



Opening Doors Together

Interim Report

May 9, 2025

Executive Summary

The County of Lambton has ambitiously been working to address the housing needs of all residents. Their mindfulness to the full housing spectrum has brought increased awareness to the current gap and the urgency for supportive housing solutions. Supportive housing has the ability to address the acute needs of those most marginalized within the County.

In collaboration with Indwell, several initiatives are underway to increase the capacity of both the housing and health sector through supportive housing. Committed to working directly with the Municipal By-Names and Coordinated Access waitlists, these initiatives will have an immediate impact on those who experience chronic homelessness.

This interim report provides a status update on the Service Agreement which was established between the County of Lambton and Indwell in June 2024. Utilizing the Housing Development Plan established by Flourish, Indwell reflects on the work completed thus far, highlighting opportunities underway and suggesting timelines for next steps.

In addition to the working relationship with the County, Indwell has put forth additional efforts to establishing trusting relationships with community partners in the health and social service sector, as well as the larger community. Engagement opportunities, such as “Be Part of the Solution Campaign” and hosting community events, have led to increased awareness surrounding health, homelessness, and supportive housing.

We hope this status update provides insight and hopefulness to the supportive housing solutions being pursued within Lambton County.

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In March 2024, County Council voted in favour of Administration issuing a Request for Proposals (“RFP”) from agencies interested in working with the County to plan new affordable supportive housing projects and then operate those services once the housing projects were established. The RFP was secured by Indwell Community Homes (“Indwell”) and a Service Agreement (“Agreement”) was entered in June 2024.

Indwell is an experienced landlord and real-estate developer in providing high-quality and affordable rental apartments. Indwell has over 50 years of experience providing comprehensive wrap-around support and services, through various professional interdisciplinary roles, to individuals living in affordable units. Its work extends throughout Southern Ontario, operating in seven municipalities.

The Agreement outlines expectations of Indwell and their work to be completed in the County of Lambton in coordination with County Administration. Indwell was expected to utilize the Housing Development Plan, presented by Flourish in January 2024, that suggested a path to creating a supportive housing spectrum of up to 300 units to eliminate the current By-Name Priority List. This interim report is a status update on the work completed to date. The report highlights the Service Agreement expectations and work completed within that scope.

Service Agreement Expectations

- a. Expectation 1: Assist the County in developing a detailed plan to carry out and complete supportive housing projects, including the development of approximately 150-300 supportive housing units, guided by the Housing Development Plan (the “Project”)**

Based on the study completed by Flourish, Indwell staff attended Lambton County to tour identified sites outlined in their report in July 2024. Indwell’s site assessment and prioritization accounts for potential and intended program models, maximizing the number of units per site, access to neighbourhood amenities and social and health services, as well as local transit stops and routes.

For various reasons, not all sites identified through the Flourish report remain available/viable for the development of supportive housing. Indwell continues to work with Administration, as well as private stakeholders, to identify alternative locations to meet the community’s target of 150-300 supportive housing units. Presently, Indwell has identified, in consultation with the County, three locations to deliver the target number of units and negotiations are underway to secure these sites.

It should be noted that the spectrum of housing units (150-300) needed is in part contingent on other affordable housing developments/community initiatives that may be undertaken over time.

- b. Expectation 2: Provide knowledge and insight to the County on the requirements for the Project and supportive housing generally in accordance with the Housing Development Plan, including the proper organization and administration of the Project.**

Indwell and County Administration have been meeting routinely over the past year. These meetings have consisted of knowledge sharing, establishing plausible timelines for program implementation, and requirements for a successful launch of supportive housing in a new community.

Indwell's recommendation is to primarily focus initial program development on our enhanced supportive housing model (totaling approximately 150 units). This model offers intense wrap-around support services to those who are currently unsheltered and/or have experienced chronic homelessness. The number of enhanced units per program site typically ranges from 40-50.

By focusing on the implementation of an enhanced support model, those in the community who require health and housing stabilization have greater opportunity for their needs to be met. This supportive housing model leads to reduced first response service utilization, often reduces recidivism within local justice and health systems, and creates increased capacity among social service agencies. These programs have proven to produce the greatest positive community impact.

