

# RESPONDING TO PREGNANCY AND HOMELESSNESS THROUGH TEMPORARY HOUSING AND WRAP AROUND SUPPORTS

YWCA HAMILTON

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# OBJECTIVES:

1. Gain a better understanding of the complex and unmet needs of people experiencing long-lasting homelessness and pregnancy.
2. Learn about how YWCA Hamilton responded through developing an 'Emergency Reproductive Care Program' - including transitional support beds and a mobile worker.
3. Understand how you might action a model of support for pregnant people experiencing homelessness your own organizations.

# HOW WE CAME TO THIS WORK:

- **COVID-19 was the catalyst for this work** - An increase in people experiencing pregnancy and street-level homelessness.
- **Learning more about lived experience** - Began with consultation with people who had experienced pregnancy and homelessness.
- **Call to Action on Pregnancy, Homelessness & Reproductive Care** - In May of 2021, we brought together community partners and academics - this is now an annual event that guides our work.
- **Witnessing lack of supports at the intersection of pregnancy, homelessness and GBV** - across programs/services at YWCA Hamilton

# **PREGNANCY, HOMELESSNESS, SUBSTANCE USE & GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:**

- This program responds to unmet need of people **experiencing pregnancy ... and:**
- **Long-lasting street-level homelessness**
- **Gender-based violence**
- **Substance use**
- **Trauma/mental health.**
- **Incarceration**
- **Past experiences with child welfare organizations**

# DEVELOPING OUR APPROACH



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# PHASE ONE: IMMEDIATE SYSTEMS RESPONSE



**ADVOCACY**



**PARTNERSHIP  
BUILDING**



**MEETING URGENT  
NEEDS**

## ADVOCACY

- Call to Action: with key stakeholders
- Quantifying the issue : Data collection
- Prioritizing pregnancy within the homelessness system

## PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

- Partnerships with organizations working at intersection of reproductive health and justice
- Identifying what resources existed that could be leveraged
- Documenting low barrier care pathways

## MEETING URGENT NEEDS:

- On-site midwifery care clinic
- Reproductive health supplies made available
- Enhancing sector knowledge on reproductive care needs

# CALL TO ACTION ON PREGNANCY, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & HOMELESSNESS 2023





# PHASE TWO: IMPLEMENTING THE EMERGENCY REPRODUCTIVE CARE BED PROGRAM



**CARE**



**WRAP-AROUND  
SUPPORTS**



**BASIC NEEDS**

## CARE:

- Seconded a full-spectrum doula in partnership with Birth Mark - (**Emergency Reproductive Care Mobile Worker**)
- Developed a suite of in-house and mobile supports

## WRAP AROUND SUPPORTS:

- **Integrated and co-located community-based wrap around supports** - with a focus on support at the intersection of pregnancy and substance use and gender-based violence

## BASIC NEEDS:

- Low barrier pathways to prenatal care, access to basic needs, rest, food, support and connection.

# Emergency Reproductive Care Program

## ERC Beds

**Prenatal and Postpartum:**  
Safe, temporary accommodations during prenatal and postpartum period

**Abortion Care Beds:**  
A safe temporary place to rest post-abortion (medical and surgical)

## ERC Mobile

Connections to prenatal care, practical support, case management, service navigation, **meeting people where they are at**

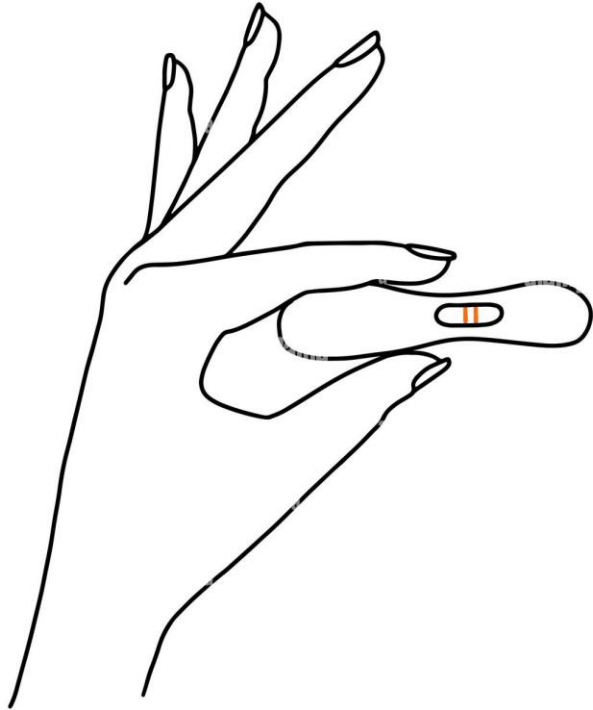
# PROGRAM VALUES:

