

Social Services Department

Serving Wellington County and Guelph
2025 Annual Report

**Children's
Early Years**

**Housing
Services**

**Ontario
Works**



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Message from the Warden



Warden Chris White

I am pleased to present the County of Wellington's Social Services Department 2025 Annual Report.

As the designated Service System Manager for the Wellington-Guelph service delivery area, the County is responsible for planning and delivering child care and early years services, housing services, homelessness prevention and response, and income support programmes. These essential services support residents across the County of Wellington and the City of Guelph. Together, they play a critical role in strengthening the wellbeing, resiliency, and hope for residents during times of great need and promoting the economic viability of communities.

This report highlights Social Services' goals, objectives, and key accomplishments from 2025. The past year brought continued challenges alongside meaningful progress, underscoring the importance of strong collaboration with many valued community partners.

Developed through analysis of local service system data, this report reflects both the strengths of our system and opportunities for continued improvement.

These insights guide our ongoing efforts to build a responsive, coordinated, and seamless system of services for residents. This work is strengthened through partnerships with community organizations, health service providers, and member municipalities.

Sincerely,

Chris White

Warden, County of Wellington

Social Services 2025 Annual Report

The 2025 Social Services Annual Report includes an overview of the Responsibilities, Goals and Objectives, Provincial Performance Measures, and Service Delivery Activity for each Division of the Social Services Department within the approved 2025 Social Services budget allocation. Impact stories, Divisional highlights, system pressures and a summary for each Division are also shared through this annual report.

Social Services

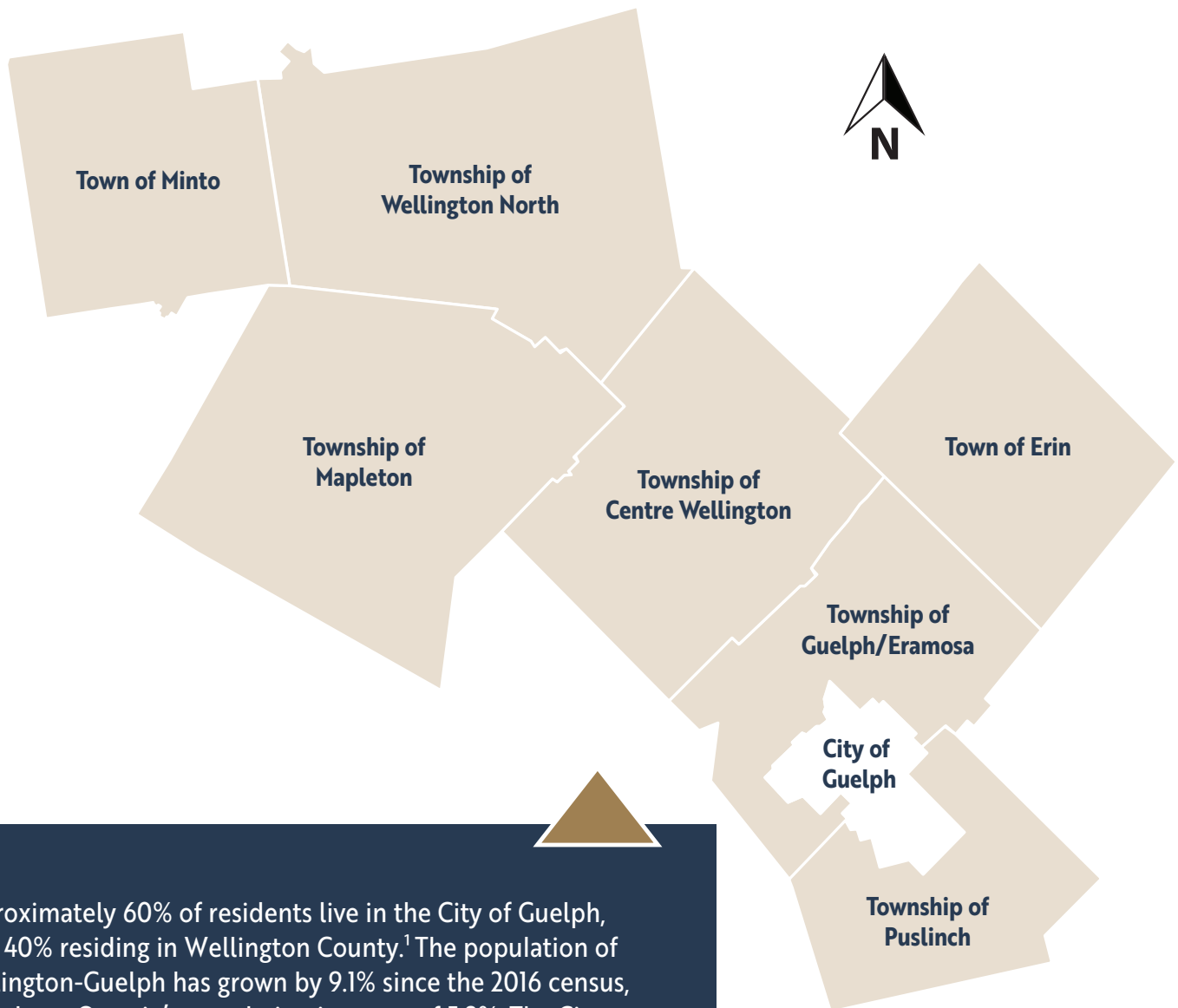
The County of Wellington is one of 47 designated Service System Managers for Social Services across Ontario that are responsible for the delivery of Provincial services in the areas of child care and early years services, housing services, homelessness services and prevention, and income supports. Service System Managers oversee systems planning and manage the delivery of these services in a way that is integrated, people-focused and outcomes-driven at the local level.

As the Service System Manager, the Social Services department oversees the planning, management, implementation, and co-funding of the following services on behalf of the Province of Ontario. Each division is legislatively required to report to their respective Ministries in accordance with the Ministry's programme mandates, funding allocations, directives, guidelines, and service targets.

Social Service	Legislation	Ministry
Children's Early Years	Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014	Ministry of Education
Housing Services	Housing Services Act, 2011 Residential Tenancies Act, 2006	Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Ontario Works	Ontario Works Act, 1997	Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Wellington Service Delivery Area

The Wellington service delivery area (“Wellington-Guelph”) has a total population of 241,026 people distributed across the City of Guelph and Wellington County. Wellington County includes the following municipalities: Centre Wellington, Erin, Guelph/Eramosa, Mapleton, Minto, Puslinch and Wellington North.



Approximately 60% of residents live in the City of Guelph, with 40% residing in Wellington County.¹ The population of Wellington-Guelph has grown by 9.1% since the 2016 census, well above Ontario’s population increase of 5.8%. The City of Guelph includes 87 square kilometers, and the County of Wellington includes more than 2,500 square kilometers of land, nearly 97% of the total service delivery area.

Note: Census data is collected every five years and will be collected next in 2026.

Source: ¹ Statistics Canada. 2021 Census.

Departmental Services

Service Integration

In 2024, the Social Services leadership team embarked on a mission to integrate frontline services provided by our three divisions. Using a person-centred and strengths-based approach, our services would offer a simplified service experience, enhanced capacity and delivery, and strengthened accountability.

Strategies include having a centralized phone number for all social services, integrating front receptionists, as well as implementing new Social Services Help Centres staffed by Social Services Navigator positions in the northern, central, and southern parts of our service delivery area.

Social Services Help Centre

The Social Services Help Centres in Guelph and Fergus, opened in early 2025, responded to 1,074 requests for assistance over the course of the year. Staff addressed more than 40 types of need for services including applications for government benefits and housing, referrals to community supports, and system navigation. Social Services Help Centres also arrange translation services.



Client Story: Turning Crisis into a Coordinated Support Plan

Staff from Hope House, a local community partner, introduced a community member to a Social Services staff member. This direct connection provided reassurance and set the foundation for a more coordinated response to their urgent needs.

A Social Services Navigator took time to understand the individual's full circumstances and worked collaboratively with them to map out clear next steps. This included completing an Ontario Works application, initiating a housing application to support long-term stability, and connecting them with community agencies offering low-barrier food supports such as hot meals available the same day.

What began as a moment of crisis quickly evolved into a structured plan supported by partnership, clear guidance, and compassionate navigation. The client left with practical next steps, strengthened connections to community resources, and a renewed sense of direction and purpose.

Children's Early Years



Wellington Place Child Care and Learning Centre

Service System Manager Responsibilities

As the Provincially designated Service System Manager, the Children's Early Years Division ("the Division") is responsible for planning, administering funding, and overseeing the system of licensed child care and early years programmes in Wellington-Guelph. The Division accomplishes this by assessing the needs of the community and working with local child care operators, home child care providers, EarlyON providers, school boards, municipalities, and other community partners. The Division aims to ensure services are high-quality, available, affordable, accessible, inclusive, and equitably distributed across Wellington County and Guelph.

The Children's Early Years Division plays a critical leadership role in ensuring that the early years system that is delivered by multiple non-profit and for-profit operators functions efficiently, effectively, and delivers a meaningful impact.

This role includes:

- Leading child care and early years system **planning**, policy analysis, **research**, and reporting by developing and managing the Child Care and Early Years Service Plan, engaging the community, and conducting evaluation, data analysis, monitoring to support continuous improvement, and coordinating the **Growing Great Generations** and **Birth-to-Six** planning tables.
- Administering the **Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System**, including 100% Federal funding, complemented by Provincial investment, to reduce parent fees, create new licensed child care spaces, and improve compensation for low-wage Registered Early Childhood Educators.
- Delivering the child care **Fee Subsidy** programme to reduce child care costs for eligible families.
- Supporting access and full participation for children with special needs in licensed child care and early years programmes through **Special Needs Resourcing**.
- Building **workforce capacity** by providing professional learning and development resources through the **Early Years Professional Resource Centre**.
- Planning and overseeing a system of high-quality, no-fee **EarlyON** Child and Family Centre programmes for families and caregivers with children from birth to age six.
- Operating **four licensed child care centres** in Aboyne, Guelph, Mount Forest, and Palmerston, and one licensed home child care agency.



Through these activities, the Division creates a responsive and community-centred child care and early years system for Wellington-Guelph that supports children's development today and builds strong foundations for their future.

Divisional Goals and Objectives

The Children's Early Years Division's goals and objectives are set out in the 2023-2027 Early Years and Child Care [Service Plan](#). The Service Plan provides the roadmap for how we do our work to achieve the following:

- **High-quality services:** by implementing consistent quality standards, supporting continuous improvement, and strengthening workforce recruitment, retention, and professional capacity across licensed child care and EarlyON programmes so all children experience belonging, engagement, expression, and well-being.
- **Available and equitably distributed services:** by expanding licensed child care capacity, prioritizing underserved communities through data-informed planning, coordinating with municipalities and school boards to maximize space, and ensuring consistent access to high-quality, no-cost EarlyON programmes.
- An **affordable** child care and early years system: by ensuring cost is not a barrier, improving awareness and access to fee subsidy, supporting lower parent fees through CWELCC, and maintaining free, welcoming, easily accessible EarlyON programmes for all families.
- **Accessible** services: by improving service navigation, increasing awareness through clear communication, reducing administrative barriers, and coordinating services so families receive timely, connected support that promotes children's well-being.
- An **inclusive** child care and early years system: by improving access to Special Needs Resourcing and Enhanced Support Services, embedding welcoming and culturally responsive practices across all programmes, and building workforce capacity in diversity, inclusion, and equitable practice so all children and families feel respected, represented, and able to participate fully.

2025 Provincial Performance Measures

Provincial Performance Measures	Provincial Target (2024-2026)	New CWELCC-Directed Growth Spaces			Progress on 3-Year Target (2024-2025)
		2024	2025	2026 (Projected)	
School-Based Spaces	128	64	0	64	50%
Community-Based Spaces	1,081	352	123	606	44%
Total New CWELCC Spaces	1,209	416	123	670	45%

Table 1:
Wellington-Guelph Space Targets and New Space Growth Between 2024 and 2026

Sources: Wellington County's Children's Early Years Service Data – CWELCC Directed Growth Data, as of December 31, 2025.
Ontario Ministry of Education. (March 31, 2025). Memo No. EYCC01: Updates to 2025 Ontario Child Care and Early Years Funding Guidelines.



Wellington Place Child Care and Learning Centre

2025 Service Delivery

The following local data highlight the Division’s progress toward strengthening quality, availability, affordability, accessibility, and inclusion across the child care and early years system in Wellington-Guelph. These data provide a snapshot of how the Division’s work in 2025 delivered meaningful impact for children, families, and the community.

Availability of Licensed Child Care

In Wellington-Guelph, the licensed child care system includes full and part day centre-based and home-based programmes for children from birth to age four, along with before and after school programmes for children ages five to twelve. Together, these programmes make up the system of licensed child care that families rely on.

Table 2 shows the existing supply of the licensed child care system (centre-based and home-based spaces) across each lower-tier municipality in the County of Wellington and City of Guelph, with local availability access rates. Access rates refer to the number of licensed child care spaces available as a proportion of the number of children who live in each area.