A 2022 study by Western University found significant behavioural changes on tenants engaged in recovery in addition to qualitative experiences of personal wellbeing and stability. In addition, our own review of the average housing retention rate of all Indwell tenants for the first year of residency is 92%. That means that an average of over 9 out of 10 tenants, including individuals housed directly from homelessness, are finding housing stability. Three surveys of healthcare utilization data of Indwell tenants showed a generalized decrease in the overall number of Emergency Room visits after admission to supportive housing and furthermore no emergency department visits after supportive housing are classified as "better managed elsewhere." Frequency and length of hospital visits sampled also decreased and in the sampling there were no readmissions to hospital within 30 days of discharge. These outcomes strongly suggest the importance of Indwell's model of supportive housing to the health and housing stability of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Essential to the long-term success of supportive housing is ensuring its full continuum of housing options. Indwell's standard support housing model provides community attentiveness, continued wellness, and a sense of belonging through on-site staff support. Staffing is at a much lower intensity than the enhanced model. The spectrum of supportive housing allows tenants who have had housing and health stability for at least a year the opportunity to transition to greater independence when they are ready.

Knowing that exposure time exacerbates the complexity and concerns related to homelessness, Indwell has maintained a posture of openness to new ideas and initiatives underway within the County and through community partners. An example of this includes Indwell's participation in the Hart Hub initiative, providing on-site support within existing County-owned housing stock in the lead-up to the opening of the first Indwell enhanced program.

c. Expectation 3: Assist the County with all pre-development works for the Project, including the location, design, approval, and funding of each project comprising the Project

Through site tours and assessments Indwell has determined several feasible sites for various supportive housing programs. As mentioned, site locations should consider nearby amenities, access to social and health care services, as well as the convenience, ease, and accessibility of food (food banks, convenient and/or grocery stores, coffee shops). Access to such services is essential to the stabilization of individuals and their willingness to utilize community resources.

A tour within parts of the County took place to connect with health, addiction support, and social service providers in Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, Petrolia, Forest, and Sarnia. Although these respective communities (and others) offer such services, the acute need, flexibility, and intensity of services available are limited in comparison to what is available within the City of Sarnia. In the absence of complementary service access, pressure on the program and staffing increases leading to higher operating expenses within the supportive housing program. Additionally, as we look at long-term stabilization, individuals become increasingly dependent on Indwell program staff versus integrating with what is available within the community.

With this, Indwell would recommend that the concentration of supportive housing units be located within the City of Sarnia and the initial sites under consideration are located in this community. Over-concentration of supportive housing in particular areas of the community and its various neighbourhoods has been considered. It is Indwell's intent to secure these sites by the end of 2025. Once confirmed, detailed proformas for each program and funding strategies to secure the required dollars will be completed. These details will be shared with transparency to County administration for contribution considerations and to collectively advocate to upper levels of government.

d. Expectation 4: Establish staffing competency and ratios for the Project in accordance with industry best practices for similar projects as the Project

Working across various municipalities in Southern Ontario, both in urban and rural settings, Indwell has gained valuable knowledge in developing accurate projections for staffing compliments and ratios based on number of units and residents served. Community context is always taken into consideration in conjunction with this knowledge. Additionally, Indwell staff operate as both the landlord/property manager and health service provider. The duality of these positions requires significant training to provide the best service possible to residents. Through our People and Culture team, an inventory of all required and essential training is made available to our employees. The compilation of these training requirements has been collected over years of experience, adapted to community and resident needs, and continues to adjust as social issues and needs evolve.

There continues to be ongoing evaluation of data provided by the County regarding the number and needs of individuals with No-Fixed-Address, in shelter and/or "sleeping rough." Community changes related to the chronicity of homelessness play a factor in the program model as well as staffing ratios. County administration has highlighted that although collective local efforts have led to overall reductions in homelessness in late 2024 and early 2025, the proportion of chronic households among those experiencing homelessness continues to rise. The County of Lambton has a live dashboard (<https://www.lambtononline.ca/en/resident-services/data-dashboard.aspx>) demonstrating real-time data pertaining to its By-Names List and chronicity of homelessness which supports our decision making relevant to community needs and trends. It is safely presumed that the longer someone experiences homelessness, the more acute their needs become. This will be taken into consideration as projects become more defined.

Finalization of staff compliments specific to programs offered within the County will occur once site selection and program models have been confirmed.

e. Expectation 5: Establish estimated costing for both capital and ongoing operation of each project comprising the Project

Estimated costs for capital and operating supportive housing are in development. Each project would consider investments from all three levels of government and, where appropriate, community donations. Costs would vary based on unit count and program model.

f. Expectation 6: Develop proposed funding strategies for each project comprising the Project and assist with any required applications to carry out the funding strategy.

