prevention supports
- Safety planning and relocation for survivors of violence

- Housing-focused discharge planning from hospitals, corrections, or care systems

Prevention efforts require early identification, coordinated assessment, and individualized, housing-focused support.[3]

Encampments

Encampments are outdoor locations with a group of tents, makeshift shelters, or other informal structures where two or more individuals reside for extended periods.[4] Often located in parks, wooded areas, riverbanks, or urban underpasses, encampments form when people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are unable to access safe, appropriate, or low-barrier alternatives.

Effective responses must be grounded in trauma-informed practice, uphold human rights, and avoid punitive or enforcement-led approaches.[5] Responses should prioritize trust-building, voluntary engagement, and pathways to permanent housing.

Progressive Engagement:
An approach that starts with the least intensive services and scales up based on participant needs and preferences. It prioritizes relationship-building, participant autonomy, and housing-focused outcomes while avoiding unnecessary barriers to services.

Diversion
Diversion activities occur once an individual/couple/family has lost their housing, but prior to shelter entry or first night sleeping outside. Explore safe, appropriate options in community or mediation.

Rapid Resolution
Rapid Resolution activities occur within the first few weeks of a shelter stay (the shorter stay the better) or time on the street when an individual/couple/family cannot be diverted.

OrgCode & CAEH. Diversion and Housing Loss Prevention: A Practice Guide for Communities. Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2022. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Canadian Definition of Homelessness, 2012. OrgCode & CAEH. Diversion and Housing Loss Prevention: A Practice Guide for Communities, 2022. Government of Canada. Homelessness Glossary for Communities, July 2024, p. 10. Available at: https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/HPD-HomelessnessGlossaryForCommunities-July2024-EN.pdf

Defining Homelessness Further in the Local Context

Living in Motel	Status	Living with Family& Friends	Status	Living in a room	Status	Living in a trailer	Status
Are they living there with support of an agency (example: OPP voucher)	**Homeless**	Have they been living there for over 6 months	**Housed**	Is there a transaction for use of the space (paying a monthly fee)	**Housed**	Is there access to water and hydro	**Housed**
Are they living there of their own self determination and able to reasonably afford it	**Housed**	Do they pay rent or contribute to the household	**Housed**	Do they have use of a kitchen and washroom	**Housed**	To they have a right to the land they are on	**Housed**
Do they want to continue living there long term, with or with out financial assistance	**Housed**	Are they actively being asked to leave but are able to stay until they find new accommodation	**Housing loss prevention**	Do they want to continue living there long term	**Housed**	No hydro and water	**Homeless**
Are they ok living there for now with out the assistance of a voucher, but eventually would like to move	**Housing loss prevention**	Do they need to leave today	**Diversion**	Are they ok living there in the short term but would eventually like to move	**Housing loss prevention**	Is the trailer in a grouping of other trailers, texts and shacks	**Encampment**

4. Coordinated System Response

A robust homelessness response system requires defined roles, shared protocols, and seamless integration across partners. Coordination ensures that no individual falls through the cracks and that services are not duplicated.

- Maintain a clear protocol for sheltered as well as unsheltered homelessness and encampment response, case conferencing, and housing prioritization.
- Establish Terms of Reference for joint tables like Impact Tables and Coordinated Access working groups.
- Ensure data sharing and privacy agreements allow for timely referrals and collaboration.
- Embed roles for Indigenous organizations, health partners, and housing providers.

5. Data-Informed Decision Making and Practices

A homelessness response system must be rooted in accurate, timely, and actionable data to drive continuous improvement, align resources, and support strategic decision-making. Data helps identify trends, target interventions, and assess the impact of programs and policies over time.

- Use of shared data platform (FIIT) to monitor inflow/outflow from homelessness.
- Regular care conferencing to adjust interventions for supported households.
- Outcome tracking: housing stability rates, returns to homelessness, landlord partnerships.
- Use a By-Name List to maintain real-time awareness of who is experiencing homelessness and their status.
- Analyze inflow and outflow data to monitor the system's ability to prevent and resolve homelessness.
- Establish dashboards to track key indicators such as housing placements, returns to homelessness, service engagement, and length of time homeless.
- Embed data discussions into regular team meetings and system planning tables to foster a culture of learning and adaptation.
- Ensure all staff understand the value of documentation, how it informs system change, and how to use data ethically and effectively.

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- Share anonymized, aggregated data with the public and stakeholders to build transparency and advocate for policy changes.