Municipality	Children Birth to Age 4 (Infant, Toddler, Preschool)		Children Ages 4 to 5 (Kindergarten)		Children Ages 6 to 12 (Before-and-After School)	
	Number of Spaces	Access Rate	Number of Spaces	Access Rate	Number of Spaces	Access Rate
City of Guelph	2,675	45.5%	869	27.5%	1,199	10.6%
County of Wellington	734	17.0%	361	15.6%	465	5.5%
Centre Wellington	274	21.1%	182	24.6%	210	8.2%
Erin	163	39.3%	114	50.7%	150	17.2%
Guelph/Eramosa	126	25.5%	39	13.7%	75	6.4%
Mapleton	16	2.1%	–	0%	–	0%
Minto	63	13.3%	–	0%	–	0%
Puslinch	16	7.0%	–	0%	–	0%
Wellington North	76	11.6%	26	8.8%	30	2.7%
Wellington-Guelph Total	3,409	33.4%	1,230	22.5%	1,664	8.4%

Table 2:
Availability of
Licensed Child
Care Spaces in
Wellington-Guelph

Data Note: Home-based spaces are included in the number of spaces for children birth up to age 4. Space counts include full-day and part-day programmes.

Sources: Wellington County’s Children’s Early Years Service Data – Child Care Licensing System & Home Child Care Data, as of December 31, 2025.

Statistics Canada. 2023. Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue number 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023.

The data in Table 2 show variation in access to licensed child care across the Wellington-Guelph service delivery area. Rural communities such as Mapleton, Puslinch and Wellington North continue to have very low access rates despite population need, while more urban communities like Guelph and Erin have higher access rates. Overall, access to license child care remains low across the service delivery area, as thousands of children continue to wait on the **OneHSN** centralized application waitlist, where thousands of children continue to wait for a space; indicating that demand continues to exceed supply. The Division uses the data on the availability of licensed child care spaces in Wellington-Guelph, alongside our **Directed Growth Plan**, to identify underserved communities and guide decisions about where new licensed CWELCC spaces are most needed.

In Wellington-Guelph, before and after school programmes are offered through the school boards. Under Provincial legislation, school boards are responsible for ensuring before and after school programmes are available for students in Kindergarten to Grade 6 where there is sufficient demand and viability.

As of December 31, 2025, 73% of schools across Wellington-Guelph have before and/or after school care in place, including 59% of schools in Wellington County and 83% of schools in Guelph.² Table 2 shows that access to before and after school programmes is lower than access to full- and part-day child care and Kindergarten programmes.

System Growth

The (CWELCC) system is funded primarily through Federal investments, with Provincial contributions. The Division is responsible for maximizing the number of licensed child care spaces available to parents and caregivers across Wellington-Guelph, within the current Federal and Provincial funding limits. Ensuring enough licensed child care spaces are available is essential for families to access the care they need.

For programmes enrolled in the CWELCC system in Ontario, parents benefit from fees capped at \$22 per day for children birth to age five. CWELCC also supports improved compensation for Registered Early Childhood Educators and other programme staff. Across Wellington-Guelph, 86% of licensed centre-based child care programmes and 100% of licensed home child care agencies are enrolled in CWELCC.³

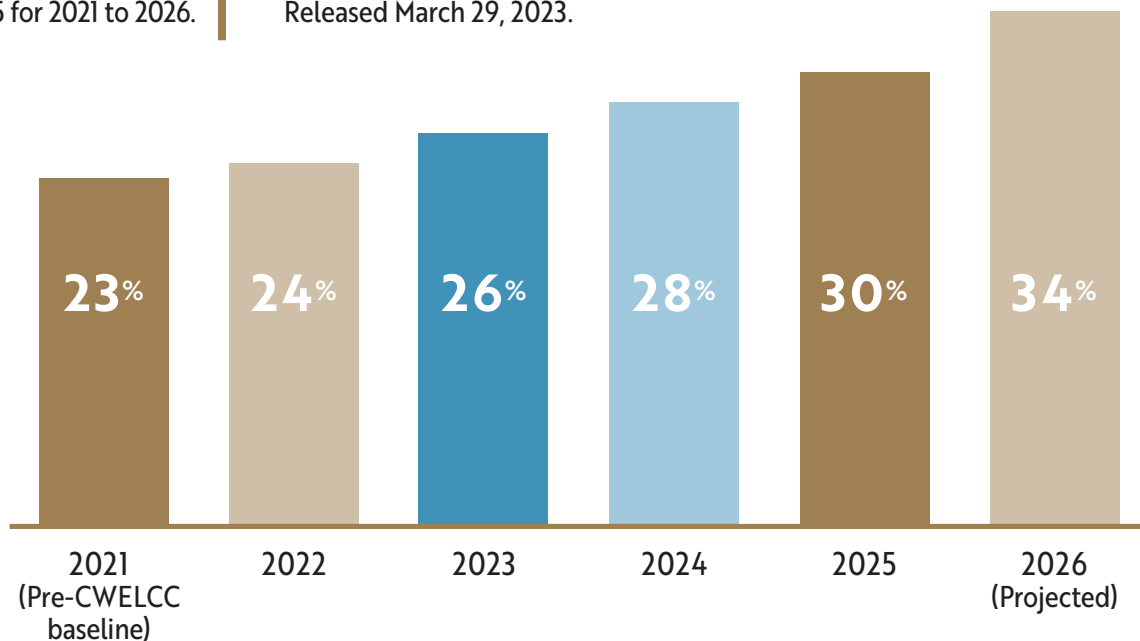


Sources:^{2,3} Wellington County's Children's Early Years Service Data - Child Care Licensing System, as of December 31, 2025.

Figure 1 shows a steady increase in child care access rates in Wellington-Guelph from 2021 (before CWELCC was introduced), to when existing licensed programmes voluntarily joined CWELCC (2022-2023), to the current phase of creating net new CWELCC-funded spaces. As a result, the system expanded between 2024 to 2026.

Figure 1:
Wellington-Guelph
Access Rates for
Children Birth to
Age 5 for 2021 to 2026.

Data source: Wellington County’s Children’s Early Years Service Data – Child Care Licensing System & Home Child Care Data, CWELCC Directed Growth Data, as of December 31, 2025. Statistics Canada. 2023. Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue number 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023.



During the 2024-2026 expansion period, the Province set a directed growth target of 1,209 net new CWELCC spaces for Wellington-Guelph, after the Province adjusted targets for Service System Managers. This target is included in Ontario’s broader commitment to create 86,000 new affordable child care spaces by the end of 2026, with progress dependent on the availability of both capital and operational funding under CWELCC. In 2025, the Division completed the allocation of all 1,209 new spaces through expansion projects by local child care operators and the County’s directly operated child care centres. As a result, in 2026 no additional CWELCC spaces can be allocated within the current Provincial framework, even where demand persists.

In 2025, nine child care programmes received capital funding to meet growth targets. Start-Up Grants totalling \$2,062,602, were allocated to nine child care programmes, and five of these nine programmes also received Infrastructure Funding totalling \$2,056,212 in addition to their Start-Up Grants. These child care programmes are scheduled to open by December 31, 2026.

Licensed child care is essential community infrastructure, enabling caregivers to work while ensuring children learn and thrive in high-quality centre-based, home-based, and before and after school programmes. The CWELCC system strengthens this foundation by making care more affordable and supporting the expansion of new licensed spaces.

Child Care Fee Subsidy

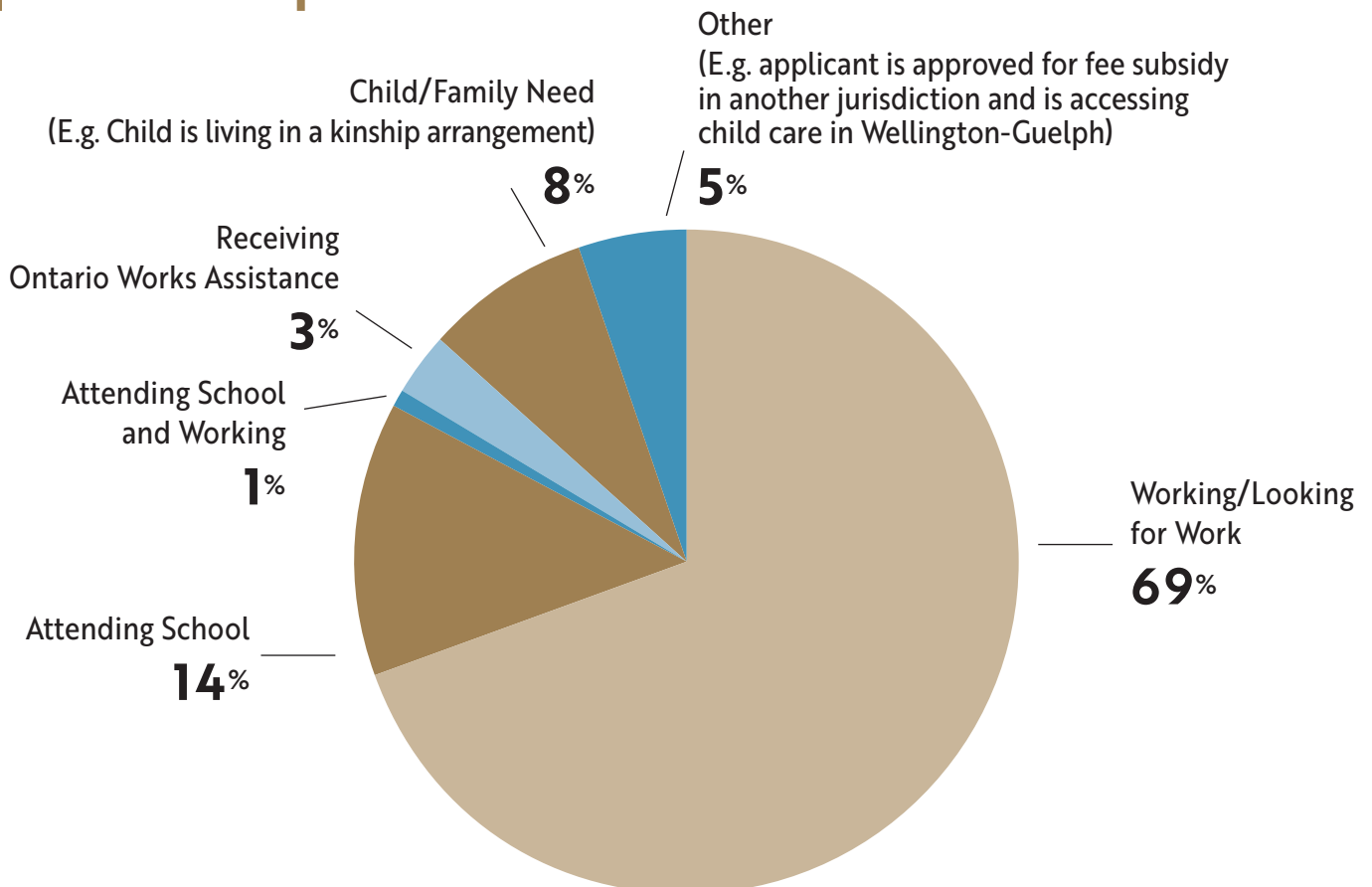
In addition to CWELCC, the Division administers the **Child Care Fee Subsidy Programme**, which helps families pay for licensed child care and approved camp and recreation programmes for children up to age 13. Families must have a need for child care and be eligible based on family income. Need for care includes working, attending school or a training programme, having a medical or family need that can be helped by the child attending child care, or having a professional recommend that a child with a disability or special need participates in child care.

While CWELCC has improved affordability, many families still struggle to afford licensed child care. Fee subsidy remains essential for families for whom even capped fees are out of reach, enabling children to access high-quality licensed care and helping caregivers participate in the workforce or pursue education and training.

In 2025, child care fee subsidy supported **710 unique children across 559 families**. Fee subsidy allowed parents to engage in work and/or education, and supported children and families who have unique medical and special needs. Figure 2 shows the reasons families accessed fee subsidy.

Figure 2:
Reasons for Families
Accessing Child Care
Fee Subsidy in 2025.

Source: Wellington County's Children's Early Years Service Data – Ontario Child Care Management System, as of December 31, 2025.



The goal of fee subsidy is to make child care more affordable for families living with low income. However, based on Ministry guidelines, fee subsidy cannot be used in all licensed child care spaces. Fee subsidy can only be used in CWELCC-enrolled licensed child care programmes, therefore families who rely on fee subsidy cannot access spaces in non-CWELCC programmes. This limitation means that these families have access to 21% fewer spaces than families who do not rely on fee subsidy. As a result, families may qualify for financial support but have limited or no access to licensed child care spaces, creating inequitable access to the licensed child care system.



2025 Early Years Professional Learning Day

Capacity Building

The Division strengthens local workforce capacity through the Early Years Professional Learning Centre (EYPRC), offering evidence-based learning and resources that enhance the skills of child care and early years educators throughout Wellington-Guelph.

The EYPRC offers in-person, virtual, and online professional

learning opportunities, side-by-side mentorship for child care and early years programmes, and access to the **ReachingIN...ReachingOUT and Bounce Back & Thrive!** resiliency skills training programmes which are designed to strengthen well-being and resilience in adults and children through role modeling and relationships.

In 2025, the EYPRC delivered **109** events to **808** educators, supervisors, and support staff from across Wellington-Guelph. Highlights from 2025 include:

- **605** educators, supervisors, and support staff received a full day of learning and reflection during the third annual Early Years Professional Learning Day in June 2025. These sessions strengthen participants' practice in supporting children with disabilities, responding to challenging behaviours, building strong relationships with families, and enhancing communication skills.
- **40** child care supervisors participated in professional learning opportunities to strengthen management, administration, and leadership skills and knowledge.
- **53** supervisors from child care programmes across Wellington-Guelph attended two leadership conferences where they mapped a vision for quality care and explored the value of leadership and workplace culture.
- Educators and supervisors from **16** child care programmes participated in side-by-side mentorship to enhance skills, knowledge, and practices to improve the quality of care for children and families.
- Leadership resource books were provided to **95** child care and early learning programmes to support supervisors' learning and development as leaders in their programmes.
- The Infant Early Years Mental Health project supported **92** educators, supervisors, and support staff in reflection and dialogue on key topics related to children's well-being such as care, attachment, emotions, identity, and self-regulation.



