



Homelessness Support Toolkit for Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)



Hamilton

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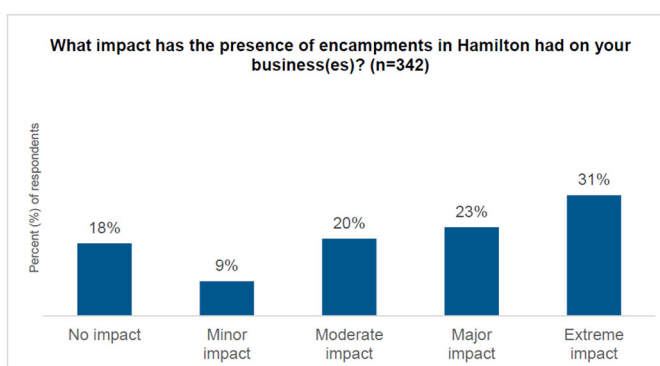
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1. Introduction

Homelessness is an issue that impacts all Hamiltonians. As of January 2025, there are at least 1,600 people experiencing homelessness in Hamilton each night, and likely many more who experience “hidden homelessness” which are not reflected in our statistics. In recent years, the presence of homeless “encampments” has grown in cities across North America and Hamilton has been no exception.

In July 2024, Hamilton Economic Development conducted a survey of Hamilton’s business community to better understand what impacts the presence of homeless encampments have had on businesses and their customers.

Based on the results of the 342 surveys completed, we saw that the majority (82%) of respondents indicated that the presence of encampments has had an impact on their business, ranging from extreme (31%) and major (23%), to moderate (20%) and minor (9%). The key challenges that businesses identified were increased litter, discarded drug paraphernalia, theft, vandalism, and harassment. As a result, businesses reported reduced customer traffic, lost revenue, and difficulties in retaining employees.



Source: Encampment Impacts on Hamilton Businesses Consultation Results (PED24143)

In the face of these challenges, we also saw business owners coming forward with many practical solutions. The overwhelming majority of responses focused on the need for increased support to persons experiencing homelessness, as well as enhanced enforcement responses and proactive clean-ups to ensure a healthy and safe environment.

We hope that this toolkit can provide you with some practical steps to take when you meet someone in your Business Improvement Area (BIA) who is experiencing homelessness and may be looking for support.

This toolkit also includes an up-to-date listing of which number to call when you have a specific issue related to homelessness in your BIA.

2. “Why can’t people that are homeless in the BIA just be taken to a place that can help them?”¹

Variations of this question come up a lot, usually from a place of both frustration and compassion. People experiencing homelessness (or at least thought to be homeless) are often encountered in the BIA, and some may appear to be in distress.

Customers and BIA members can be upset, bothered, concerned, or worried about people experiencing homelessness in the BIAs and want to make sure people are being supported and served, and that they have access to food and a safe place to stay at night.

If customers and BIA members feel unsafe, or witness a crime, please call 9-1-1.

Important facts to know:

Services to people experiencing homelessness are voluntary.

There is no legal mechanism to force people to use a community service or stay at an emergency shelter. While trained professionals may make use of assertive interviewing as techniques in engagement, the person that is experiencing homelessness must make an informed decision to receive service.

There is only one exception to this rule and that is if the person experiencing homelessness is a clear danger to themselves or others.

The Mental Health Act sets out the powers and obligations of psychiatric facilities in Ontario. The Act governs how admissions are done, the categories of admissions, as well as directives around assessment, care, and treatment. The Act outlines the powers of police officers and Justices of the Peace to make orders for an individual (who has met certain criteria) to undergo psychiatric examination by an appropriate mental health professional. Patient rights are also referred to the Consent and Capacity Board.

Being homeless is not illegal.

In 1994, the Courts determined elements of vagrancy laws were unconstitutional because they interfered with life, liberty, and security of the person. Some of the behaviours exhibited by people experiencing homelessness or activities required for day-to-day survival may be subject to other laws or by-laws, but simply being without a permanent place to live does not render a person without rights, nor does it nullify the Canadian Charter.

¹ Information on this page has been adapted from the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association’s “Homeless Response Tool-Kit”. For more information on the OBIAA, visit: obiaa.com

3. Key Service Providers

Homelessness is a multi-faceted issue. In practice, that means one worker from one organization is not going to be able to address all the challenges that a person experiencing homelessness may be facing. By understanding how each piece fits together, you can be confident in knowing that your concern or request for information is being directed to the right place.