Once sites have been confirmed, proposed funding strategies will be pursued. Indwell has been working proactively with various levels of government to bring about awareness to efforts unfolding in Lambton County. Indwell and County Administration remain attuned to Provincial and Federal funding options to expedite solutions.

As a charitable organization, Indwell has been connecting with community members and stakeholders about contributing to supportive housing. It is evident that there is community interest and desire to be part of providing hope and homes and we anticipate we will launch fundraising upon confirmation of the first supportive housing project in the coming months.

g. Expectation 7: Assist the County in a process to prioritize and select individuals in need of supportive housing in accordance with the County's Centralized Waiting List, Coordinated Access and By-Name List policies and procedures.

Indwell has a deep understanding of the importance of addressing the most acute needs of individuals within each community. Utilizing priority lists, such as Coordinated Access and By-Names Lists, helps ensure those with the greatest needs are accessing the right housing with the right support, at the right time. As referenced, data regarding homelessness trends are accessible on the County of Lambton website.

Evidence is shown through our launch in St. Thomas-Elgin where Indwell opted to forego opening their own waitlist and work directly with the Coordinated Access and By-Names List. Through these efforts and by working collaboratively on housing prioritization, St. Thomas has been able to address chronic homelessness, as spotlighted through The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH). In April 2024 a CAEH article highlighted that between July 2023 and January 2024, they reduced chronic homelessness by 30% (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2024). In April 2025, they were again spotlighted by their ability to maintain reductions and sustain them (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2025).

It is Indwell's intention to partner with the County through these same lists to support housing suitability and sustainability for its most marginalized community members.

h. Expectation 8: Assist the County and other agencies in the homelessness prevention system to ensure an effective system-wide approach, including adoption and integration of best or emerging practices and protocols, engaging in continuous improvement activities.

Initial work between Indwell and the County was scoping and understanding the community's needs. Through several in-person, round-table meetings Indwell has had the opportunity to

connect with social services, health, shelter, and housing providers. These conversations have created a strong foundation for ongoing collaboration and understanding. Essential to a thriving community is the ability for agencies to complement each other's work without duplicating services. This past year has demonstrated the breadth of collective responsibility felt by and within the health and housing sector in Lambton County while also giving rise to the critical need for supportive housing.

In addition, Indwell hosted a community event in Point Edward in April 2025. This served as an opportunity to gather local leaders, health and social service providers, and community. Indwell seized the opportunity in advance of any program site announcement to share more about our model of supportive housing while also listening to the concerns of residents.

Throughout our work Indwell has also remained open to sharing documents and resources to support shared learning and program consideration.

- i. Expectation 9: Complete an environmental scan of housing, health, and social services within the County of Lambton. Assess and establish opportunities for collaboration and partnership that will create organizational capacities with the County of Lambton and support the health and housing stability of individuals prioritized for various supportive housing programs.**

This past year, the provincial Conservative Government announced its investment in HART Hubs; a health model intended to support individuals with personal, mental, and addiction needs. Complimentary to the Hub was a supportive housing component. Under the leadership of Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton-Kent, and alongside several other community partners, the opportunity to seize early investment in supportive housing was made. Indwell and the County evaluated immediate and pressing support needs within their existing housing portfolio and responded innovatively within the request for proposals. This was possible in part due to the early foundational relationship-building work completed in bringing about awareness of who Indwell is, the welcoming nature and pre-existing efforts between community partners, and the collective vision of addressing the health and housing needs within the County.

Successful in its application, partners are now expediting the delivery of increased services that will support therapeutic transitions to supportive housing. There are intentions to engage in ongoing evaluation regarding the extent of impact Hart Hubs may have on the spectrum of supportive housing.

Conclusion

Indwell looks forward to the ongoing relationship with the County of Lambton. We know the progress thus far has created a strong foundation to bring about positive change and real solutions. Ongoing efforts will continue to bring concrete projects forward - bringing resolution to homelessness within the region.

We welcome feedback regarding our continued efforts.

References

Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. 2024. "Bright Spot: St. Thomas-Elgin reduces chronic homelessness by 30% in just seven months." Accessed May 6, 2025 at <https://caeh.ca/bright-spot-st-thomas/>

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