Child Care Cooks and Friends, 2025 Early Years Professional Learning Day



Figure 3:
Professional Learning Support

Source: Wellington County’s Children’s Early Years Service Data – Early Years Professional Resource Centre Data, as of December 31, 2025.

Resiliency Training

In 2025, the ReachingIN...ReachingOUT and Bounce Back & Thrive! resiliency training programmes ran **67** trainings which supported **768** caregivers and educators. These trainings provide resiliency skills adults can role model through daily interactions with young children.

Capacity building empowers educators. When educators are empowered, programmes flourish.

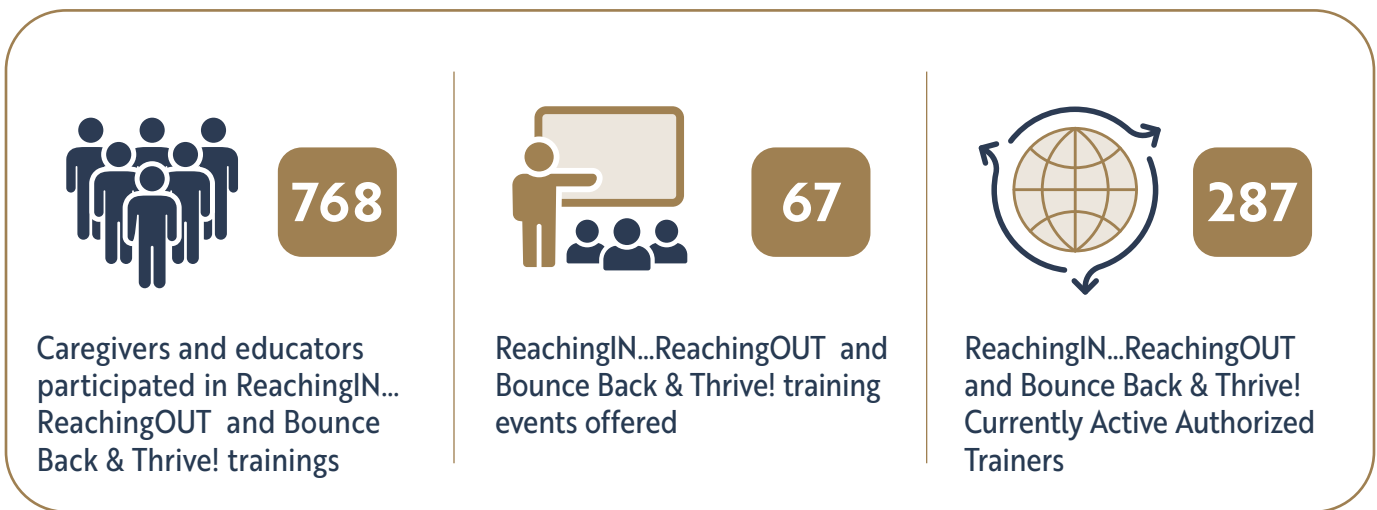


Figure 4:
Resiliency Trainings

Source: Source: Wellington County’s Children’s Early Years Division’s Service Data – ReachingIN...ReachingOUT & Bounce Back and Thrive Data, as of December 31, 2025.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres (EarlyONs) offer high-quality, no cost drop-in and pre-registered programmes for children birth to age six, along with their families. They provide welcoming environments where children, families, and caregivers can learn, grow, and connect. EarlyON programmes are led by Registered Early Childhood Educators, offering play and inquiry-based programmes for children and providing parenting and child development support for caregivers.

EarlyONs provide low-barrier opportunities for caregivers to connect with one another and early learning professionals, while also helping them navigate the child care and early years system through supportive conversations and referrals to local resources and services.

Three agencies are contracted to operate EarlyON programmes in Wellington-Guelph: Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington, Guelph Community Health Centre, and Shelldale Family Gateway. These agencies provide programming through eight EarlyON Centres and fourteen EarlyON mobile sites. Programming is offered on

weekdays, evenings, and weekends, both in person and virtually to meet the needs of families in each community. In 2025, 6,949 unique children made visits to EarlyON programmes in Wellington-Guelph.⁴

Figure 6 shows that visits made by children to EarlyONs increased each year between 2022 and 2025. This increase is likely a result of multiple factors, including resuming in-person programming after significant reductions because of COVID-19, the opening of a new EarlyON Centre in Fergus, and increasing awareness about EarlyON programming in the community.

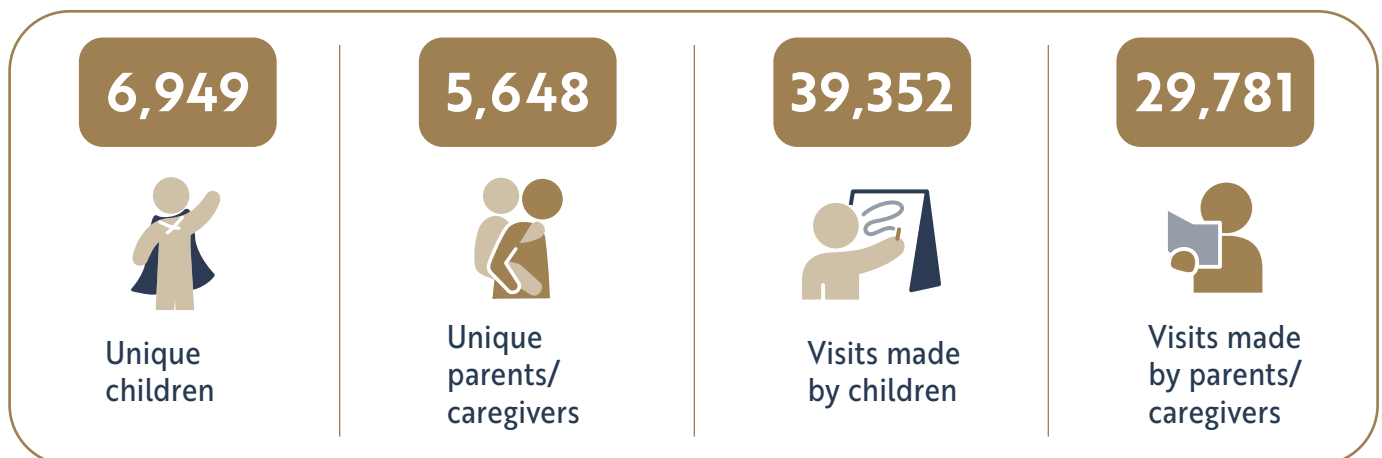
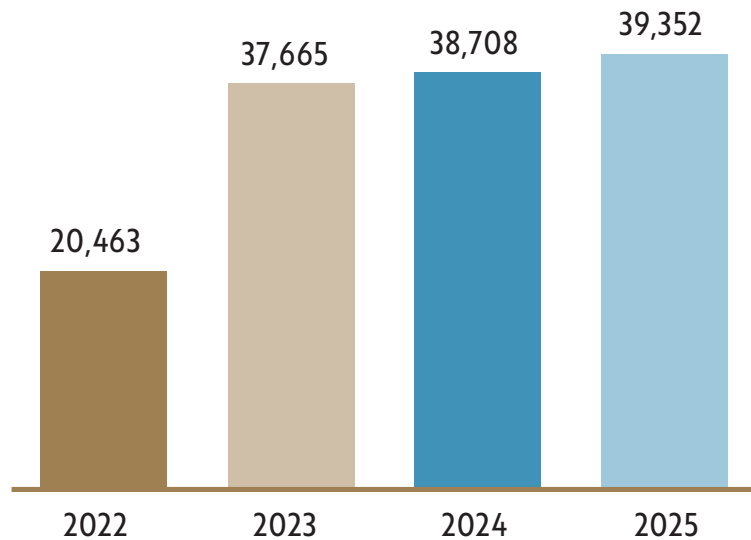


Figure 5: EarlyON Visits

Source: ⁴ Wellington County's Children's Early Years Service Data – Ontario Child Care Management System, as of December 31, 2025.

Figure 6:
Number of Visits
to EarlyON Centres
2022 to 2025.

Source: Wellington County's Children's Early Years Service Data – Ontario Child Care Management System, as of December 31, 2025



Accessible early learning lets every family connect, belong, and thrive in our community.

In 2025, the Children's Early Years Division conducted an evaluation of EarlyON programmes in Wellington-Guelph and found that families are satisfied with the programmes and services offered through EarlyONs:

- **95%** of families agreed or strongly agreed that they feel welcome and accepted at EarlyON Centres.
- **90%** of families agreed or strongly agreed that EarlyONs accommodate the needs of their children.
- **83%** of families agreed or strongly agreed that EarlyON services reflect the needs of their community.
- **77%** of families agreed or strongly agreed that they have access to relevant information about community services for their family and/or child(ren) through EarlyONs.⁵



Source: ⁵ Wellington County's Children's Early Years Project Data – EarlyON Evaluation, Family Survey, 2025.



Special Needs Resourcing

The Division administers Special Needs Resourcing, a funding stream that supports the inclusion of children with special needs in licensed child care, authorized recreation and camp programmes, and EarlyON Child and Family Centres.

Supports offered through Special Needs Resourcing are provided at no additional cost to families. The Enhanced Support System is Wellington's model of delivering Special Needs Resourcing. Child care educators and programmes play a lead role in offering supports and services to children and families. **The Enhanced Support System** model provides educators with access to resources,

supports, and professional learning opportunities that support them in meeting the needs of children and families. These supports include general consultations (i.e., supports an entire programme or room), child-specific consultations (i.e., supports an individual child), direct liaison therapy support, and funding for specialized equipment, devices and additional staffing.

Two agencies are contracted and fully funded to deliver services through the Enhanced Support System:

- KidsAbility provides occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech and language supports in child care programmes.
- Canadian Mental Health Association's Mental Health Consultants provide child care and EarlyON Child and Family Centres with mental health, behaviour, social skills, and attachment supports. **Here4Kids** is the access point for mental health and developmental services for children up to age six.

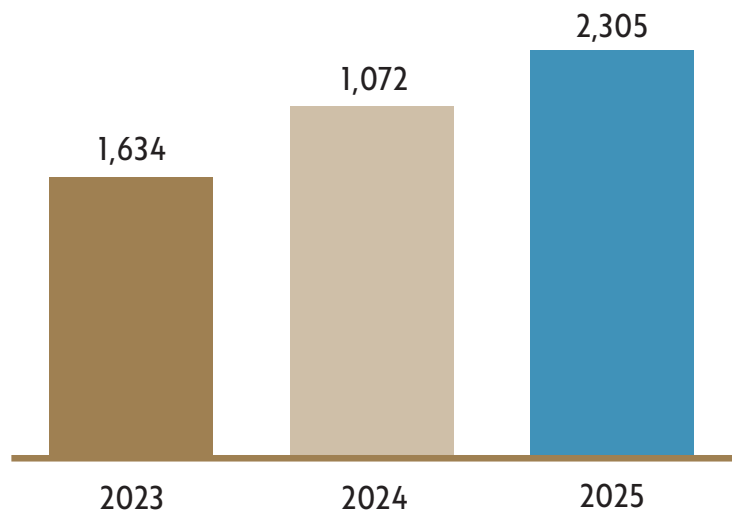
Investment in these community programmes aligns with the Division’s role of connecting child care programmes with a network of professionals who work in partnership with staff to meet the needs of all children enrolled in their care.

Supports from the Enhanced Support System aim to ensure that children with special needs and complex medical conditions are able to fully participate in Child Care programmes and other early learning settings. In 2025, the Enhanced Support System offered developmental and inclusion supports to 649 children and provided 2,305 consultations with licensed child care programmes, authorized recreation programmes, and EarlyON Centres.

Figure 7 shows an increase in Enhanced Support System Consultation Visits between 2023 and 2025. An increased demand for inclusion supports reflects the expansion of licensed child care spaces driven by CWELCC new space creation, alongside growing developmental and behavioural needs that require additional support to ensure children can meaningfully participate in early learning settings.

Figure 7:
Number of Enhanced Support System Consultation Visits, 2023 to 2025.

Source: Wellington County Children’s Early Years Service Data – Enhanced Support System Data, as of December 31, 2025



Inclusive child care and early years programming ensures every child and family feels welcomed, respected, and supported.

The Munoz Family Story

When newcomers arrive in Canada, they often face challenges such as navigating a new culture, securing employment, and finding child care. One family who recently settled in Wellington County arrived with young children and no local connections. Both parents quickly found employment, but their ability to work depended on access to licensed child care and the Fee Subsidy programme that made it affordable.

For a time, the family was able to maintain stability. However, an incident beyond their control resulted in them no longer being eligible for fee subsidy. In Ontario, families must demonstrate a “reason for service,” such as employment, education, or a medical need, to qualify. With limited savings and no other support, this family faced the possibility of losing their children’s licensed child care spaces, jeopardizing their ability to return to work and maintain stability.

Because the children were enrolled in a licensed child care programme that was enrolled in CWELCC, the family was able to benefit from both the CWELCC system and the Fee Subsidy programme. CWELCC reduces parent fees by capping the daily cost of care, while fee subsidy can further reduce costs for eligible families. When the family temporarily lost their subsidy, the lower CWELCC-capped fees made it possible to afford the full



cost of care for a short period of time and keep their child care spaces.