- **Intersectional Feminist Analysis:** We believe that these oppressive institutions create systemic barriers that impact reproductive rights, choices, and experiences.
- **Harm Reduction:** Our work is explicit in a commitment to supporting women and non-binary people who use substances and focused on providing options to reduce the harms associated with substance use during pregnancy and the postpartum period.
- **Pro Choice:** We are explicit in our commitment to supporting people who choose to access abortion supports and aim to reduce the barriers to abortion for people who face barriers to access.
- **Gender Inclusive:** Trans and non-binary people experience pregnancy differently – and require unique services and supports during the prenatal and postpartum period.
- **Low Barrier:** We are committed to creating low barrier pathways for services that prioritize access to basic needs such as food, housing and safety and enhance prenatal, postpartum, and post-termination supports.

# **PARTNERSHIPS:**

- **Birth Mark:** Full spectrum doulas – including abortion doula care
- **Hamilton Social Medicine Response Team:** Safe supply prioritizing pregnant women
- **The Program for Pregnancy and Substance Use:** Addiction care + prenatal care
- **McMaster University:** Research & evaluation component
- **Hamilton Outreach Midwifery Team:** Outreach midwifery care
- **Greater Hamilton Health Network:** Systems planning & advocacy

# OVERVIEW OF OUR FIRST YEAR OF OPERATIONS



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# REFERRALS:

Over the first year of service delivery:

- **52** people have been referred for services and support:
  - **39** people have accessed mobile supports
  - **12** people have accessed the emergency reproductive care beds

# PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS:

- All participants experiencing long histories of homelessness and unstable housing.
- Over half of the program participants shared they were actively using substances during pregnancy. (64%)
- Gender-based violence is impacting every single participants experiences. (100%).
- All participants experiencing long histories of homelessness and unstable housing.
- Majority of referrals had not had any prenatal care prior to being referred to the program.



# OUTCOMES:

- **Point of connection** – accompaniment to appointments, referrals, support, case management, service navigation, advocacy with other services
  - Increased retention in prenatal care / postpartum care
  - Increased retention on safer supply program
- Meeting basic needs for pregnant people experiencing homelessness

# **OUTCOMES FOR BABIES:**

- **15 babies born in total:**
  - **CAS Apprehension: 4**
  - **Went Home: 5**
  - **Into Shelter: 2**
  - **Passed Away: 1**
  - **Kinship Care: 1**
  - **Baby In Hospital: 1**
  - **Unknown: 1**

# **ACTIONING THIS IN YOUR OWN ORGANIZATIONS**

DEVELOPING PATHWAYS FOR PREGNANT PEOPLE IN THE HOMELESSNESS SERVING SECTOR

# ACTIONING THIS IN YOUR OWN WORK

- 1. **Prioritize space** (emergency shelter, transitional, permanent housing) for people experiencing pregnancy
- 2. **Build partnerships** with reproductive care providers & full spectrum doulas, and other care providers to develop a suite of wrap-around care
- 3. **Systems planning with partners** to leverage existing resources and create clear low barrier pathways to services and supports
- 4. **Work with municipal officials and community partners** to ensure pregnant people are prioritized within the existing suite of services in the homelessness sector
- 5. **Collect data** on pregnancy for people experiencing homelessness accessing services

# LESSONS LEARNED:

- We opened this program within an existing gender-specific transitional living program. **It is possible.**
- Strong community partnerships are needed. **Birth Mark has provided a new lens to this work for us.**
- Municipal systems need to prioritize pregnant people within the emergency shelter system & into affordable/supportive housing stock. **Emergency shelter and permanent housing where babies can transition to.**
- Collect data on pregnancy within your organization. **This is crucial for advocacy!**

# **BUILDING RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS TO INFORM LONG-TERM ADVOCACY & ACTION**

- We have received a Partnership Engage Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to further investigate housing and support models for people experiencing pregnancy and homelessness – who are at risk of newborn apprehension from child welfare organizations.
- **Responding to Pregnancy, Infant Apprehension and Homelessness: Building Community Capacity for Adequate Housing and Support Through YWCA Hamilton**

**SSHRC**  **CRSH**

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada  
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

# WHERE TO GO FROM HERE:

- **YWCA Oakwood Place** (*forthcoming housing build*) - a continuum of housing and supports for people experiencing homelessness, GBV + pregnancy and parenting with in-house supports
- **Trauma-informed supports for people who experience child apprehension**
- **Building out supports for women and non-binary people who are incarcerated and pregnant**
- **Advocacy for prioritization of pregnant people for temporary and permanent housing options**

# **QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION**