

SPECIAL REPORT

Join us for a Code Red Open Forum, Thursday, April 22 at 7:30 p.m. in the Spectator auditorium. This session is free, but you must register in advance. Call our Open Forum line at 905-526-3535 to register.

with enormous stresses that, frankly, would challenge many of us," said Brasch.

"I see some of these people and they have next to no money, no family support and they're unable to work for whatever reason, and then they have another loss and suddenly, they're homeless.

"It's very difficult to have positive mental health if you're homeless."

She describes the case of one patient she saw recently in St. Joe's psychiatric emergency department. It's a frightening example of how one incident can lead to a downward spiral.

The patient was a skilled tradesman who owned a home and had a job with a company. He is divorced with children who were part of his life.

The man suffered an accident that left him unable to work. He eventually lost his home, spent much of his time worrying and became very depressed.

The man then began drinking excessively and ultimately gave up contact with his children because he didn't want them to worry about him.

Brasch said she tried to convince the man that his children might want to help, "but he doesn't see it that way," she noted.

"He was a contributing member of society," Brasch said sadly. "He's become depressed, he's become anxious, he's drinking to self-treat, he's lost his home, he's become quite reclusive.

"He's living in cheap hotels and moving from one to another because he feels he bothers people."



There was a time when the prevailing philosophy was out of mind, out of sight.

Institutionalization was the norm for people with psychiatric problems.

"When the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital was built, it was built out in the country so that the residents could farm the land as part of their therapy," said Brasch. "People used to drive from downtown Hamilton for a Sunday afternoon drive to go and watch the people at the psych hospital."

The pendulum has since swung to shorter hospitalizations and independent living in the community.

"Hamilton has a number of very good programs to support people in the community," Brasch added.

In some ways, Hamilton has become a victim of its own success.

A strong network of food banks, support programs and lodging facilities — many of them in the central lower city — combined with cheap housing, means that Hamilton has become a magnet for people in surrounding areas who suffer with mental illness.

A decade ago, the provincial government decided to download the costs of social services to municipalities.

That policy shift has long raised the question of whether Hamilton is adequately reimbursed for the costs of treating people from outside who migrate to the city to take advantage of better services and lower housing costs.

"We'd developed a comprehensive network of social and health services here that serviced a much wider geographic catchment area," said Terry Cooke, former regional chair of Hamilton-Wentworth, now president and CEO of the Hamilton Community Foundation.

"When that stuff was shared mostly by the provincial tax base, it was equitable; and while it was a strain, we could support it.

"When it became largely the domain of municipal government, it became financially crippling," Cooke added, "and it became a vicious spiral because at the same time we had an economic downturn that drove up demands for services."

If there's one area that could use improvement, Brasch noted, it's the need for more programs that deal with concurrent disorders — people, for example, who require treatment for mental illness as well as a substance abuse problem.

"You go to detox and they say 'Well, you're suicidal, you've got to get that fixed before we can help you,'" said Brasch. "You go to a psych clinic and they say 'Well, you're drinking daily, my drugs won't help you until you stop drinking.'"

"It puts people in a very difficult position, because if you're really depressed, it's hard to stop drinking," she added.

"So if we see someone who is depressed and drinking, are they depressed because they're drinking or are they drinking because they're depressed?"

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A bold, 10-year plan to fight homelessness

Mental illness is often a package deal, linked with homelessness and poverty.

Two years ago, the city of Calgary made a bold pronouncement that it was going to tackle one of those three problems.

The Alberta city announced the introduction of a 10-year plan to eradicate homelessness by 2018.

With commitments from Calgary's heaviest hitters, a model has been developed that other Canadian cities, including Hamilton,

could find useful.

While the Alberta oil boom brought prosperity to Calgary, it also brought an unwelcome side-effect — a dramatic increase in homelessness.

