



Report to: Program Planning Committee

From: Donna Stewart, Director of Integrated Social Services
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Date: February 22, 2017

Re: Homelessness Enumeration

Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the DSB Board with information on Homelessness Enumeration.

Introduction

As part of the Province's efforts to end chronic homelessness by 2025 and the long-term goal to end homelessness, the Minister of Housing introduced proposed legislative amendments that would, if passed, create a requirement for Service Managers to conduct local enumeration of people experiencing homelessness. Through the proposed amendment to the Housing Services Act, 2011 and an implementing Ministerial Directive, the Province would require all Service Managers to conduct enumeration of those experiencing homelessness in their communities. Local homeless enumeration, which is the measurement of the number of people experiencing homelessness over a specific period of time, would help Service Managers and the Ministry better understand the scale and nature of homelessness across the Province, as well as inform current and future policy and program design.

Context

As part of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, Realizing Our Potential (2014-2019), the Province established a bold, long-term goal to end homelessness and committed the government to seek advice to achieve this goal. As a first step, in 2015, the Province established the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness to provide recommendations on how to:

- Define and measure homelessness
- How to prioritize and set targets for ending homelessness; and
- How best to expand the evidence base and build capacity to address homelessness.

In response to the Panel's October 2015 report, *A Place to Call Home*, the Province committed to a number of immediate and long-term actions. These included:

- Committing to end chronic homelessness by 2025;
- Adopting four provincial priorities to guide action: chronic, youth, and Indigenous homelessness, and homelessness following transitions from provincially-funded institutions and service systems; and
- Planning to require local enumeration to gather data about homelessness.

Objectives

Recognizing the value of strong, reliable and consistent data to inform policy, programs and services at both the provincial and Service Manager levels, the objectives of local homeless enumeration are:

- To provide a snapshot of homelessness, including information on the scope and nature of homelessness in communities across Ontario.
- To provide a mechanism for tracking progress and trends, including:
 - Establishing a baseline sample that can be used to track progress in reducing homelessness and chronic homelessness over time.
 - Enabling provincial reporting on the problem of homelessness.
 - Providing data that Service Managers can use to monitor the impact of local strategies and initiatives.
 - To provide information to drive change, spur innovation and enable continuous improvement. Data gathered through enumeration can provide information about whether programs and initiatives are having the desired impact on homelessness.

Enumeration Plans

Service Managers would be expected to complete and submit an Enumeration Plan that would outline how they plan to conduct homeless enumeration in their Service Manager area. Enumeration Plans would help the Ministry ensure that there is rigor in the data collected and provide a baseline of how and where enumeration will be conducted across the province.

Plans would be required to be submitted to the Ministry prior to a Service Manager undertaking local homeless enumeration.

- Enumeration Plans could be approved by Council or by a delegated Service Manager authority.
- Enumeration Plans would be due to the Ministry nine (9) months before conducting an enumeration.

- Service Managers would be expected to submit an Enumeration Plan every two years, starting in 2018. Please refer to the Timing and Frequency sections of these guidelines for further information.
- Service Managers would be required to use the Ministry's Enumeration Plan Template when completing our plan.

The Ministry would review all Enumeration Plans and may provide feedback as required. Ministry staff members would be available to work with Service Managers as they develop their plans.

This process would provide information on the scope of municipalities being enumerated across the province; the enumeration methods being used; and how enumeration will be implemented across Service Manager regions.

Enumeration Methods

Service Managers would be required to conduct local homeless enumeration using any of the following three enumeration methods: Point-in-Time (PiT) Count, Registry Week, and Period Prevalence Count (PPC).

1. Point-in-Time (PiT) Count

The Point-in-Time (PiT) Count provides a snapshot of the population experiencing homelessness on one day of the year. It is intended to capture numbers and basic demographics of people experiencing homelessness at a single point in time.

This method counts unsheltered and emergency-sheltered populations. PiT Count data is collected by trained volunteer canvassers who physically locate, count, and collect survey data from people experiencing homelessness. Surveys are also carried out at emergency shelters, Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, and in transitional housing.

