



United Way
Perth-Huron

Strategic Plan 2025–2028

The 2025–2028 United Way Perth-Huron (UWPH) Strategic Plan, Building Equity, Capacity, and Housing, focuses on advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and Indigenous collaboration, strengthening community development and enhancing organizational capacity to address rising living costs, housing unaffordability, and income inequality. Key initiatives include enhancing Community Committees, Connection Centres, Access Centres, and United Housing projects to improve access to services, increase affordable housing, and support.

**Building
Equity,
Capacity, &
Housing**



Introduction

The 2022-2025 strategic plan, entitled *An Equitable Recovery for All*, guided our organization to refocus after the Covid years. The pandemic reshaped not only our world, but it was also the impetus for UWPH to reevaluate our goals, objectives, and strategies. The resulting strategic plan challenged us to become better people first, laying the foundation for a more equitable approach, and further challenged us to strive to improve access to services for people across our region. Additionally, the plan challenged us to increase people's incomes and address the critical shortage of affordable housing.

United Way Perth-Huron responded to these challenges by deepening our diversity, equity, inclusion, and Indigenous collaboration efforts. We formulated a plan, implemented educational training and resources, updated our related funding procedures, and reviewed our policies. We increased funding to our Supported Partners. We launched two Access Centres so organizations could meet people closer to home, while continuing work on designing a third. We opened our fourth Connection Centre, certified new living wage employers, and launched United Housing, the region's first non-profit housing corporation dedicated to building and operating mixed-income rental housing. To support all of this, we continued raising record amounts of money despite challenging local and national trends.

With continued financial growth and strategic action, local people increasingly grew to recognize UWPH as a community development leader, social expert, and one of the region's charities of choice.

Then it was time to dream again! Between June and December 2024, and while the organization continued building on emerging issues and organizational momentum, UWPH's Board of Directors and staff engaged with our Community Committees, Social Research & Planning Council, Supported Partners, and others. From these discussions the current strategic plan was born.

Environmental Scan

According to the 2021 census, 81,565 and 61,366 people live in Perth and Huron respectively. Our region has seen a modest rise in population due to interprovincial migration over the last census period. Several municipalities have not only seen an increase in size, but also increased cultural, racial and ethnic diversity among the population. Encouraging and maintaining a diverse community involves appreciating and respecting our differences and creating opportunities for meaningful participation. UWPH recognizes that when we include and reflect diversity such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, and

abilities in our community and structures, we are more likely to have better engagement and outcomes for all.

Correspondingly, income is demonstrated to have a significant impact on quality of life and is one of the most important social determinants of health and well-being. Overwhelming statistical data highlights those living in a low-income bracket are at higher risk of enduring incredible stress. As low-income individuals and families try to get by while dealing with substandard housing, food insecurity, poor working conditions, unstable employment, discrimination, and access to internet and transportation, this directly impacts their emotional, physical and mental well-being, and is connected to their ability to access these critical rights and factors.

As of 2020, the median after-tax household income was \$74,500 in Perth and \$70,000 in Huron. By comparison, it was \$79,500 in Ontario. While low income is an indicator of living in poverty, it is not the same thing. Poverty is complex and can best be described as not having enough money for, or access to, resources to enjoy a decent standard of living. It extends beyond having enough income to afford only necessities—such as food or shelter—and is about exclusion. It is estimated that 1 in 4 households in Perth-Huron couldn't afford a one-bedroom unit at 2023 asking rents. In fact, rents are too high for a single-earner household and an individual working at posted hospitality/retail wages would spend 52% of their income on rent. Women, racialized workers and new immigrants are disproportionately represented in the lowest paid worker bracket. The lowest paid workers are often more vulnerable and more likely to be precariously employed.

While adequate housing is often treated as a commodity, according to Canadian and International Law it is a human right. This means every person has the right to secure housing without fear of eviction or losing their home. In Perth-Huron 14% of tenant households are in core housing need. This means their housing is some combination of unaffordable, inadequate, and unsuitable, and the median acceptable alternative housing would also be unaffordable.

The number of working poor in Canada is growing. The Social Research & Planning Council conducted a survey in November 2022 to better understand the nature and severity of household food insecurity regionally and more than 700 respondents reported being food insecure or at risk of food insecurity. Of the respondents dealing with food insecurity, 64% had full-time employment.

For households earning a minimum wage, working precarious jobs, receiving social assistance, or living on a fixed income, it is difficult to manage. In addition to the disparity in average after-tax income noted above, the local 2024 living wage is \$23.05/hr., the second highest rate in Ontario for two consecutive years. As the gap increases between the minimum

wage and a living wage, we see the struggles many households face daily. The stress of living with low income has major impacts on health and well-being.

Core Statements

Our continued focus on improving lives for everyone in our communities continues shaping UWPH's research and work as captured in our Core Statements:

VISION

A better life for everyone in our communities.