The **City of Hamilton** contributes by:

- Providing outreach services to persons experiencing homelessness
- Providing affordable housing
- Providing housing supports (social housing waitlist, housing allowances)
- Enforcing municipal by-laws related to parks, public and private property
- Cleaning up litter and waste related to parks and public property
- Licensing animals
- Community paramedic services
- Social assistance and case management

Community agencies contribute by:

- Providing emergency shelter beds, transitional, supportive, and affordable housing
- Drop in services
- Offering case management and referrals
- Providing meals and laundry services
- Assisting individuals with finding permanent housing



Health care providers contribute by:

- Organizing regular clinics in the shelter system, supportive housing and in encampments
- Providing mobile wound care services
- Connecting clients with mental health and addiction supports


The **Hamilton Police Service** contribute by:

- Responding to criminal activity
- Meeting with residents and business owners to discuss neighbourhood needs
- Responding to encampments on private property

4. Making the right call

Life Threatening Situation


Police / Paramedics / Fire

 **9-1-1**

To report any immediate threats to the safety and well-being of any community member, including loss of consciousness, frostbite, heat stroke, substance poisoning, or harassment.

Mental Health Crisis

Crisis Outreach and Support Team

 **905-972-8338**

Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST) is a program of St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton that provides services to people who reside in the City of Hamilton and are experiencing a crisis related to mental health and addictions. A mental health professional will respond to calls on the COAST crisis line and complete an intake assessment regarding the mental health concern. Support, recommendations, and a plan for intervention will be developed.

Call COAST if the situation includes:


- A person struggling with mental illness symptoms
- Some concerns for safety, but not an immediate risk
- Suicidal thinking/thoughts of harming self or others, but relatively safe or supported at this time
- Not caring for basic needs
- Significant decompensation from known baseline
- Serious mental illness symptoms appearing for the first time

COAST response time is hours, not minutes. COAST workers are not "First Responders" and are not equipped to step into potentially dangerous situations as patrol officers do.

If a person is experiencing a mental health crisis and requires immediate assistance, please call 9-1-1.

Unsheltered Homelessness

Housing Focused Street Outreach

 **905-546-2828**

 **unsheltered@hamilton.ca**


The Housing Focused Street Outreach Team (HFSO) works with individuals who are experiencing homelessness and face barriers to engage with services within the community. Outreach workers assist individuals in connecting to programs providing housing, income, health care, and other appropriate community supports. If you know

someone who is experiencing homelessness, please encourage a connection to this service.

HFSO is not a crisis line. If someone is in crisis, consider calling 9-1-1.

A new encampment forming in a BIA

Municipal Law Enforcement

 **905-546-2782, Option 1**

 **encampments@hamilton.ca**

At the January 15, 2025, General Issues Committee meeting the 2023 Encampment Protocol was rescinded effective March 6, 2025. On March 6, staff transitioned from the rescinded Encampment Protocol to enforcement of the City of Hamilton Parks By-law No. 01-219 as amended, which prohibits camping in City parks. Municipal Law Enforcement also enforces Streets By-law No. 86-77 as amended which requires the right of way to be clear of obstructions and encumbrances.

To report the presence of an encampment in a City park or on public property such as sidewalks, please contact the Coordinated Encampment Response Team at encampments@hamilton.ca or call 905-546-2782, Option 1.


The number and email are monitored Monday to Friday during regular business hours (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). A request for service will be entered for investigation as appropriate.

If an encampment is forming on your private property, and you do not feel comfortable asking the individual to leave, please contact Hamilton Police Service via their non-emergency line at 905-546-4925.

Report immediate threats to the safety and well-being of any community member, including loss of consciousness, frostbite, heat stroke, substance poisoning, or harassment by calling 9-1-1.

Other Municipal Law Enforcement Concerns

Municipal Law Enforcement

 **905-546-2782, Option 1**

 **mle@hamilton.ca**


By-laws are local regulatory laws that keep our city safe and moving. The City licenses businesses and activities and investigates complaints on private and public property to ensure compliance with by-laws which includes street parking, noise complaints, property standards, hazardous private property trees and snow and ice removal. For an urgent complaint regarding private property that is an immediate health and safety concern such as lack of heat, water and electricity supply to a rental unit please call 905-546-2782, Option 1 during regular business hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m.

to 4:30 p.m.) or 905-546-2489 after regular business hours rather than completing the online complaint form.