This allowed the children to remain in care and helped the parents maintain their employment momentum. Within weeks, one parent secured new employment and the family once again became eligible for fee subsidy. The family continued to receive fee subsidy when the children started school, allowing them to attend before and after school programmes and summer camps.

Looking back, the family reflects on how critical these supports were during a vulnerable time. They shared that when they first arrived in Canada they did not know anyone or how the system worked, but the support they received from the Children’s Early Years Division made all the difference. This support helped them keep their jobs, maintain child care, and continue building stability for their family.

System Pressures

The introduction of CWELCC and the creation of the County of Wellington Directed Growth Plan created significant opportunities to expand the affordability and availability of child care in Wellington–Guelph. While licensed child care growth was achieved in 2025 and is planned through 2026, the Division has now fully allocated its Provincially directed growth CWELCC allocation across Wellington-Guelph, leaving no remaining capacity to approve additional affordable CWELCC spaces. Opportunities for further expansion are also limited by constrained capital funding for new builds and retrofits, as well as uncertainty regarding operating funding beyond 2026. These constraints persist despite consistent local waitlist data, and feedback from families, indicating that demand continues to exceed available supply. Waitlists for child care spaces further challenge affordability of child care, because families who qualify for child care fee subsidy can only be subsidized in CWELCC-enrolled spaces. At the same time, insufficient workforce

compensation and benefits contribute to recruitment and retention challenges that affect the capacity to sustain existing child care spaces.

These pressures extend beyond licensed child care. Since 2019, EarlyONs have not received funding increases and are facing high demand, especially as many families without access to licensed child care are visiting EarlyON programmes instead. Additionally, since there are more children enrolled in licensed child care because of the expansion of child care spaces under CWELCC, requests for Special Needs Resourcing support are increasing, therefore strengthened workforce infrastructure is needed to meet this rising demand.

Together, these pressures create constraints on resource allocation and long-term planning, making it difficult to sustain existing services and strategically expand the system to meet growing community needs.

Summary

In 2025, the Children’s Early Years Division made meaningful progress toward strengthening the quality, availability, affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity of child care and early years programming. Growth in new licensed spaces increased availability for families, affordability supports including fee subsidy reached households with the highest need, and inclusion services supported hundreds of children’s participation in child care and early learning. Investments in professional learning continued to strengthen programme quality, while EarlyON Centres welcomed thousands of families across Wellington-Guelph. At the same time, the system continues to face significant pressures, including Registered Early Childhood Educator workforce shortages, limited capital and operating funding for child care expansion, and rising complexity in children’s needs. The Division will continue working with operators, educators, and the community to respond to these challenges and advance the child care and early years system for children and families across Wellington-Guelph.

Housing Services



Fergusson Place, 165 Gordon Street, Fergus

Service System Manager Responsibilities

As the Service System Manager for Wellington-Guelph, the County of Wellington's Housing Services Division ("the Division") delivers Federally and Provincially mandated affordable housing programmes and initiatives to prevent and respond to homelessness. The Division is responsible for service system planning across the housing spectrum for low-income households, which is the range of housing options one may need over a lifetime, including temporary emergency shelter, transitional and supportive housing, subsidized housing, affordable and market rental housing, and affordable homeownership.

Key responsibilities include:

- Administration of the Centralized Waiting List (“the waitlist”) for Community Housing
- Access to subsidized and government-funded affordable housing
- Administration of community housing subsidies
- Rent supplements
- Legislative programme compliance
- Initiatives to prevent and respond to homelessness.



Through these activities, the Division creates a system that supports housing affordability, human-centred and culturally appropriate service delivery, revitalization of Wellington-Guelph’s housing stock, coordination of support services, and ending chronic homelessness.

Divisional Goals and Objectives

The work of the Division is undertaken collaboratively with a variety of local partners including municipal governments, Indigenous organizations, health and human service organizations, housing providers and operators in the homeless serving system. The current objectives of the Housing and Homelessness Plan, developed in consultation with community, are to:

- Help low-income households close the gap between their incomes and housing expenses
- Provide a range of housing stability supports to assist with housing retention and homelessness prevention
- Offer a comprehensive range of supportive housing options for residents with complex needs due to aging, disabilities, mental health issues and addictions
- Increase the supply and mix of affordable housing options for low to moderate income households
- End chronic homelessness
- Promote client-centred, coordinated access to the housing and homelessness system
- Support the sustainability of the existing social and affordable housing stock
- Foster access to culturally appropriate housing and homelessness services for Indigenous peoples.

2025 Provincial Performance Measures

The Division’s legislative performance measures are established by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing through the Housing Services Act, 2011.

Table 3:
Provincial
Performance
Measures, Targets
and Actuals, 2025

Source: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Provincial Performance Measure	Description	Provincial Target 2025	Actual 2025
Number of subsidized housing units	Number of rent-geared-to-income households receiving income assistance as required by the Housing Services Act	2,342	3,413

The Housing Services Act, 2011 requires Service System Managers to prepare local 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plans, in consultation with community members and service providers, to address the current and future housing needs of individuals and families. The Division’s Housing and Homelessness Plan, “A Place to Call Home”, sets out how our community plans to address housing and homelessness locally. The Division’s progress in 2025 towards the performance measures set out in “A Place to Call Home” is described in Table 4.

Table 4:
Progress on
Performance
Measures in 2025

Source: 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, "A Place to Call Home"

Outcomes	Measures	Targets	Progress in 2025
Objective 1: To help low-income households close the gap between their incomes and housing expenses			
Improved access to rent supports that help improve housing affordability for low-income households.	Number of households that receive rent supports per year.	By 2025, 400 households receive rent supports per year.	In 2025, 1,213 households received rent supports.
Objective 2: To provide a range of housing stability supports to assist with housing retention and homelessness prevention			
Improved access to supports and resources for tenants and landlords to stabilize housing and reduce evictions.	Number of households at risk of homelessness that are stabilized (includes eviction prevention services, and assistance with rental and energy arrears) per year.	By 2025, 75% of households who received a subsidy and/or supports have retained their housing at six months follow up.	In 2025, 78% of households who received a subsidy and/ or supports had retained their housing at six months follow up.
Objective 3: To offer a comprehensive range of supportive housing options for residents with complex needs due to aging, disabilities, mental health issues and addictions			
Increased access to supportive housing options that help people to successfully live independently.	Number of households that receive housing support services through the Service Manager per year.	By 2025, there has been a 5% increase in the number of households that receive support services through the Service Manager.	In 2025, 28 additional units of transitional housing were developed, representing an increase of 29%.

Outcomes	Measures	Targets	Progress in 2025
Objective 4: To increase the supply and mix of affordable housing options for low to moderate income households			
Increased number of households who are living in affordable housing options.	Number of households in affordable housing per year.	By 2025, there has been a 5% increase in the number of affordable housing units. Increasing number of first time homeownership grants and Ontario Renovates programme participation.	In 2025, 28 new affordable transitional housing units became available, seven homeownership down payment loans were issued, and two households were supported by Ontario Renovates.
Objective 5: To end chronic homelessness			
People experiencing chronic homelessness find and maintain housing.	Reductions in the number of people actively experiencing chronic homelessness.	By 2024, Guelph Wellington will reach the third key reduction indicator in the 20K Homes Campaign: Getting Close to Functional Zero Chronic Homelessness.	Housing stability efforts made strong progress in 2025. Chronic youth homelessness dropped 75% from baseline, aligning with the Built for Zero approach and Reaching Home objectives. Work continues to reduce homelessness across all age groups by strengthening prevention and diversion to reduce inflow into homelessness, while advancing Housing First-informed, permanent housing solutions that support long-term stability.

Outcomes	Measures	Targets	Progress in 2025
Objective 6: To promote client-centred, coordinated access to the housing and homelessness system			
People are able to access the housing and homelessness services they need in a timely and efficient manner.	Number of activities undertaken to improve coordinated access and customer service (i.e., training, policies, phones, positions, etc.)	By 2024, Social Services reception and intake is fully integrated.	In 2025, Housing Services continued to advance plans for a phased implementation of integrated social services reception and intake. We continue working to meet the target.
Objective 7: To support the sustainability of the existing social and affordable housing stock			
Improved viability of existing rent geared to income units and social housing assets beyond their original operating and mortgage agreements.	Number of households in rent geared to income and affordable housing units.	By 2024, the Housing Services Division and local housing providers are collectively continuing to maintain service level standards.	Service level standards were successfully maintained in 2025, strengthened by the completion of four End of Mortgage Service Agreements with provincially reformed housing providers.
Objective 8: Objective 8: To foster access to culturally appropriate housing and homelessness			
Improved access to culturally appropriate housing and homelessness services for Indigenous peoples.	Number of engagement activities and resources initiated to deepen understanding of Indigenous housing and homelessness experiences in Wellington-Guelph.	By 2024, the Housing Services Division and community housing partners are engaged in the development of a meaningful process that supports Indigenous participation in the housing and homelessness initiatives in our community.	Housing Services continues its partnerships with Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre and is building a relationship with Crow Shield Lodge to provide cultural circles at our Transitional Housing site (65 Delhi Street). We remain committed to this ongoing work.

2025 Service Delivery

The following local data highlights the Division’s progress toward the vision for the Housing and Homelessness plan, that everyone in Wellington-Guelph can find and maintain an appropriate, safe and affordable place to call home. These data points provide a snapshot of how the Division’s work in 2025 contributed to this vision.

Preventing Experiences of Homelessness

Wellington-Guelph is experiencing similar homelessness trends as other communities across the province, including a 25% increase in experiences of homelessness since 2018.⁶

The Division has the leadership role in developing a sustainable and integrated housing stability system, and leverages partnerships with other local organizations. This “community as a whole approach” reflects a broad range of community needs, with consideration given to the housing and homelessness system, resulting in locally appropriate allocation of available resources. The “community as a whole” approach, along with significant municipal investments, has positioned Wellington-Guelph as a leader to ending chronic homelessness. Wellington-Guelph’s average homelessness rate for 2018-2025 was 25%, which was well below the provincial average of 50%.

The Division implements a range of strategies to decrease the risk of people becoming homeless and delivers core programmes and initiatives to support individuals experiencing homelessness.

The Division has adopted the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness’s framework for homelessness prevention¹². The framework outlines three main tasks required to prevent and address homelessness: Prevention, Emergency Responses to Experiences of Homelessness, and Housing Placements with Supports.



Source: ⁶ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention.

Eviction Prevention

Eviction prevention support services are provided by the Division and may include one-time assistance with rental and/or utilities arrears, one-time assistance with first and/or last month's rent and other housing stability expenses for eligible households. In 2025, 1,142 unique clients were supported with Housing Stability Programme Benefits. Table 5 shows the services provided through Housing Stability Programme Benefits in 2025.

Table 5:
Number of Clients
Supported with Housing
Stability Programme
Benefits, Wellington-
Guelph, 2025

Data source: HIFIS Goods and Services Report

Note: Clients can access more than one service within a given year, therefore the number of clients supported in Table 5 is greater than the number of unique clients supported with Housing Stability Programme Benefits.

Service	Number of Clients Supported
Utility arrears	40
Rental arrears	233
Clients issued first and last month's rent	479
Clients supported through other housing stability benefits (example: moving expenses, storage, appliances; etc.)	422

Emergency Responses to Experiences of Homelessness

Emergency responses to experiences of homelessness include services that address the immediate needs of youth, families, single adults, and seniors experiencing homelessness. Emergency responses are a foundational part of the solution to homelessness because, despite best efforts, some people will continue to experience homelessness due to systemic and structural barriers.


In Wellington-Guelph, emergency responses include outreach and rapid re-housing efforts, emergency shelter, temporary accommodations, and transitional housing.

The Division increased the number of shelter beds from 52 in 2018, to a current system capacity of 149 shelter beds, representing an increase of 187%. Additional expansion will occur in 2026. Between 2023 and 2025, 100 new transitional and supportive housing units for youth and adults were opened, in addition to increased efforts on prevention, rapid rehousing initiatives, and rent support programmes.

Outreach, Diversion and Rapid Housing

The Division partners with 20 local service agencies as part of the Coordinated Access System. These local service agencies include:

- Canadian Mental Health Association of Waterloo Wellington
- Community Resource Centre
- Compass Community Services
- Crow Shield Lodge
- East Wellington Community Services
- Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County
- Guelph Community Health Centre
- Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis
- Homewood Health
- Michael House
- Mount Forest Family Health Team
- Ramoth House
- Royal City Mission
- Rural Wellington Community Team
- Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre
- Stepping Stone
- Stonehenge Therapeutic Community
- Thresholds Homes and Supports
- Traverse Independence
- Wyndham House



As a result, 21 Integrated Housing Support Workers provide support, outreach, diversion and rapid housing services. These roles are designed to prevent homelessness, support rapid transitions into permanent housing, and promote long-term housing stability through individualized, culturally responsive, and health-integrated approaches.

In 2025, these Outreach Workers had 318 interactions with individuals experiencing homelessness. In addition, the Housing Support Workers were successful in diverting 347 individuals from entering emergency shelters, including 198 youth and 149 adults.

Table 6:
Outreach Services,
2025

Data source: Reaching Home quarterly reports

Service	Number of Clients	
Number of interactions with Individuals supported through outreach	318	
Number of unique individuals diverted from emergency shelters	Youth	198
	Adults	149
	Total	347

The Division also provides funding to five local agency partners, including the Community Resource Centre, East Wellington Community Services, Stepping Stone, Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre and Wyndham House.