MISSION

Improve lives and build community by engaging individuals and mobilizing collective action.

UWPH has continued conducting research to uncover new approaches, strategies, and resources to enhance the health and well-being of individuals, families, and older adults in our community. As the socio-economic and socio-political climates continue changing, UWPH has adapted our approach to ensure we are providing the best services and resources. Specifically, over the next three years UWPH is striving to help foster a community incorporating and championing:

- ▶ A firmer understanding of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with increased efforts from not-for-profit organizations to improve related practices.
- ▶ Efforts ensuring everyone in our broader community has sufficient income and access to affordable, adequate, reliable, and safe housing to prosper as individuals.
- ▶ Access to social services programs and supports ensuring individuals and families can thrive in our community.

The collected data demonstrated a clear direction for UWPH to establish positive changes within the organization centralized on enhancing outreach, collaboration, inclusivity, and branding. This necessitated updates to the Strategic Direction and Objectives to develop a more directed and inclusive plan to make the community we envision a reality. The modification to the Strategic Plan encompasses the collective vision of staff, community, and Board to strengthen UWPH and our role in maintaining our advocacy, support, and action in the community.

Strategic Directions and Objectives

STRATEGIC DIRECTION	OBJECTIVE
Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Indigenous Collaboration	1.1 UWPH nurtures a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace.
	1.2 UWPH builds toward and delivers on an equity-centred community impact and investment approach.
	1.3 UWPH supports other non-profits to enhance their DEI & IC work.
Strengthening Community Development	2.1 UWPH advocates for an increased income for people living on less than a living wage, improved access to safe and affordable housing, and increased funding for community services.
	2.2 UWPH champions social progress by organizing, interpreting, and sharing research data.
	2.3 UWPH fosters ongoing improvements and access to local services.
	2.4 UWPH champions improved access to supportive, affordable, and workforce housing.
Enhancing Organizational Capacity	3.1 UWPH diversifies and increases its revenue and resources.
	3.2 UWPH optimizes staffing and organizational structure to meet changing demands.
	3.3 UWPH increases investment in people to build staff and volunteer expertise.
	3.4 UWPH reinforces its brand understanding and value in Perth-Huron.