When data is embedded in every layer of the system—from frontline decision-making to executive-level policy—it enables responsive, targeted, and efficient solutions that are aligned with real community needs.

6. Progressive Engagement Model

Progressive Engagement is a service philosophy where minimal assistance is offered at initial engagement, with more intensive services provided over time based on client readiness and demonstrated need. This model builds trust, reduces service resistance, and promotes sustained housing outcomes.

- Initial Light Touch: Assist with ID, benefits, and basic needs.
- Trust-Building: Consistent, judgment-free outreach and follow-up.
- Escalated Support: Based on participant goals, barriers, and timelines.
- Flexibility: Allow disengagement/re-engagement without penalty.
- Accountability: Track goals and progress through housing plans and case notes.

7. Homelessness Prevention Framework

Effective housing loss prevention requires a multi-pronged approach that combines early detection of risk, coordinated intervention, and strategic resource allocation. It must be recognized that poverty reduction and homelessness prevention are very different strategies and the focus here is on the prevention of homelessness for people with the greatest risk of entering the homelessness response system. Prevention efforts focus on individuals and families who are housed (with or without a formal tenancy or lease agreement) but at imminent risk of becoming sheltered or unsheltered homeless due to eviction, family breakdown, income loss, or system discharge.

7.1 Early Intervention & Upstream Strategies

- Systematic risk screening in community services (e.g., income assistance, health care, schools) to ensure that households with multiple factors increasing the risk of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness are identified and supported proactively.

- The recognition that prevention of eviction protocols for households with a formal lease must integrate legal clinics and tenant support programs.
- Collaboration with landlords to mediate disputes, mediation with family and friends to secure safe and appropriate places to stay in community as well as flexible resources to address arrears before eviction notices are issued and/or contribute to the expenses of host homes for those that have no formal housing options.

7.2 Targeted Supports for Households with the Greatest Risk of Entering/Re-Entering Homelessness

- Personalized housing retention plans with actionable goals and timelines.
- Flexible financial support for rent, utilities, and moving costs.
- Connections to benefits, employment programs, and identification services.

8. Emergency Sheltering Response Protocol

The entry point to the homelessness response system must be coordinated, housing-focused and person-centered. All emergency accommodations are focused on starting with thorough, resourced and consistent diversion practices and, when diversion is not possible, a process of rapidly and actively re-housing individuals.

- Create clear and actionable processes in the case of emergency housing response, across all options (shelter, hotel, motel, etc.).
- Include communication and collaboration protocols between any community partners that may be booking participants into these options such as by-law, emergency services, etc.
- Utilize consistent diversion, housing plan and case management templates across all emergency shelter options.
- Define consistent data collection processes for shelter, hotel and motel users that allows for specific information on the outcomes of emergency housing responses to actively adjust practices.

9. Unsheltered Response Protocol, including Encampment Prevention and/or Resolution

It is recognized that unsheltered homelessness does not happen by accident and is highly preventable in communities that maintain a focus on prevention and

early homelessness responses and a commitment to housing resolutions. When unsheltered homelessness and encampments occur, they must be addressed with a balance of compassion, rights-based practice, and housing-focused interventions. A well-coordinated unsheltered response strategy can build trust with individuals staying outside, connect them to needed services (problem solving that considers safe, appropriate – even temporary - housing options in community, indoor emergency housing options and access to basic needs), and facilitate permanent housing solutions while minimizing harm.

9.1 Ethical Engagement

- Recognize unsheltered homelessness, including encampments, as a housing systems failure, not personal failure.
- Approach individuals respectfully, acknowledging their right to privacy and autonomy.
- Since homelessness is a housing problem, communities should remain focused on housing solutions, not just the provision of basic needs.
- Avoid enforcement-led displacement unless immediate health/safety risks are present.

9.2 Outreach and Relationship Building

- Designate specialized outreach workers/teams with trauma-informed training.
- Conduct regular visits with supplies, referrals, and rapport-building goals.
- Integrate outreach with Coordinated Access and By-Name List management with a focus on ensuring that unsheltered households are incorporated into the community prioritization processes.

9.3 Housing Transitions and Case Management

- Develop individualized housing plans upon first contact.
- Employ progressive engagement to escalate supports appropriately.
- Coordinate warm transfers to shelter, transitional, or permanent housing with wraparound services.

9.4 Data Management

- Formalize encampment response data collection to ensure dependable, up to date and accurate information regarding the number of encampments and the number of people in encampments.
- Include real-time data entry and updates as part of data and documentation protocols.
- Utilize consistent definitions of encampment and unsheltered homelessness that have been socialized with staff when collecting data.

9.5 When diversion efforts and emergency shelter options are not possible, address immediate needs for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, including encampments

- Ensure access to clean water, hygiene products, blankets, food, and waste disposal.
- Provide harm reduction materials such as naloxone and safe-use kits.
- Respect self-determination in relocation decisions when shelter, temporary safe locations or permanent housing options are not immediately available.

10. Community Engagement and Messaging

Communities play a key role in shaping perceptions, reducing stigma, and contributing to solutions. Proactive public education is essential to maintain public trust, prevent misinformation, and support advocacy.

- Develop messaging strategies that highlight strengths-based narratives and data-informed realities.
- Create 'What To Do If You See...' guides for the public to support compassionate responses.
- Host regular town halls, share newsletters, and celebrate housing successes.
- Train BIAs and community associations on homelessness support and referral protocols.

11. Implementation and Performance Monitoring

Successful implementation depends on clear timelines, ownership, and performance metrics. Progress should be monitored regularly to ensure continuous quality improvement.

- Identify milestones (e.g., full encampment protocol rollout, outreach training completion).
- Establish key performance indicators (e.g., # housed, length of time homeless, housing retention rates).
- Conduct quarterly reviews with internal and external stakeholders.
- Adjust policies based on feedback, outcomes, and system capacity.

12. Monitoring Progress and Striving for Service Excellence

Ongoing monitoring is critical for ensuring continuous improvement and achieving excellence in the community's housing loss prevention and encampment response efforts. A culture of evaluation, reflection, and learning helps align practices with emerging needs, best practices, and evolving community expectations.

- Establish a community dashboard to publicly report key metrics (e.g.: number of households stabilized, time to housing, housing retention rates).
- Use feedback loops, including client satisfaction surveys, staff debriefs, and community consultations, to identify areas for improvement.
- Maintain regular performance reviews of service contracts and frontline operations.
- Recognize and celebrate achievements, innovative practices, and exemplary partnerships to promote morale and excellence.
- Encourage peer learning and capacity building through cross-agency collaboration, training, and shared practice models.

12. Implementation Plan

The following implementation plan outlines key activities, responsible parties, and target timelines to operationalize the District of Parry Sound's Homelessness Prevention and Resolution Strategy. It reflects a phased, adaptable approach aligned with community capacity, seasonal realities, and available resources.

Strategic Activity	Responsible Parties	Timeline	Key Outputs/Indicators
Establish strategy oversight and community advisory group	DSSAB leadership, municipal reps, Indigenous partners	Months 1–2	Steering committee formed, TOR approved
Deliver staff training on diversion, harm reduction, housing-based case management, trauma-informed outreach and housing loss prevention	Training leads, partner agencies	Months 1–3	90% staff trained; post-training survey results
Launch coordinated unsheltered response protocol, including encampment prevention and resolution	Outreach teams, CA staff, housing navigators	Months 2–4	Protocols in place; 100% staff equipped with response tools
Strengthen landlord engagement and tenancy support tools	Housing workers, landlords, DSSAB housing team	Months 3–6	Increase in landlord partnerships; toolkit distributed
Implement shared documentation tools and housing plan templates	ISNs, data team, community partners	Months 4–6	Templates used consistently; case reviews documented

Develop and publish community data dashboard	Policy and data teams	Months 5–7	Live dashboard; quarterly updates
Evaluate strategy and adjust implementation roadmap	Steering committee, evaluation consultant	Bi-annually	Lessons learned; revisions adopted

Conclusion

Ending homelessness requires intentional, strategic, and coordinated action from all levels of government, community partners, and local residents. This strategy outlines a comprehensive roadmap to prevent housing loss (not just traditional eviction prevention), strengthen homelessness resolution as well as respond to unsheltered homelessness (including encampments) with compassion, and drive system change using data, collaboration, and innovation.

By centering housing as a human right, integrating trauma-informed care, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, communities can significantly reduce homelessness and enhance wellbeing for all. Success will depend on sustained leadership, transparent communication, and a shared commitment to ensure every person has a safe and permanent place to call home. Housing First is an approach that provides immediate access to permanent housing without preconditions. A prevention-focused system identifies risks early, intervenes before homelessness occurs and aligns local goals with national and provincial standards of service excellence and housing outcomes.

As the system matures, excellence will be measured not only by efficiency and outcomes, but also by how equitably and respectfully services are delivered. Monitoring must be participatory, transparent, and future-focused—fostering a system where learning is continual and excellence is shared.