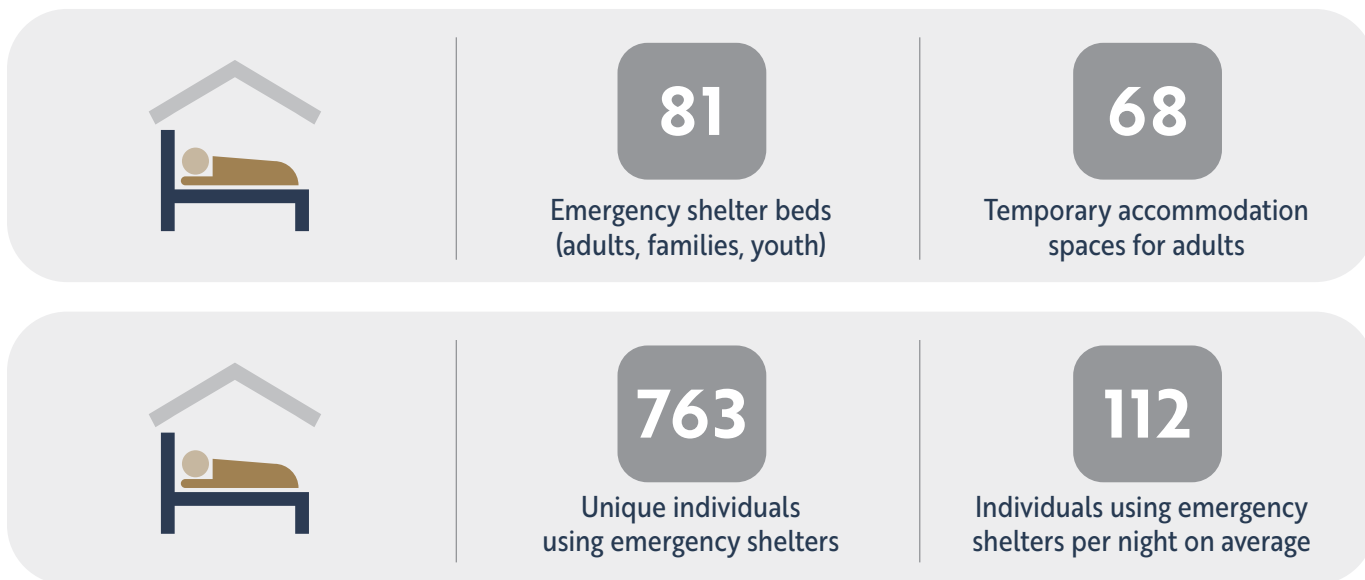
Stepping Stone, 23 Gordon Street, Guelph

Emergency Shelters and Temporary Accommodations

The Division's emergency responses have dramatically increased over time requiring additional municipal investments to support our community to address the lack of community housing, government-funded affordable housing, and Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit subsidies.

Figure 8:
Emergency Shelters
and Temporary
Accommodations

Source: Emergency Shelters and Temporary Accommodations



Winter Response Plan

The Division is committed to offering individuals in unsheltered homelessness a warm and safe temporary accommodation during cold winter months while prioritizing housing permanency so that individuals do not return to homelessness. The Winter Response Plan is a coordinated initiative led by the Division to support people experiencing unsheltered homelessness during colder months. Through strategic planning and collaboration with service partners, the Winter Response Plan offers people experiencing unsheltered homelessness a warm, dedicated place to stay, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, from October to April. The Winter Response Plan prioritizes access to temporary accommodation, tangibles (e.g., tents, tarps, sleeping bags, warm clothing, basic essentials, transportation, storage) and basic needs. In the City of Guelph, individuals are referred to 128 Norfolk for 24/7 temporary accommodations, with hotels being considered in exceptional circumstances. In the County of Wellington, individuals are offered hotel rooms based on availability.

Of the 24 households that obtained permanent housing through the 2024-2025 winter response, 88% had maintained their housing in 2025, 12 months after they were housed.⁸

Source: ⁸ Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS).

A number of contributing factors supported the successes of the Winter Response Plan. Consultation with the Lived Experience Advisory Group and local service partners during the planning and implementation of the programme was an important contribution. The Lived Experience Advisory Group provided integral feedback regarding the tangible items that are not available through emergency shelters or temporary accommodation, such as hot packs, sleeping bags, tarps, sleeping mats, clothing, emergency blankets, and tents. The Lived Experience Advisory Group also encouraged additional direct consultation with individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

In 2025, the Division introduced two accountability measures that contributed to the success of housing placements. These included:

- A Housing Engagement Plan, which identifies a pathway to permanent housing, including health services if needed
- A Housing Engagement Agreement, which highlights the participant’s code of conduct, programme requirements, and implications for not following through on expectations.

Table 7:
Winter
Response Plan

Source: 2024-25 Winter Response Plan Summary Report

Individuals Accessed Temporary Accommodations	Tangibles Issued	Access to Storage and Transportation	Individuals Housed
94	115	15	24

Housing Placements and Supports

Housing placements and supports involve strategies and resources to move people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing solutions, and the provision of supports (health, mental health, addictions, housing) that are needed to reduce the risk of housing instability and/or recurring experiences of homelessness. Depending on the needs of the individual or household, this can include solutions in market rental, community, government-funded affordable, or supportive housing. Housing placements are a result of a variety of housing options established by the Division including subsidized housing, government-funded affordable housing, and rent support programmes.

By-Name Data

The Wellington-Guelph By-Name Data is a real-time list of all people experiencing homelessness in Wellington-Guelph. Overseen by the Division, this list helps in prioritizing needs and matching services to individuals, and monitors changes in housing status as individuals and families move in and out of homelessness. Movement into homelessness is referred to as inflow and movement out of homelessness is referred to as outflow. By highlighting inflow and outflow trends and fluctuations, the By-Name Data helps inform outreach and diversion strategies to reduce inflow into homelessness through prevention, and identify local resources and strategies to connect

individuals with permanent housing solutions. This targeted need-based approach plays a central role in supporting the community's efforts to end chronic homelessness in a coordinated and data-informed manner.

In 2025, there were 202 housing placements for individuals and households experiencing chronic homelessness¹⁴. This represents the incredible effort to increase outflow through the shelter system. Despite these efforts, the total number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness has continued to increase. Table 8 shows the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in Wellington-Guelph in 2025.

Table 8:
 Individuals
 Experiencing Chronic
 Homelessness,
 Wellington-Guelph,
 2025

Source: Wellington-Guelph Centralized Waiting List

Individuals Experiencing Chronic Homelessness	Number
Adults (includes 25 Indigenous)	190
Youth	13
Individuals in families	22
Total	225



Stepping Stone, 23 Gordon Street, Guelph

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing provides an intermediate step between emergency shelter and permanent housing. It offers individuals a safe place to stay temporarily, along with a programme of individualized support services such as counselling, job training and placement, community activities, and help with life skills. Transitional housing supports individuals in need of structure, support and/or skill building, in order to move from homelessness to housing stability and ultimately prevent a return to homelessness.

In March 2025, Wellington County opened its first transitional housing facility for adults, located at 65 Delhi Street in Guelph, offering 28 units with 24/7 support. The facility reached full capacity (28 individuals housed) by November 2025.

Supportive Housing

Supportive housing refers to housing that offers rental assistance accompanied by individualized health support services for people with complex needs, including brain injury, developmental disabilities, mental health, and/or substance use. Permanent supportive housing is offered in purpose-built housing where supports and resources are offered on site, and through a “scattered sites” model that provides wraparound supports to individuals where they live.

Referrals for permanent supportive housing are made through the Coordinated Access System for individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness. After completing an assessment, households are added to the By-Name Data. When an opportunity becomes available in transitional or permanent supportive housing, households are prioritized based on need and suitability. Table 9 shows the permanent supportive housing sites, and the number of units per site, in Wellington-Guelph in 2025.

Table 9:
Permanent Supportive
Housing Units,
Wellington-Guelph, 2025

Source: A Place to Call Home 2023 Annual Report, County of Wellington
Note: the number of supportive housing units did not change in 2025.

Permanent Supportive Housing	Number of Units
Bellevue	8
Grace Gardens	32
Shelldale	32
Supportive Addiction and Mental Health Scattered Sites	24
Total	96

Centralized Waiting List for Rent Geared to Income Housing

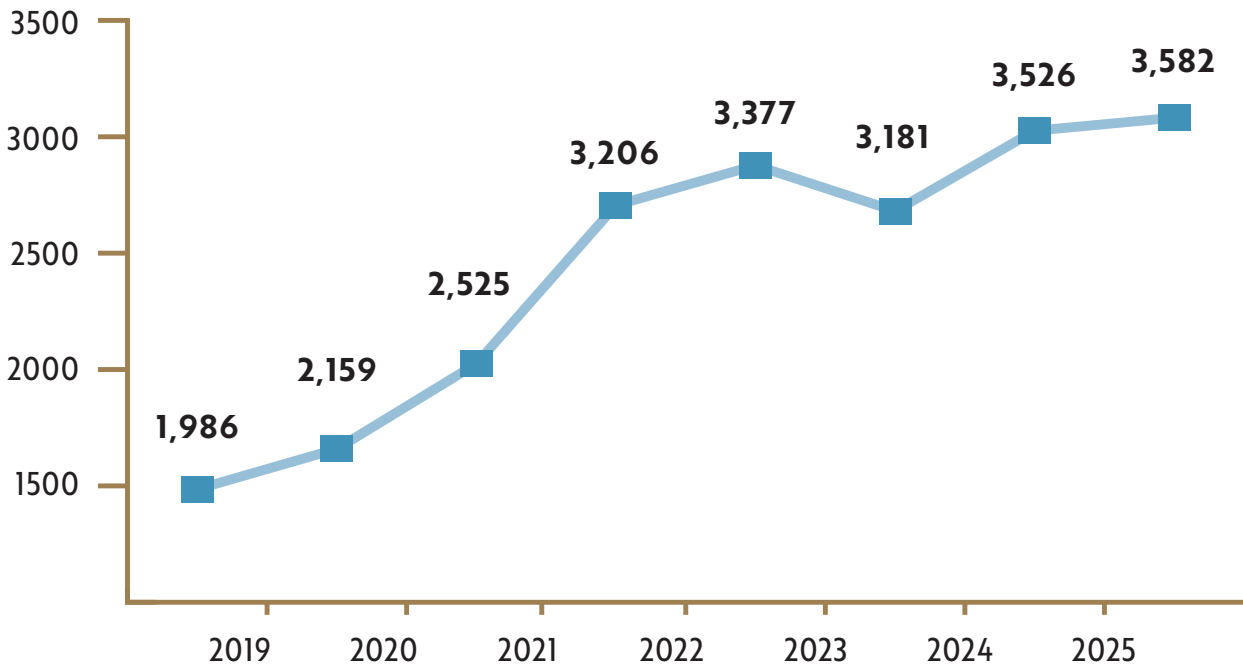
The Division manages the Wellington-Guelph Centralized Waiting List in compliance with criteria set out in the Housing Services Act, 2011 for the purpose of allocating Rent Geared to Income, Rent Support and Special Needs housing units.

As of December 31, 2025, there were 3,582 households on the waitlist. The majority of applicants are waiting for one-bedroom units.

Figure 9 presents the number of eligible households on the Centralized Waiting List waiting for subsidized housing between 2019 and 2025. The number of eligible households waiting for subsidized housing has continued to trend upwards since 2019, highlighting the increasing need for expanded services and funding. The waitlist fluctuates based on the number of eligible applications, the number of cancelled or ineligible applications, and the number of individuals housed.

Figure 9: Number of Applicant Households on the Wellington-Guelph Centralized Waiting List, 2019-2025

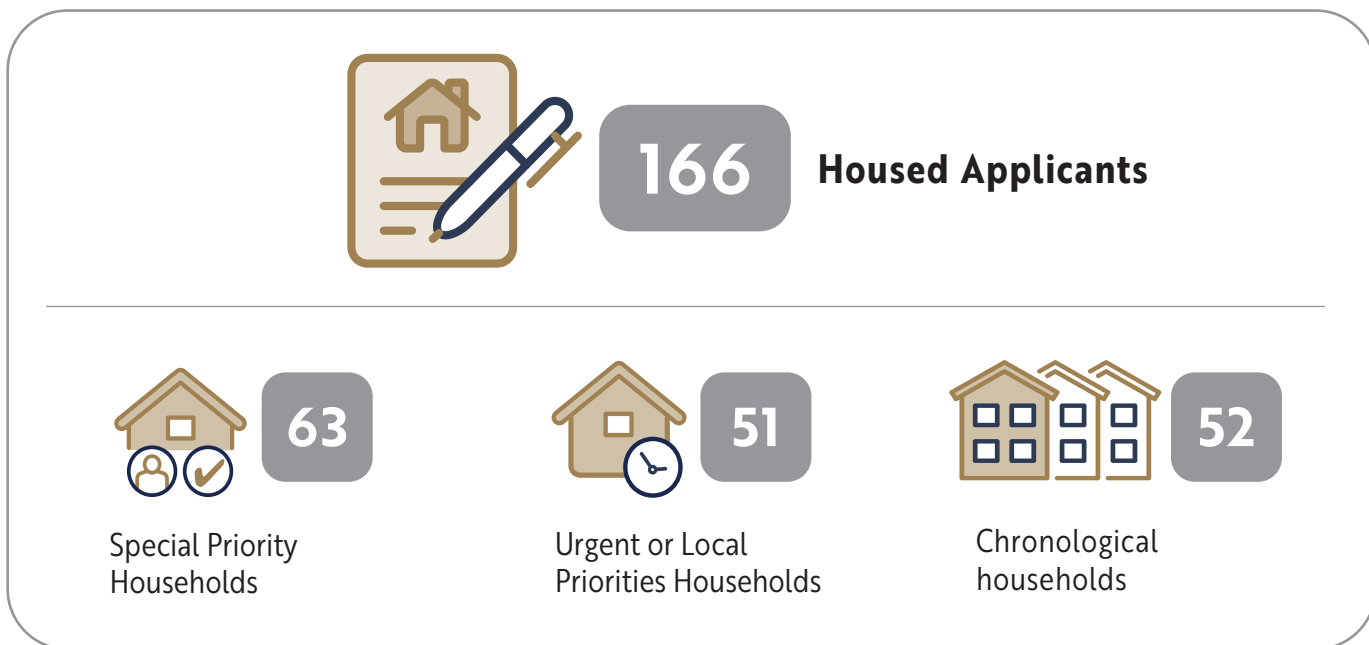
Source: Wellington-Guelph Centralized Waiting List



Of the 3,582 households on the waitlist at the end of 2025, 160 households held Special Priority status (survivors of domestic violence) and eight were identified as Local Priorities (including Uninhabitable Housing, Family Reunification, Hospital Discharge, and individuals from the Coordinated Entry System). Households that are not designated one of the priority statuses described above are prioritized based on their application date and referred to as Chronological Households.