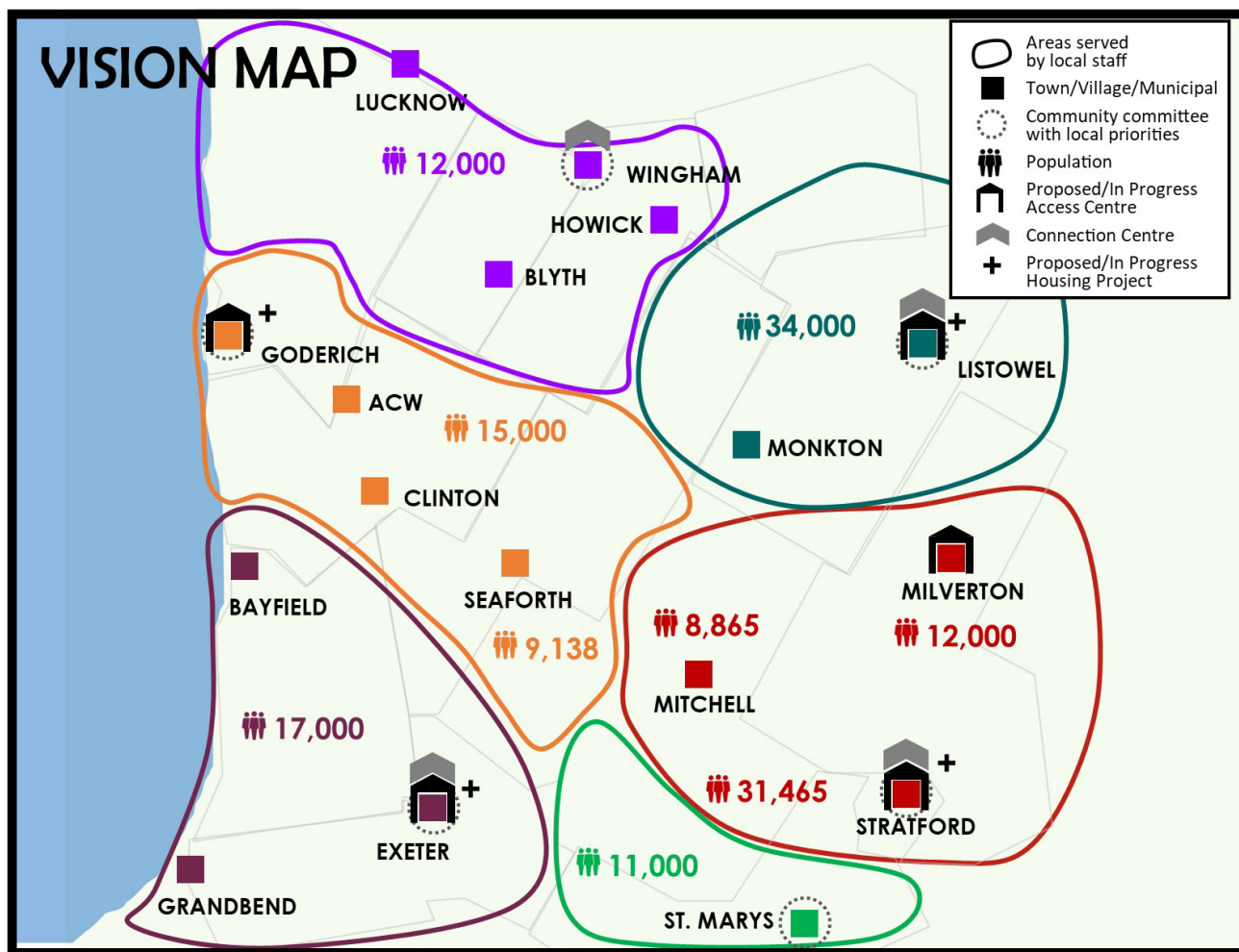
Seeing the Big Picture

As part of UWPH's previous strategic plans, we embraced a hyper-local approach, including launching community committees in North Perth, Goderich, Southern Huron, St. Marys, Stratford, and Northern Huron. This community-by-community approach enabled the organization to understand local needs, set community-based priorities, and raise additional funds to implement new solutions.

The following vision map represents some of our goals for the next three years and beyond as it relates to our six regions. The map clearly identifies where we have Community Committees (comprised of residents who assist UWPH with identifying needs and raising funds),

Connection Centres (places where our most vulnerable can access basic needs while being connected to long-term solutions for permanent housing) Access Centres (placed-based hubs for social services), and mixed-income housing projects in development.

In this cycle, we anticipate reorganizing our Huron Community Committee zones slightly as we seek to engage more municipalities and their residents. We plan to solidify our Access Centres, while we look for additional opportunities to open more sites. We will open our first mixed-income housing project in Listowel, hopefully a second in Stratford, obtain land in Huron County, secure property management contracts, acquire an existing affordable housing project, and continue working toward pre-development on others.



Conclusion

United Way remains a vibrant and vital non-profit leader in Perth-Huron. With the support of generous donors, as well as substantive partnerships with not-for-profit organizations and various levels of government, we believe our future is bright!

Glossary of Terms

Access Centres: Community-based hubs where social service organizations provide resources and assistance closer to individuals in need.

Affordable Housing: Housing deemed financially accessible based on local income levels, ensuring individuals do not spend an excessive portion of their income on rent.

Chronic Homelessness: Long-term state of homelessness experienced by individuals due to systemic barriers, economic instability, or personal circumstances.

Community Development: The process of improving the social, economic, and environmental well-being of a community through collaborative efforts.

Connection Centres: Spaces designed to support vulnerable individuals by providing access to essential services, including basic needs such as showers and laundry facilities, and pathways to stable housing.

Core Housing Need: A measure indicating that a household's living conditions are unaffordable, inadequate, or unsuitable, with no viable alternative options within financial reach.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): A framework aimed at fostering fair treatment, access, opportunity, and representation for all individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Equitable Recovery: Post-crisis rebuilding approach aimed at ensuring all individuals,

particularly those part of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, have fair access to resources and opportunities.

Equity-Centred Community Impact: Strategy focused on ensuring community programs and investments prioritize equity, inclusion, and access for all individuals, especially underserved populations.

Fixed Income: Income that remains constant over time, often referring to government benefits or pensions, which may or may not adjust in response to inflation or cost-of-living increases.

Food Insecurity: Inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.

Living Wage: Calculated annually using local data, a living wage reflects the income level a worker needs to earn to cover basic everyday expenses.

Not-for-Profit Housing Corporation: An organization dedicated to developing and managing affordable housing for individuals and families without profit motives.

Precarious Employment: Jobs that are insecure, low-paying, and lacking benefits or stability, often associated with contract or part-time work.

Social Determinants of Health: Factors such as income, education, employment, housing, and access to services that influence an individual's overall health and well-being.

Social Research & Planning Council:

Program operated by the United Way to collect, analyze and distribute local information to inform community activities and decisions.

Strategic Plan: A Strategic Plan outlines an organization or business' vision for growth, and the plan outlining how they will achieve their objectives.

Supported Partner: Agency or service provider that receives financial support from United Way.

Tenant Households in Core Housing Need: Renter households lacking affordable,

suitable, or adequate housing options within their means.

Workforce Housing: Housing specifically designated as affordable for modest income workers, such as teachers, healthcare workers, and service industry employees, who may struggle to find housing near their workplaces.

Working Poor: Individuals who live independently and are employed with a total income falling below the estimated poverty line.