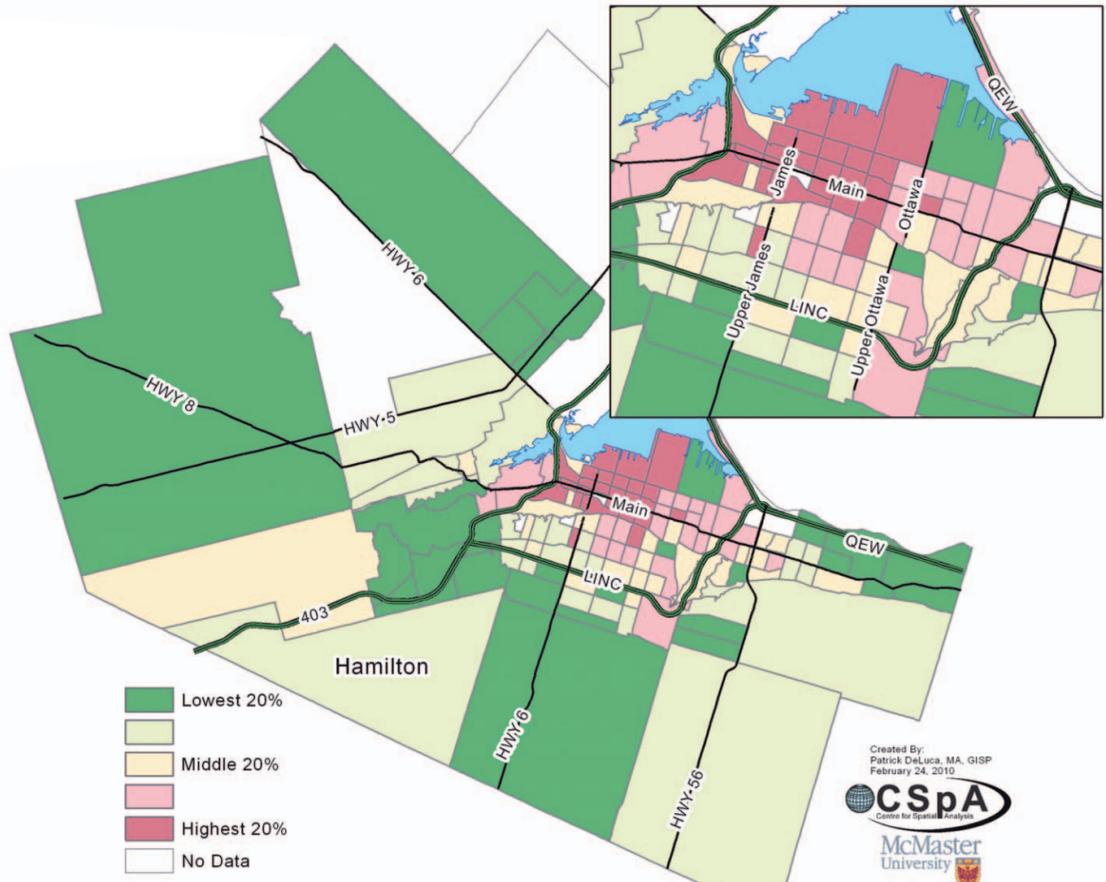
In less than two decades, the number of homeless people in Calgary grew by nearly a factor of 10 — from 447 in 1992 to 4,060 in 2008.

A report on homelessness for the City of Calgary calculated that "the average annual

cost of system usage, such as hospitals, corrections and shelters, by a homeless person in Calgary is estimated to be approximately \$100,000."

If that's accurate, it means the annual cost of Calgary's homeless problem amounted to more than \$400 million in 2008.

Two years into the project, the Calgary Homeless Foundation reports that more than 1,200 people, including 220 families, have received housing and support.



RATE OF PSYCHIATRIC-RELATED EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS PER 1,000 PEOPLE