Figure 10:
Number of Housed Applicants in 2025

Source: Wellington-Guelph Centralized Waiting List



Subsidized Housing

Subsidized housing, also known as rent-gated-to-income housing, ensures that tenants pay no more than 30% of their household income on rent. The County owns and operates 1,264 subsidized housing units across the Wellington-Guelph area. Community housing providers manage an additional 1,330 units, with another 163 units of affordable housing owned and operated by the County of Wellington as the Service System Manager.

Through its role as Service System Manager, the Division supports the delivery of 1,330 social housing units operated by 14 non-profit and co-operative landlords. The Division continues to meet with housing provider boards, sector groups and other Service System Managers to discuss opportunities and education surrounding regulatory changes, funding opportunities and community development.

Government-Funded Affordable Housing

Government-funded affordable housing ensures that tenants pay rental costs set at or below 80% of average market rent. These units represent vital community infrastructure and play a key role in providing safe and affordable housing options to low-income households. The Division plays a crucial role in expanding the availability of government-funded affordable housing in Wellington-Guelph. Through Municipal, Provincial and Federal programmes, as well as collaborative work with community partners, the Division seeks to make meaningful increases in the complement of affordable housing options available in our community.

Since 2005, the Division, as Service System Manager, has supported the development of 681 units of government-funded affordable housing. In 2025, the Division completed meetings with non-profits, charities, developers and housing providers interested in pursuing development, and completed a request for proposal for Provincial programme funding open to housing providers, charitable organizations and non-profit corporations towards approximately \$1.8 million for the development of affordable rental housing. Through a number of Municipal, Provincial and Federal programmes, the Division received Council approval to commit over \$2.5 million in funding towards the

development of affordable housing in Wellington-Guelph and is currently supporting three affordable housing projects in active development. Figure 11 shows the total number of affordable housing units in Wellington-Guelph.

Figure 11:
Government
Funded
Affordable
Housing Units

Source: County of Wellington internal service delivery data

Tenants pay rental costs set at or below 80% of average market rent.

681

Total units



163

County of Wellington
owned units
(Wellington County only)



518

Not-for-Profit
units



Rent Support Programmes

The Division offers rent support programmes that aim to improve housing affordability and stability for low-income individuals and families. These programmes provide either direct financial assistance to help cover the gap between what households can afford and market rent, or short-term support combined with services delivered through community agencies. Some programmes offer monthly subsidies paid directly to landlords or tenants, while others link rent assistance with wraparound supports for people facing challenges such as mental health or substance use. Together, these initiatives help prevent homelessness and promote housing stability in the Wellington-Guelph service delivery area.

Figure 12:
Rent Support
Programmes

Source: County of
Wellington internal
service delivery data

Tenants receive various forms of annual financial assistance to increase housing affordability and stability.

1,213
units



361
Canada Ontario
Housing Benefits
(COHB) units



691
Rent Subsidy
Support units



82
Retirement
Residence
Subsidy units



79
Supportive
Housing units



Maintenance Operations

The Division oversees the maintenance and capital renewal of 1,427 housing units owned by the County across Wellington-Guelph. Properties range from varying types, sizes and capital needs. The capital programme has grown both in volume (by acquiring new housing stock) and complexity due to aging infrastructure, increasing legislative requirements, rising costs of construction, climate change goals, and funding programme requirements.

In 2025, 6,720 work orders were received, with 6,023 completed. The total value of operational work orders paid out for 2025 was approximately \$5.33 million.



Notably, the past three years marked a transformational period for the housing portfolio through the introduction and successful completion of a \$12 million Federal funding allocation from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. This funding was provided in addition to the Division's existing operating and capital budgets, allowing the organization to accelerate infrastructure renewal, reduce deferred maintenance pressures, and realign the 10-Year Capital Plan to more sustainable funding levels. This investment enabled the Division

to transition from a reactive capital model to a proactive asset management strategy. With the completion of this funding programme, the portfolio is now significantly stronger, both operationally and financially. This capital programme reflects a balanced approach to maintaining and improving housing stock across multiple priority areas.

In 2025, 49 capital projects were completed, totalling approximately \$13.9 million with new capital projects accounting for \$5.8 million.

Tenant Support Programmes

The Division, along with community service providers, delivers a variety of case management support and counselling services to tenant households in Wellington-Guelph. The goal of these initiatives is to assist tenants who require more intensive services to enhance their quality of life and maintain stable housing.

The Division is responsible for the legislative administration of the calculation and implementation of rent-geared-to-income subsidies for all households across the community housing portfolio. This ensures affordability and directly supports housing stability for low-income tenants.

In addition, through the Social and Recreation Fund, the Division provides

financial support to Hope House to facilitate fresh food markets within rent-geared-to income buildings in Guelph. These markets offer free, fresh food to tenants directly in their buildings, eliminating transportation barriers and improving access to nutritious food. This fund also provides affordable camp experiences and child care through the summer to families experiencing low income.

In 2025, the Division experienced one of its most demanding and challenging years supporting residents' increasingly complex needs. The need for tenant supports increased significantly, with many households presenting higher and more diverse needs than in previous years. The Division continued to see a shift in the community, with more



tenants requiring intensive, ongoing assistance related to health, mobility, mental wellness, financial stability, accommodation requests, and interpersonal challenges.

A major contributing factor to this increased pressure has been the growing waitlists for external support agencies. Access to community-based services, including mental health supports, developmental services, and housing stability programmes, has become more limited. As a result, tenants often remain without the formal supports they need for extended periods. The Division continues to identify solutions to bridge those gaps wherever possible. This has required increased coordination, advocacy, and creative problem-solving to stabilize tenancies while awaiting outside intervention.

Neighbour conflicts have also risen in both frequency and complexity. Many situations involve heightened sensitivities, communication breakdowns, and competing

accommodation or lifestyle needs within shared living environments. These matters require significant time investment in mediation, documentation, education, and follow-up to prevent escalation and support positive tenancy outcomes.

Additionally, the Division has managed a consistently high volume of calls, emails, and in-person concerns. The nature of these inquiries has shifted from routine tenancy questions to more crisis-oriented or emotionally charged situations. This has required staff to exercise strong de-escalation skills, trauma-informed approaches, and clear boundary setting while maintaining professionalism and compassion.

The Division remains committed to supporting stable and successful tenancies. The work in 2025 has underscored the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and resilience as the needs within the community continue to evolve.

Tenant Stories

Tenant email after being supported by a Housing Community Support Worker:

“Hi, I wanted to take a minute to thank you again. I don’t think you realize how grateful I truly am for the opportunity. Thank you for trusting me. It’s only been a couple of days since I fully have been here and I already feel so at home which is surprising and the best way. I haven’t felt this relaxed and at home and it’s making things in other areas of my life so much easier. I met my new counselor. I am excited for the shift in my life because it’s a good one. My neighbors- their lovely and I’m sure there’s a bad apple out there somewhere but I have the tools to succeed thanks to people like you giving someone back their self-worth is all they need just a little support a little understanding and a little compassion.

There will never be words to express my gratitude and I hope to bump into you again in a different way at a different point in my path of this very interesting adventure. I look forward to seeing you I want you to know I am grateful to have met you I feel like I wish I had an opportunity to know you better. If still wish to pop by for a tea or a coffee I would be more than happy to hostess and it would be an honor to have you. I truly mean that in the short time I got to know you, you impacted my life in a way that I will never forget and I will go forward striving to impact somebody else’s life the way you impacted mine. Thank you for showing me that Humanity still exists because I had started to lose faith and at some points thought I’m going to end up being



a statistic but I am not a check mark on a page I’m a human, and I matter! This doesn’t define me, it’s something I’m going through. Thanks to people like you who looked past the damage and the fear. I will not just be okay for the first time in many years. I’m thirsty and have a great desire to thrive.”

Tenant Story about the gift of housing:

“I just wanted to let you know, this unit has been such a gift to me and my family. It gave me stability when I needed it and now I have bought my own home. I am so grateful to you and the staff there in Housing. I hope this unit

can be a gift to the next person who gets it. Thank you again for all your help and support.”

Tenant stories about the importance of community housing:

One applicant shared that, for the first time in many years, she would be able to pay her rent and still have money left for groceries.

Another expressed excitement about finally having a place of

his own after years of sharing accommodation because he could not afford to live independently.

Affordable housing truly makes a meaningful difference in people's lives.

System Pressures

The Division continues to focus on delivering services despite sustained structural and system pressures. The most prevalent challenges faced by the Division are the need for increased funding that is stable and predictable, alignment of Federal and Provincial government policies towards reducing and addressing homelessness, and health resources to support the increasingly complex needs throughout the community. This requires the Division to invest significant time, resources, and staff focusing on mediation, documentation, education, and follow-up efforts that prevent escalation and support positive tenancy outcomes. The rising complexity and demand in service delivery cannot be overstated.

Summary

2025 presented both challenges and opportunities for Wellington-Guelph as a community coming together to address the need for more safe, stable, and affordable housing. Despite increased system pressures in 2025, the Division has continued to deliver Provincially mandated social and affordable housing programmes, as well as initiatives to prevent and address homelessness in Wellington-Guelph. This report has highlighted the strong skills, teamwork, resilience and adaptability of staff alongside leveraging community partnerships that bring resources and expertise together to strengthen our community.

As the Service System Manager, the Division will continue our leadership role in developing a sustainable and integrated housing stability system in our ongoing effort to make Wellington-Guelph an even better place to call home.

Ontario Works



County of Wellington Social Services, 129 Wyndham Street, Guelph

Service System Manager Responsibilities

Ontario Works provides temporary financial assistance to residents in need while they are actively assisted in becoming employed and achieving financial self-reliance. Social assistance benefit rates, eligibility requirements, and programme delivery are regulated by the Provincial Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Key responsibilities include the following:

- Benefits are provided monthly and consist of a basic need and a shelter portion, as well as other benefits prescribed in Provincial regulations that consider family size and individual circumstances.
- Ontario Works offers employment and life stability supports which include the development of action plans, and referrals to community supports.
- Ontario Works administers Provincially and municipally funded discretionary benefit programmes to eligible low-income households, with urgent needs, who are not otherwise in receipt of Ontario Works assistance.
- To ensure accountability, the division's Cost Recovery (Eligibility and Special Benefits) team is primarily responsible for eligibility verification and review, overpayment recovery and client appeal processes.

Divisional Goals and Objectives

The Ontario Works Division strives to effectively serve people needing assistance by delivering high quality programmes and services in collaboration with our community partners and in accordance with Provincial legislation and directives governing the Ontario Works programme.

The goals and objectives of the Ontario Works programme are to:

- Recognize individual client responsibility and promote self-reliance through participation in life stabilization and employment supports.
- Provide financial assistance to those most in need while they meet obligations to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment.
- Ensure accountability in service delivery to provincial and local taxpayers.

2025 Provincial Performance Measures

Ontario Works performance measures are established by the Province and included in the annual service agreement between the County of Wellington and the Provincial government.

Table 10:
2025 Provincial
Performance
Measures

Data source: Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
- Social Assistance Programs Division

Performance Measure	Description	Actual 2024	Provincial Target 2025	Actual 2025
Ontario Works adults with participation requirements that have an Action Plan	Percentage of adults that have an Action Plan outlining their participation activities to support moving forward	77%	100%	90%
Ontario Works adults with participation requirements that are referred to Employment Ontario	Percentage of adults referred to Employment Ontario to receive employment supports	32%	30%	21%
Ontario Works cases that exit to employment	Percentage of the total Ontario Works caseload that exited due to securing paid employment	9%	14%	8%
Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) who exited the programme for any reason and return within one year	Percentage of the total Ontario Works caseload that returned to the programme within one year	37%	35%	36%

The Ontario Works Division advanced the Province’s Integrated Employment Services service delivery model throughout 2025 by taking an active and coordinated approach in how clients are connected to employment supports. Working closely with local Employment Ontario offices, staff strengthened referral practices to ensure that Ontario Works recipients were connected to the most appropriate supports based on their needs. This targeted and individualized approach reduced referral volumes and ensured that individuals ready for employment-focused supports received effective referrals to Employment Ontario programs.