As this method provides information for a single point in time, it is not intended to be a measure of everyone who experiences homelessness in a community over time and will not include some people who cycle in and out of homelessness. In addition, as this method focusses on unsheltered and emergency-sheltered populations, this method is not intended to provide a count of people experiencing hidden homelessness (e.g., people who are staying with friends or "couch surfing").

2. Registry Week

The Registry Week method is a coordinated, multi-day count of people experiencing homelessness on the streets, in shelters, and in other community-identified spaces frequented by people experiencing homelessness.

It also involves a coordinated outreach and assessment process to collect information and create a list of people experiencing homelessness, starting with the most vulnerable, in order to prioritize access to permanent housing and supports.

Volunteers administer a survey – a pre-screening and triage tool – that collects personal data and ranks participants on a vulnerability index. The information collected is then used to prioritize individuals for accessing rapid re-housing and other supports.

3. Period Prevalence Count (PPC)

The Period Prevalence Count method is a coordinated, multi-day count that captures the incidence of homelessness over a period of time. The PPC method is sometimes preferred in Ontario's rural and Northern areas where there are fewer visible people experiencing homelessness (on the streets and in shelters) and more hidden homelessness.

The PPC method is extended to a full week of data collection, in order to maximize the number of people included. It focusses on accessing people through a variety of service organizations that are likely to be used by people experiencing homelessness such as community meal programs, drop-in centres, bus stations, and emergency shelters. Data collected using this method include demographic information, reasons for homelessness, and referral patterns.

As this method focusses on accessing people through service organizations and agencies, people who do not access such services may not be included in the count. In addition, this method may not count people experiencing homelessness in areas where services do not presently exist.

Using Different Enumeration Methods

Service Managers would have the flexibility to use different enumeration methods for different municipalities in their service area, depending upon factors such as geography and community preference.

Service Managers could also choose to combine different enumeration methods in the same municipality to access different locations of those experiencing homelessness. For example, a Service Manager could choose to combine the PiT Count method and the PPC method to access those who are unsheltered, as well as those who access homeless-serving agencies.

Timing

Service Managers would be required to conduct their local homeless enumeration during the months of March or April. Service Managers would be required to conduct their first homeless enumeration in 2018.

Frequency

Service Managers would be required to conduct homeless enumeration every two years, starting in 2018.

Reporting

Required Data Points

Service Managers would be required to provide client-level information to the Ministry on 13 required data points following the completion of homeless enumeration in their Service Manager areas. This data would be used to inform future policy and program development, as well as respond to the indicators in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. All identifying information should be stripped from the data before it is shared with the Ministry.

Sharing Information with the Public

To promote information sharing and accountability, Service Managers would be required to share their enumeration results publicly within the same calendar year that their enumeration is conducted.

Determining the Number of Municipalities to Select

As a guideline, the Ministry recommends that the number of municipalities selected for enumeration should cover at least 30% of the population of the Service Manager area.

To determine whether enough of the Service Manager area is covered, Service Managers should add together the populations of the municipalities that have been selected. If the sum of those populations is equal to or more than 30% of the total population in your Service Manager area, the sample is large enough to provide a good picture of homelessness in that area.

Engaging with Indigenous Communities

As the Province is committed to building constructive, cooperative relationships that are based on mutual respect and lead to improved opportunities and outcomes for all Indigenous peoples, Service Managers would be required to engage with Indigenous organizations and communities – including First Nation, Métis, Inuit organizations and communities, where present in the service area, when planning and conducting enumeration. Engagement with Indigenous organizations and communities should occur during all phases (planning, implementation, and communication of results) of enumeration to ensure that the enumeration approach is culturally appropriate.

Conclusion

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB staff have yet to determine which method they will use to conduct the homelessness enumeration as more information is yet to come from the Ministry prior to making that decision. Staff will ensure that all guidelines are followed while completing the homelessness enumeration.