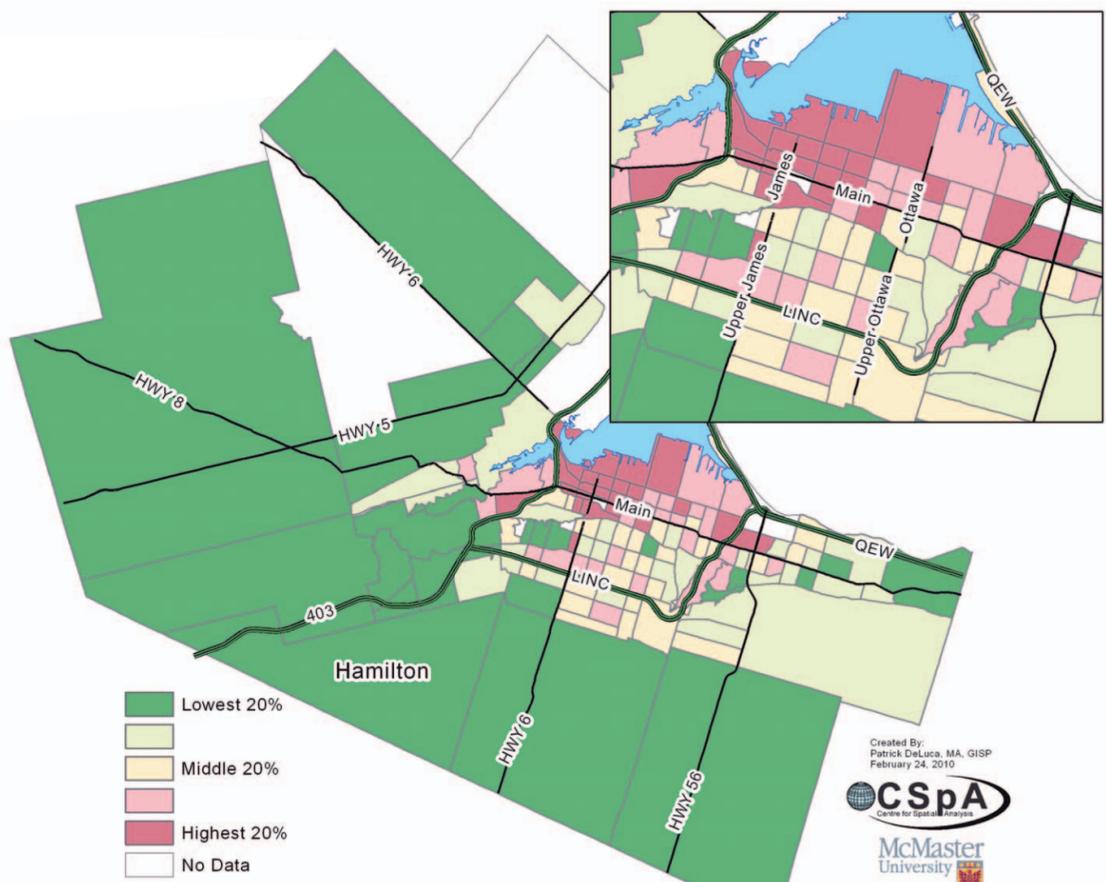
HIGHEST

1. 5370064 (Queen Street North / rail line / James Street North / Cannon Street West)	87.9
2. 5370063 (James Street North / rail line / Wellington Street North / Cannon Street East)	75.7
3. 5370049 (James Street North / Cannon Street East / Wellington Street North / King Street East)	62.0
4. 5370037 (Queen Street South / King Street West / James Street / Hunter Street West)	61.9
5. 5370048 (Queen Street North / Cannon Street West / James Street North / King Street West)	59.6

LOWEST

1. 5370142.02 (Highway 8 / Flamborough border / Gore Road / Middletown Road)	2.6
2. 5370142.01 (Middletown Road / Highway 8 / Governors Road / Flamborough border)	2.9
3. 5370140.04 (Hamilton Street / Burlington border / Highway 6 / north of Dundas Street)	3.1
4. 5370122.01 (Wilson Street West / Shaver Road / Garner Road / Fiddlers Green Road)	5.0
5. 5370086 (Waterfront / Stoney Creek border / Escarpment / Glover Road)	5.4

NOTE: Neighbourhoods are identified by their Hamilton census tract number, as defined by Statistics Canada (5370001, for example). For a complete list of Hamilton's census tracts and their geographic boundaries, visit the Code Red project at thespec.com.



PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE 15 YEARS AND OLDER LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

HIGHEST

1. 5370049 (James Street North / Cannon Street East / Wellington Street North / King Street East)	48.0%
2. 5370048 (Queen Street North / Cannon Street West / James Street North / King Street West)	45.4%
3. 5370037 (Queen Street South / King Street West / James Street / Hunter Street West)	44.2%
4. 5370051 (Wentworth Street North / Cannon Street East / Sherman Avenue North / Main Street East)	42.0%
5. 5370063 (James Street North / rail line / Wellington Street North / Cannon Street East)	40.9%

LOWEST

1. 5370142.01 (Middletown Road / Highway 8 / Governors Road / Flamborough border)	0.4%
2. 5370084.03 (Green Road / Highway 8 / Millen Road / Escarpment)	1.4%
3. 5370144 (Highway 6 / Flamborough-Puslinch Townline / Millborough Line / Concession 5 East / Robson Road / Parkside Drive)	2.1%
4. 5370121 (Governors Road / Brant County border / Jerseyville Road / Alberton Road / Garner Road / Martin Road / Binkley Road)	2.3%
5. 5370142.02 (Highway 8 / Flamborough border / Gore Road / Middletown Road)	2.6%