While two of the Provincial performance measures fall outside of the legislated authority of Ontario Works, the Province is tracking these metrics to monitor the delivery of Integrated Employment Services across ministries.

2025 Service Delivery

Applications

County of Wellington Ontario Works processed 2,495 applications for social assistance in 2025, which includes applications for ongoing Ontario Works Assistance, as well as applications for Emergency Assistance to support people in crisis with short term financial support where they are not eligible for ongoing social assistance.

Caseload Growth

The Ontario Works caseload has experienced rapid growth post-pandemic and continues to increase. The caseload in December 2025 was 15% higher than the previous year, increasing by 337 cases between December 2024 and December 2025. Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services forecasts suggest that caseloads could increase by 9% over 2025 actual numbers by the end of 2026.

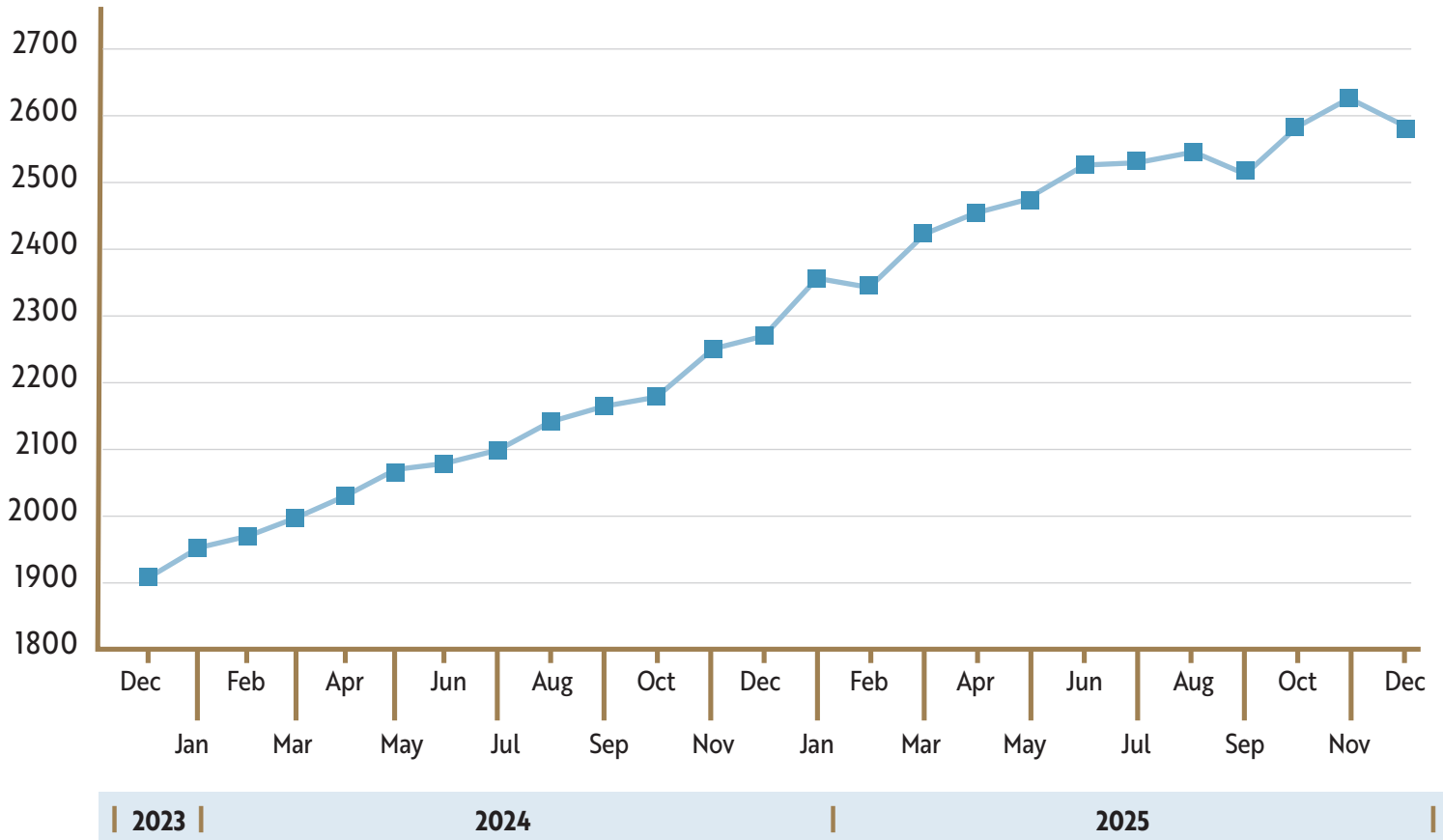


Processed 2,495 applications

Figure 13:
Monthly Ontario
Works Caseload

Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Social Assistance Operations Performance Report – Wellington CMSM (December 2025).

Monthly Ontario Works Caseloads

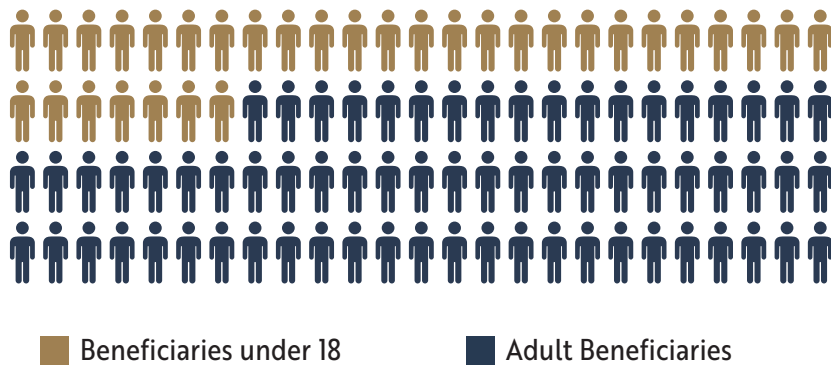


Ontario Works Caseload Demographics

As of December 31, 2025, **4,156 people (2,595 cases)** were reliant on Ontario Works financial assistance to meet their basic needs in Guelph and Wellington County. 78% of Ontario Works recipients in 2025 were residents of Guelph and 22% were residents of Wellington County. 32% of all people reliant on Ontario Works in 2025 were children under the age of 18 years.

Figure 14:
Age of
Ontario Works
Beneficiaries

Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Caseload at a Glance Report – Wellington CMSM (December 2025).



Household Composition

Most households on the Ontario Works caseload are single individuals at 71%, followed by single-parent households at 24%. Unlike families with children who can access targeted supports and child benefits, single individuals have limited access to other income supports and are over-represented on the Ontario Works caseload.

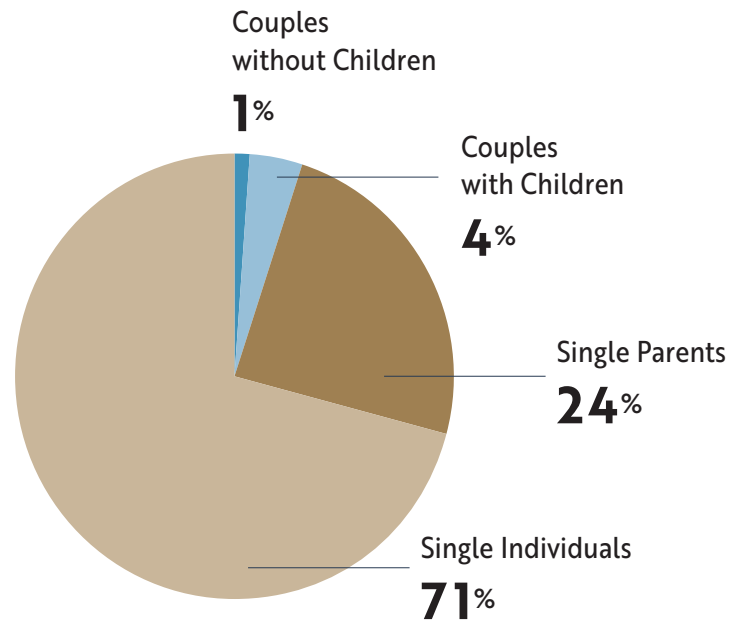


Figure 15:
Household
Composition

Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Caseload at a Glance Report – Wellington CMSM (December 2025).

Gender Distribution

The gender distribution on the Ontario Works caseload is split evenly between male and female overall. Most single parent households, however, are female-led at 92%, while the majority of single individuals on the caseload are male at 62%.

Areas of Highest Need

The top life stabilization needs identified by Ontario Works recipients through their Action Plans were financial need, mental health, food security, transportation and housing. Although mental health was identified as the primary need in 2024, financial need has overtaken it to become the most significant concern for Ontario Works recipients in 2025.

Areas of highest need identified by Ontario Works recipients:



Financial Need



Mental Health



Food Security



Transportation



Housing

Ontario Works staff worked closely with each recipient to understand their individual circumstances, strengths, and barriers, and provided case management support to help them move toward greater life stabilization and employment readiness. Through regular appointments and goal-setting, staff connected recipients to the most appropriate resources, including referrals to community agencies for services such as housing support and mental health counselling.

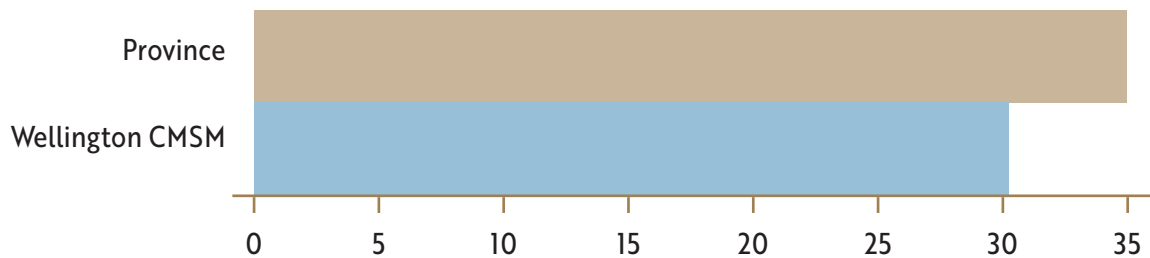
Ontario Works staff supported 243 individuals and families to transition to the Ontario Disability Support Program in 2025. This programme provides higher rates of social assistance to eligible recipients living with a disability or complex health needs, compared to the monthly benefit rates for Ontario Works recipients.

Average Months on Assistance

The average time spent on assistance was 30 months, lower than the provincial average of 35 months. On average, single parent households remain on assistance for the longest period of time, while couples without dependent children tend to exit assistance faster than other household types.

Figure 16:
Average Months on Assistance

Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Caseload at a Glance Report – Wellington Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) (December 2025).

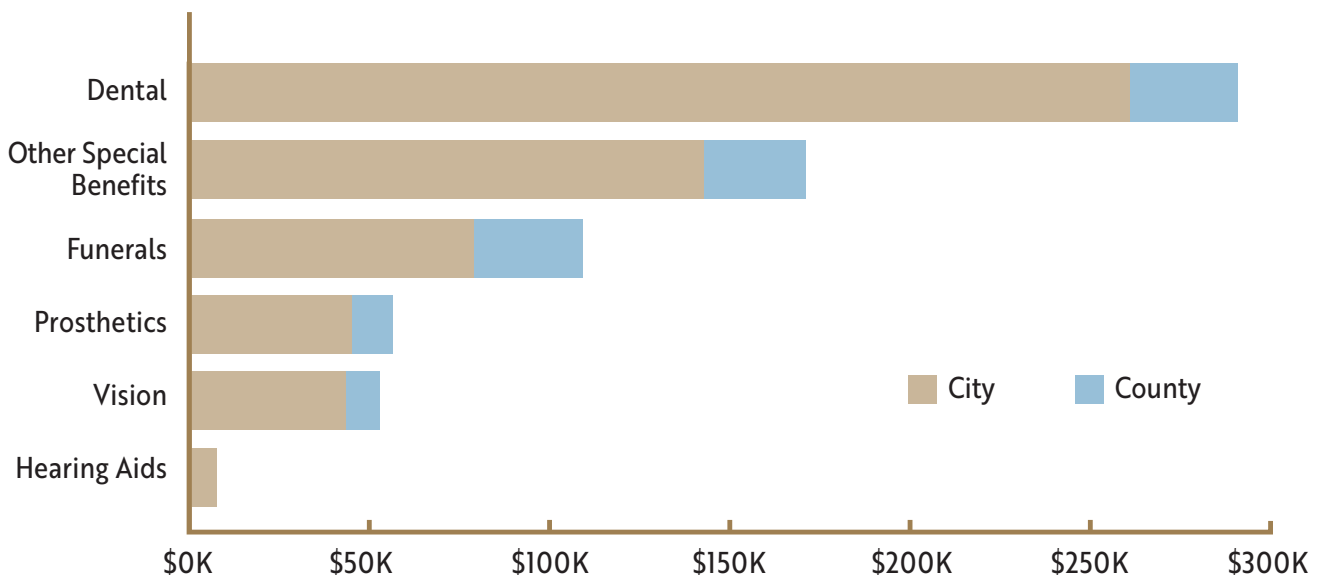


Provincially Cost-Shared Discretionary Benefits

Ontario Works supports social assistance recipients to access medically necessary health-related benefits, as well as low-cost funerals, with Provincial programme funding. These benefits are issued in accordance with Ontario Works directives and do not impact the municipal tax levy.