For graffiti complaints, please complete the graffiti form located on the City's website. In the case of an emergency, please call 9-1-1.

Young person possibly at risk

Wesley Youth Outreach Services

 **905-527-4430 ext. 34**

 **yow.hamilton@wesley.ca**

Mobile workers engaging at-risk youth aged 12-21 years and their families, to better navigate and connect with services and supports in their communities to improve youth outcomes.

Garbage, Discarded Needles, or Human Waste on public property

Customer Contact Centre

 **905-546-2489**

 **askCITY@hamilton.ca**


All requests for service are received by the City of Hamilton's Customer Contact Centre and forwarded to the appropriate City team.

If the concerns are on private property, the private property owner is responsible for disposing of garbage, needles, and human waste. Adults can safely dispose of a found needle by following a step-by-step guide available at hamilton.ca/NeedleDisposal.

If you require assistance, please connect with the Customer Contact Centre.

Dangerous Pet Concerns

Animal Services

 **905-574-3433**

 **animalservices@hamilton.ca**

For Animal Control Officer response, dogs at large, animals in distress or deceased animals please contact Animal Services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For animal cruelty concerns, please call the Provincial Animal Welfare (PAWS) at **1-833-926-4625**.

Theft, Vandalism or Property Damage

Police Non-Emergency Line

 **905-546-4925**

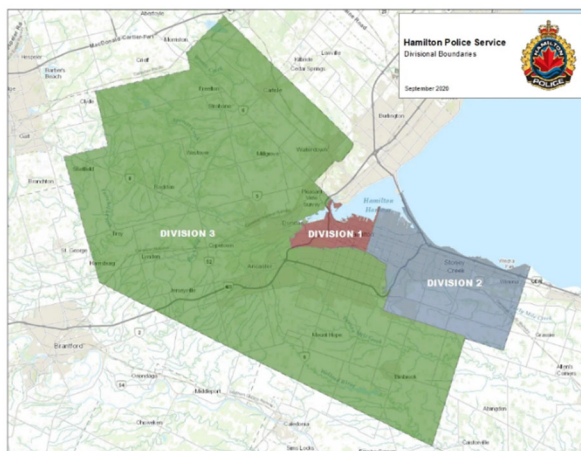


hamiltonpolice.on.ca/report-crime/online-reporting

Please note that criminal activity needs to be reported directly to the Hamilton Police Service. If the matter is urgent, please call 9-1-1.

5. Area Crime Managers

Sometimes you may experience patterns of illegal activity in your community that will require a strategy to address. That's when you should consider calling a **Crime Manager**, which every division has. Crime Managers play an important role and will assist with non-emergency related community complaints. These may include issues relating to your neighborhood, property, business, parking, or any other community problem that may require long-term consideration.



Find out which Crime Manager is responsible for your BIA area:

Division 1	Division 2	Division 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Westdale Village BIA• Locke Street BIA• Downtown Hamilton BIA• International Village BIA• Barton Village BIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ottawa Street BIA• Stoney Creek BIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dundas BIA• Ancaster Village BIA• Waterdown Village BIA• Concession Street BIA

Crime Managers by Division

Division 1 (Central)

905-540-6074 or 905-540-5093

Division 2 (East End)

905-540-5179 or 905-546-2949

Division 3 (Mountain)

905-540-5142 or 905-546-2447

Business owners can request a free Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) audit through the Crime Prevention Office. Please contact **905-546-4900** or **crimeprevention@hamiltonpolice.ca** for further information.


6. Drop-ins and Shelters


Drop-ins offer a safe, welcoming space where individuals can access basic needs like meals, showers, and hygiene supplies during the day. It often provides resources such as housing referrals and connections to health care supports. These programs support people experiencing homelessness by meeting immediate needs and helping them take steps toward stability.


Helper tip: Try asking, “Have you ever been to a drop-in?” or “Would you like to know where the nearest drop-in is located?”

Drop-ins

YWCA Carole Anne's Place (CAP)

 75 MacNab Street South


 10 p.m. – 1 p.m.


 905-517-9326

A low-barrier drop-in for unsheltered women and non-binary individuals. Individuals are provided with meals, access to showers and basic needs, low barrier health care, harm reduction, systems navigation and shelter referrals, advocacy, care planning and coordination.

Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (HRIC)

 407 King Street West


 Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.


 905-548-9593

A culturally safe and appropriate space for Indigenous people to access housing supports and connect with peers in a community-based setting. Services: Light breakfast, lunch, and dinner; Access to traditional medicines, connect with elders/ knowledge keepers; identification supports; housing help and resources.

Helping Hands Street Mission

 E-669 Barton Street East


 Café and Store Hours: Monday, and Friday, 1 – 4 p.m.


 905-522-4263

Offers free clothing, coffee and treats to all, while also providing Bible Study, introduction to worship and social events throughout the week.

Mission Services Willow's Place

 196 Wentworth Street North


 9 a.m. – 9 p.m.


 905-528-5100 ext. 1200

A low-barrier space for women, trans-, and non-binary people. Clients have access to laundry, shower facilities, a safer place to rest, meals, and harm reduction supplies. Beyond basic needs, Willow's provides opportunities to build on one's strengths and creativity through art, games, and other social activities.

Living Rock Ministries

 30 Wilson Street

 Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday, 1 – 8 p.m.


 905-528-7625

Offers youth and their children access to basic necessities, such as food, clothing, and facilities for showers and laundry. In addition, they provide opportunities for personal growth, life skills development, and employment training, helping youth build brighter futures while feeling celebrated and supported along the way.

Cathedral Café

 252 James Street North

 Monday to Saturday, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

 905-523-5546 ext. 232

Drop-in center offering a continental-style breakfast (from 9 to 11 a.m.) and a hot lunch (12:30 to 3:30 p.m.) while also providing access to washrooms, relief from inclement weather, and a variety of activities, services, and programs.

Shelters



Emergency shelters offer temporary housing, meals, and access to hygiene facilities like showers and laundry. It provides essential support services including case management, referrals, and help finding permanent housing. The goal is to ensure immediate safety and basic needs while assisting individuals and families in transitioning to more stable living situations.

Helper tip: While you can call to find out if there are any available beds, shelter staff will need to speak directly with the person experiencing homelessness to have an intake conversation.



A person experiencing homelessness may also decline your suggestion to access a shelter based on their own past experiences with the shelter system. But a major barrier is how full the shelters are and how difficult it can be to get a bed, so do not be offended if someone is disinterested in your offer to help.

Shelters for Women and Gender Diverse Individuals



Good Shepherd Mary's Place

 20 Pearl Street North
 905-523-6277 (Crisis line)
905-540-8000 (Business line)


YWCA Hamilton 24/7 Shelter

 75 MacNab Street South
 365-384-3406



Mission Services Emma's Place

 196 Wentworth Street North
 905-528-5100 ext. 1200

Womankind Emergency Shelter



 431 Whitney Avenue
 905-545-9100

Good Shepherd West Avenue Shelter



 46 West Avenue South
 905-528-5877 ext. 4331

Emergency Shelters for Men and Gender Diverse Individuals



Good Shepherd Cathedral

 378 Main Street East
 905-528-5877 ext. 2051 or ext. 2052



Good Shepherd Men's Centre

 135 Mary Street
 905-528-9109



Mission Services Men's Shelter

 400 King Street East
 905-528-7635



Salvation Army Booth Centre

 94 York Boulevard
 905-527-1444

Emergency Shelter for Youth **Good Shepherd Notre Dame House**



 14 Cannon Street West
 905-308-8090

Emergency Shelter for Families **Good Shepherd Family Centre**



 143 Wentworth Street South
 905-528-9442

Violence Against Women (VAW) Shelters


Good Shepherd Martha House

 25 Ray Street North
 905-523-6277 (Crisis line)
905-523-8895 (Business line)



Interval House of Hamilton

 630 Sanatorium Road
 905-387-8881 (Crisis Line)
905-387-9959 (Business Line)

Mission Services Inasmuch House

 905-529-8600 (Crisis line)
905-529-8149 (Business line)

Native Women's Centre

 1900 King Street East
 905-664-1114

7. Public Restrooms, Showers and Laundry Resources

Many persons experiencing homelessness lack access to basic amenities such as bathrooms, showers, and laundry services. The City and organizations have developed services to address these needs.

