

Housing & Homelessness: The Challenges Faced by People with Physical Disabilities

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Written by:

Tracy Smith-Carrier, Researcher
Beverly Patterson, Researcher
Dan Vandebelt, Social Planner

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To obtain a copy of this report please contact:

Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries
24 Queen's Square Cambridge, Ontario, N1S 1H6
phone: (519) 623-1713
fax: (519) 621-6220
e-mail: [info@ socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org](mailto:info@socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org)

or visit our website: www.socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org

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Secondly, we would like to acknowledge the on-going work of the Region of Waterloo in identifying the need to research into the issues of people who are literally homeless or at-risk of homelessness, and particularly addressing the concerns of people with disabilities.

Thirdly, recognition is afforded to the staff involved in the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative in helping to facilitate the dialogue in which this issue was raised.

Executive Summary

While there may be very few individuals with severe physical disabilities who are living under bridges or in emergency shelters, it is clear that there are some crucial housing challenges faced by people with physical disabilities in Waterloo Region. These challenges make these people at risk of being literally homeless and demand local action.

This report highlights the findings of interviews with several people about the barriers and issues to find and maintain appropriate housing in Waterloo Region. Some of these individuals have physical disabilities themselves and some work in agencies that provide services to people with disabilities.

A number of critical issues that surfaced in the interviews including:

- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Availability
- Eligibility
- Geography
- Poverty
- Emotional and Social Isolation
- Inappropriate housing
- Attitudinal bias
- Communication barriers
- Lack of appropriate supports
- Awareness
- Vulnerability

All of the participants interviewed in this study repeatedly referred to the issues listed above. However, while all of the themes listed are noteworthy, the three most widely acknowledged issues for people with physical disabilities consistently involved shortages in the availability, affordability, and accessibility of housing in the Region of Waterloo.

Social service providers in Waterloo Region have contributed greatly in helping people with disabilities find and maintain housing. Although they offer many supportive programs and services, the needs of people are so multi-faceted and complex that service providers confront daily the difficulties associated with supporting a population facing such unique challenges. Each challenge presented in this report may represent only one obstacle for a person to overcome, however, when these needs are compounded by other significant challenges, the setbacks to finding appropriate housing become momentous. For instance, an isolated person who has multiple physical and mental disabilities will likely face greater barriers to suitable housing than a person with a mild disability who has the support of friends and family.

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