Figure 17:
Provincially Cost-Shared Discretionary Benefit Spending

Source: County of Wellington General Ledger 2025



Community Investments

100% Municipally-Funded Discretionary Benefits

The Ontario Works division also delivers 100% municipally-funded discretionary benefits for Guelph and Wellington County. This programme provides low-income residents of Wellington County and Guelph with financial support to cover basic medical expenses when there is no other social assistance programme or other community support that meets their needs. The programme has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of those in our community who would otherwise have no ability to pay for critical medical necessities.

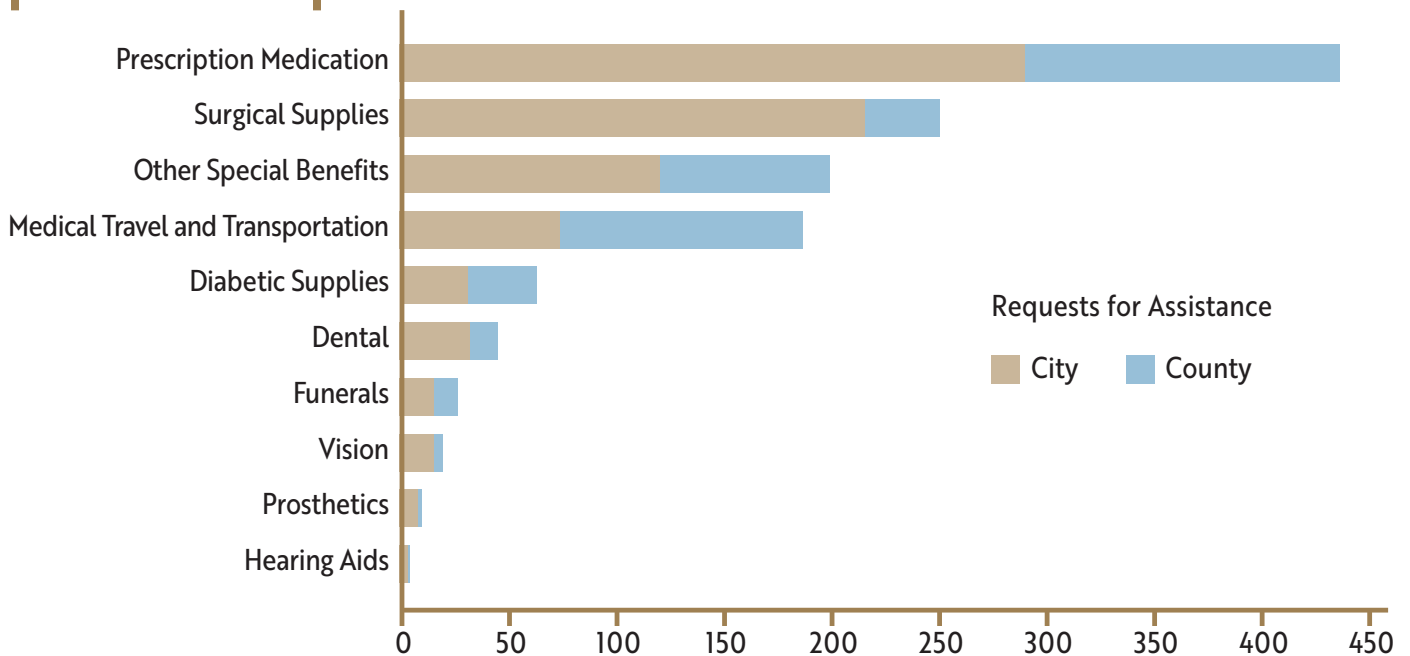


The 2025 municipal discretionary benefit funding allocation enabled social services staff to assist 317 unique individuals with a total of 1,252 requests for assistance.

63% of all requests for these supports were from City residents, while 37% of requests came from residents of Wellington County. The majority of individuals who accessed municipally funded discretionary benefits are subsidized retirement home residents, accounting for 71% of all medical benefit requests. Prescription medication, surgical supplies and other special benefits such as wheelchairs and mobility supports were the most requested benefits in 2025.

Figure 18:
Total Requests for Assistance, 100% Municipally-Funded Discretionary Benefits

Source: Discretionary Benefits Tracker 2025, Ontario Works Division



Community Outreach

Ontario Works began expanding community outreach in 2025, providing supports and access to service for recipients at six different locations throughout the City of Guelph. Expanding community outreach in the County is a divisional priority for 2026.

Community Grants

The Social Services Department oversees the implementation of 100% County funded community-based grants that have been approved by County Council. These grants aim to support vulnerable individuals in our communities, strengthen local capacity to respond to social and health challenges, and contribute to well-being across Wellington County. In 2025 these grants supported a wide range of local needs, including supports for victims of domestic violence, education bursaries for youth in care, and strengthened local advocacy for system and policy change to address the root causes of poverty.

Grant recipients in 2025 included:

- Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo-Wellington
- Children's Foundation of Guelph and Wellington
- Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County
- Guelph Wellington Women in Crisis
- Guelph and Wellington Poverty Elimination Collaborative (hosted by United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin)
- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
- Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy (hosted by Guelph Community Health Centre)



Market Bucks

The Market Bucks programme, managed and fully funded by the County of Wellington Social Services department in collaboration with Economic Development, provides individuals and families with vouchers to purchase products at participating Wellington County farmers' markets throughout the market season. Community organizations and municipalities are also able to purchase Market Bucks at a reduced rate to provide vouchers to people in need in communities across Wellington County. The programme

aims to increase access to fresh, healthy food for Social Services clients and community members, increase exposure and revenue for local farmers, and build community connections.

In 2025, this programme supported **190 households** to access fresh food at all local farmers' markets. Market Bucks purchased **\$14,160** worth of goods from farmers and producers across the County of Wellington during the 2025 farmer's market season.



2025 Market Bucks Programme



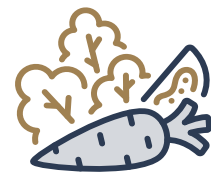
190

Households



\$14,160

Worth of goods



Impact Stories

Coordinated Service - from Isolation to Connection

A newcomer family to Canada was granted Ontario Works approximately one year after arrival in the country. One of the teen family members was not attending school or connected with any health care or social supports due to needs associated with her disability and barriers associated with language and culture. Educational staff at the school of the teen's siblings learned of the situation and began connecting with the family and with community partners, including Ontario Works.

Collaboration between the school board, child and developmental service agencies, and Ontario Works led to regular case conferences and a coordinated plan for this teen and family. The family was granted Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities. The teen began attending school. An Ontario Works Caseworker quickly became a vital part of this team, offering previously unknown benefits to the family around the needs associated with the teen's disability. Connections were made to immigrant services, respite services, and health care professionals including in-home supports, doctors, pharmacists, specialists, and surgeons. Through the advocacy, coordination, determination, and efficiency of the care team working in tandem, the teen was granted Developmental Services Ontario supports and will soon



transition to the Ontario Disability Support Program.

Within two years, a child and family went from a place of isolation, without support, facing significant barriers including developmental, financial, and language, to

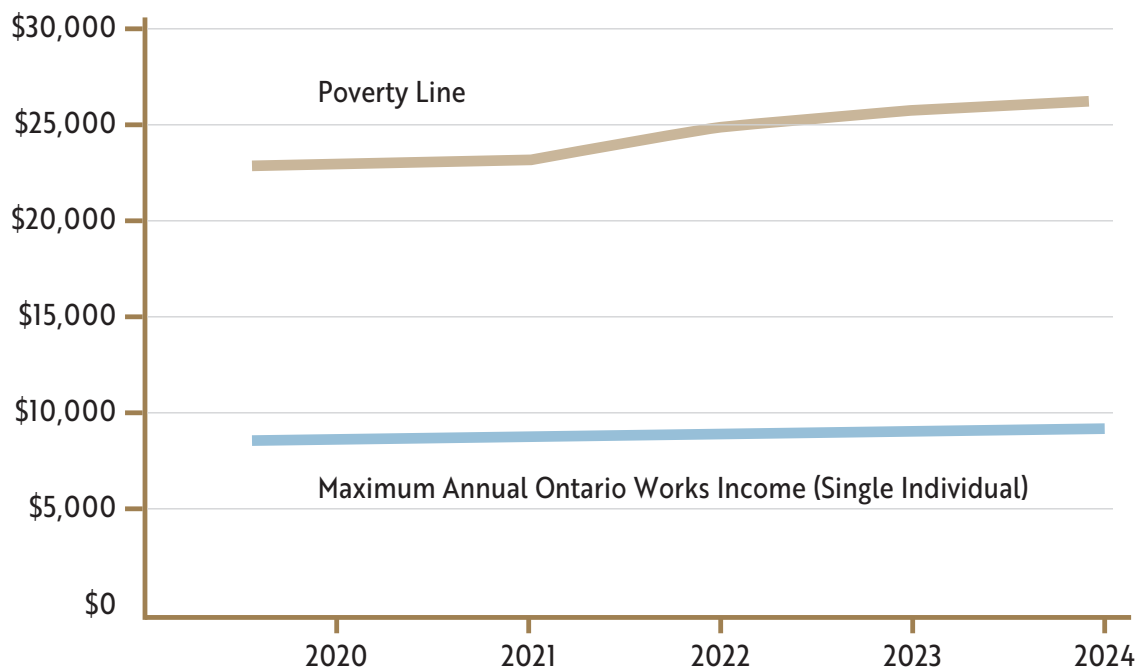
experiencing the improved outcomes and lessened barriers resulting from community connection and a coordinated team supporting service navigation and care planning. This collaborative response, anchored in compassionate guidance and efficient implementation of solutions, offered this child and family connections to community resources, clear next steps and strategies, and an aligned, unified team of service providers to rely on each step of the way along their new pathway of direction and opportunity.

System Pressures

Monthly benefit rates for Ontario Works (see Table 10) leave recipients in deep poverty, far below the official poverty line (as shown in Figure 19).

Figure 19:
Ontario Works
Income Compared
to Poverty Line

Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services - Ontario Works Rates; and Statistics Canada (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110006601>).



Maximum monthly benefit rates fall far below the cost of basic necessities (as shown in Figure 19). Individuals in receipt of Ontario Works cannot afford adequate and suitable housing or nutritious food, leaving them vulnerable to poor health outcomes and unable to move beyond survival. More than 6% of Ontario Works recipients locally are homeless.

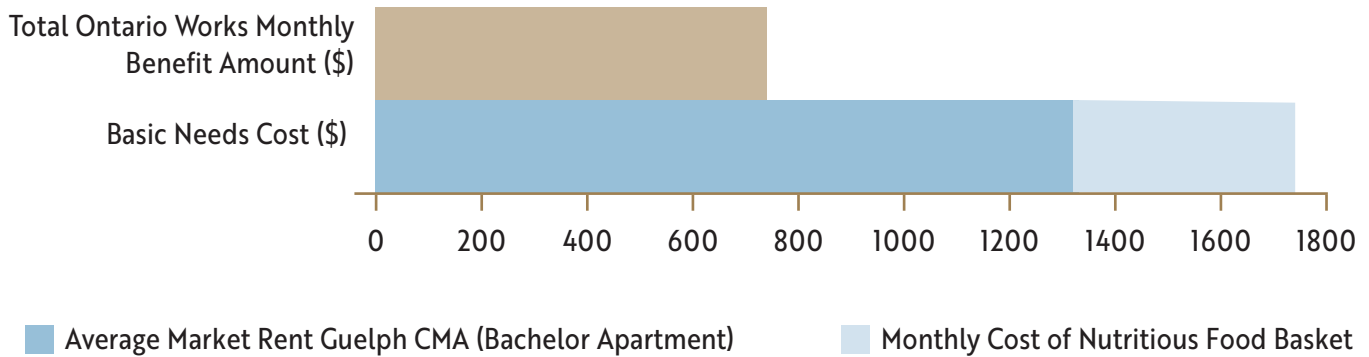
Table 10:
Sample Ontario
Works Benefit
Rates

	Single Individual	Single Parent with 2 Children
Basic Needs	\$343	\$360
Shelter	\$390	\$697
Total Monthly Assistance	\$733	\$1,057

Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Figure 14:
Basic Needs Costs
relative to Ontario
Works Monthly
Benefit

Source: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Wellington-Dufferin Public Health.



Summary

In 2025, County of Wellington Ontario Works supported 4,156 individuals across Wellington-Guelph to meet their basic needs through the administration of financial assistance and life stabilization supports. The caseload grew by 15% over the previous year and was predominantly composed of single individuals and single parents with children, many facing significant financial, housing, mental health, and food security challenges.

In line with the Provincial programme objectives, staff strengthened referrals to employment services to encourage self-reliance and supported 243 individuals with disabilities and complex medical needs to transition to the Ontario Disability Support Program.

County of Wellington Ontario Works also delivered municipally funded discretionary benefits to 317 low-income- residents, primarily seniors, to cover critical basic medical expenses. Community investments such as Market Bucks and County-funded grants for community organizations helped improve access to food and social supports for vulnerable residents. In 2025, County of Wellington Ontario Works also expanded community outreach to six locations in the City of Guelph.

Through expanded service access, collaboration with community partners and a focus on client-centered support, County of Wellington Ontario Works continued to support a growing number of individuals in 2025 despite systemic pressures and low benefit rates.



Alternate Formats Available Upon Request.

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