Public Restrooms

Spring/Summer Season: Park washrooms are typically open between May and October. Public Works Staff manually open, close, and clean park washrooms daily. Park washrooms are opened between the hours of 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. and



closed between dusk and 11 p.m. Depending on the location of the washroom and where it falls on the route, the opening and closing times may vary.


Fall/Winter Season: A select number of washrooms are available during the fall and winter season during daylight hours and subject to change (based on the cleaning schedule) beginning in November each year.

To find the most up-to-date information, please visit Open Hamilton.

Showers

Bennetto Community Centre

 450 Hughson Street North
 905-546-3747

 Summer schedule 2025

Monday 3 – 4:45 p.m.

Tuesday 3 – 4:45 p.m.

Wednesday 3 – 4:45 p.m.


Thursday 3 – 4:45 p.m.


Friday 3 – 4:45 p.m.

Facility closed July 1, August 4, and September 1

Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre

 430 Cannon Street East

 Offers Shower and Laundry Services between Monday – Friday through registration by calling 905-522-3233 or by email at MHATHub@hucchc.com.

 Hours of Operation:

Monday 1 – 6 p.m.



Tuesday 1 – 6 p.m.


Wednesday 1 – 5 p.m.

Thursday 1 – 6 p.m.

Friday 1 – 5 p.m.

Norman Pinky Lewis Recreation Centre

 192 Wentworth Street North
 905-546-3747

 Summer schedule 2025

Monday 1:15 – 2:45 p.m. and 8:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Tuesday 1:15 – 2:45 p.m.

Wednesday 8:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Thursday 1:15 – 2:45 p.m. and 8:30 – 9:30 p.m.

Friday 3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Facility closed July 1, August 4, and September 1

Laundry

Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre



430 Cannon Street East



Offers Shower and Laundry Services between Monday – Friday through registration by calling 905-522-3233 or by email at MHATHub@hucchc.com.



Hours of Operation:

Monday 1 – 6 p.m.

Tuesday 1 – 6 p.m.

Wednesday 1 – 5 p.m.

Thursday 1 – 6 p.m.

Friday 1 – 5 p.m.

8. Food Resources

The experience of homelessness can involve a great amount of uncertainty when it comes to your daily meals. The following resources are for free meals in the community. For an expanded resource guide that includes food banks, community kitchens, meals on wheels, and other possible food resources, please visit foodaccessguide.ca.

Helper tip: Try asking: “Have you had something to eat today?” or “If you’re looking for a free bite to eat, I can recommend a few places.”

Lower City

De Mazenod Door Outreach

Where: St Patrick’s Roman Catholic Church 440 King Street East

When: Saturday to Thursday, Breakfast from 9:45 – 11 a.m.; Lunch from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Friday BBQ: Breakfast from 9:45 – 11 a.m.; Lunch from 1 – 2:30 p.m.

Who: Open to all

Contact: 905-522-9828

Details: Provides free daily meals to individuals in need, year-round. Offers light breakfast and coffee, as well as a hot lunch, with a barbeque every Friday.

Good Shepherd Centres, Daily Hot Meal Program

Where: 135 Mary Street

When: Monday to Saturday, from 3:30 – 4:45 p.m.

Who: Open to all

Contact: 905-528-9109 / info@gsch.ca

Web: goodshepherdcentres.ca/services/good-shepherd-centre

Details: Distributes free hot meal for anyone in need.

Oasis Coffeehouse

Where: 30 Wilson Street

When: Monday to Friday, Breakfast from 8 – 9:30 a.m.; Dinner from 5 – 8 p.m.

Who: Open to youth ages 13 to 25

Contact: 905-528-7625

Web: livingrock.ca/food-programs

Details: Join Oasis Coffeehouse every weekday morning for a nourishing breakfast and every weekday evening for a buffet where they offer all youth aged 13-25 a delicious meal.

Meal Program, Notre Dame House

Where: 14 Cannon Street West

Who: Open to all youth ages 16-21 years old.

Contact: 905-308-8090 / youthservices@gsch.ca

Web: goodshepherdcentres.ca/services/notre-dame-house

Details: Provides dine-in or take-out meals at lunch and dinner time for youth.

541 Eatery and Exchange

Where: 541 Barton Street East

When: Tuesday to Saturday, 8 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Who: Open to all

Contact: 289-389-0541

Web: fivefortyone.ca

Details: 541 Eatery & Exchange is a non-profit cafe helping our neighbours overcome the impacts of isolation, poverty, and injustice by cultivating a community of mutuality and a space for connection. Every week, we serve over 500 meals to individuals needing access to good food. Our pay-it-forward button system empowers the community to welcome and care for others inclusive of their circumstances, identity, and status.

Mountain

Hamilton Community Food Centre

Where: 310 Limeridge Road West

When: Thursday Dinner from 4:30 – 6 p.m.; Friday Lunch from noon – 1:30 p.m.

Who: Open to all

Contact: 905-574-1334 / admin@n2ncentre.com

Web: n2ncentre.com/hamilton-community-food-centre

Details: Provides freshly made meals, highlighting plant-based ingredients, at no cost. Dine-in and takeout options are available.

Various locations

Hamilton Out of The Cold Free Meal Program

Where: Various locations across Hamilton (see schedule)

When: See website for schedule

Who: Open to all

Contact: 905-308-8447 / hootc97@gmail.com

Web: hamiltonoutofthecold.ca

Details: Provides free hot meals to people in need through meals to go, sit-down dinners, or morning cafes. Operates in the winter, usually the beginning of November to the end of March. Schedule can be found online.

9. Health Supports

Many persons experiencing homelessness have complex health needs and lack access to a primary care doctor.

Unfortunately, persons experiencing homelessness face multiple barriers when accessing the traditional health care system and often avoid attending hospital due to perceived stigma. Some of the barriers they experience may include not having an up-to-date health card and not having a consistent phone number or address to receive appointment information.

That is why organizations have developed mobile services that can meet people where they are at. One example of such a service is the **Good Shepherd Health on Wheels** program, which makes regular visits to shelters, drop-ins, and local food programs.



The graphic features the Good Shepherd logo with the tagline 'Faith in people.' and the title 'Health on Wheels Weekly Schedule' in large, bold letters. To the right is an illustration of a white van with 'Good Shepherd Health on Wheels' written on its side.

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
9:00 AM - 12:30 PM St. Patrick's Church	9:00 AM - 12:30 PM Good Shepherd's Men's Centre	9:00 AM - 12:00 PM 541 Eatery and Exchange	9:00 AM - 12:30 PM Salvation Army Booth Centre	10:00 AM - 3:00 PM Christ's Church Cathedral Warming Centre
1:00 PM - 3:00 PM In the Community	1:00 PM - 3:00 PM In the Community	1:00 PM - 3:00 PM In the Community	1:00 PM - 3:00 PM In the Community	10:00 AM - 3:00 PM Christ's Church Cathedral Warming Centre

Schedule may change without notice. Please call or email with any questions.
Phone: 365.833.9382 Email: mobilehealth@gsch.ca

Mental Health and Addiction Treatment (MHAT) Hub at Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre

Where: 430 Cannon Street East

When: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday 9 a.m. – 8 p.m., Wednesday 1 p.m. – 5 p.m. and Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Who: Open to all, no appointment or ID required.

Contact: 905-522-3233 / MHATHub@hucchc.com

Details: Walk-ins and Self-Referrals are welcome. The MHAT Hub provides Primary care and specialty health services; Mental health and addiction care, counseling, and supports; Case management, employment, life skills and social reintegration, social assistance; Specialized support for Black, Indigenous, and Francophone populations; Wrap-around supports like laundry, shower, food, collective kitchens, ID,

and many more; Needle drop-off; Bed-based intensive addiction treatment and supportive recovery services; and Placement to transition shelter beds and supportive housing units.

Important note: If a person experiencing homelessness is in an emergency situation and requires urgent medical care, please call **9-1-1**.

10. Inclusive Language

Some terms/phrases that are common in our culture can actually be very insulting toward people who are experiencing homelessness. The words we use to describe people without homes can increase stigma and be a barrier to seeking help.

We would recommend that you use person-first language wherever possible. Labels such as “homeless” dehumanize people and takes away from their individual identity. The terms listed below are often associated with negative and harmful stereotypes and typically suggest a personal or moral failing.

Consider avoiding or using a different term if you are inclined to use any of the following words or expressions:

Instead of saying...

The homeless
Street people
Vagrant
A bum
Hobos

Junkie
Drug Addict

Crazy

Tent people

Consider Saying

A person experiencing homelessness

A person living with addiction
A person that uses substances

A person living with mental illness
A person who may be unwell

A person living in an encampment



hamilton.ca/housing-shelter