



Durham Region Poverty Response Program

Community workshop summary and
path forward

Insights, reflections and opportunities
from May 21, 2025

Land Acknowledgment

The Region of Durham exists on lands that the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg inhabited for thousands of years prior to European colonization. These lands are the traditional and treaty territories of the Nations covered under the Williams Treaties, including the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, and the Chippewa Nations of Georgina Island, Beausoleil and Rama.

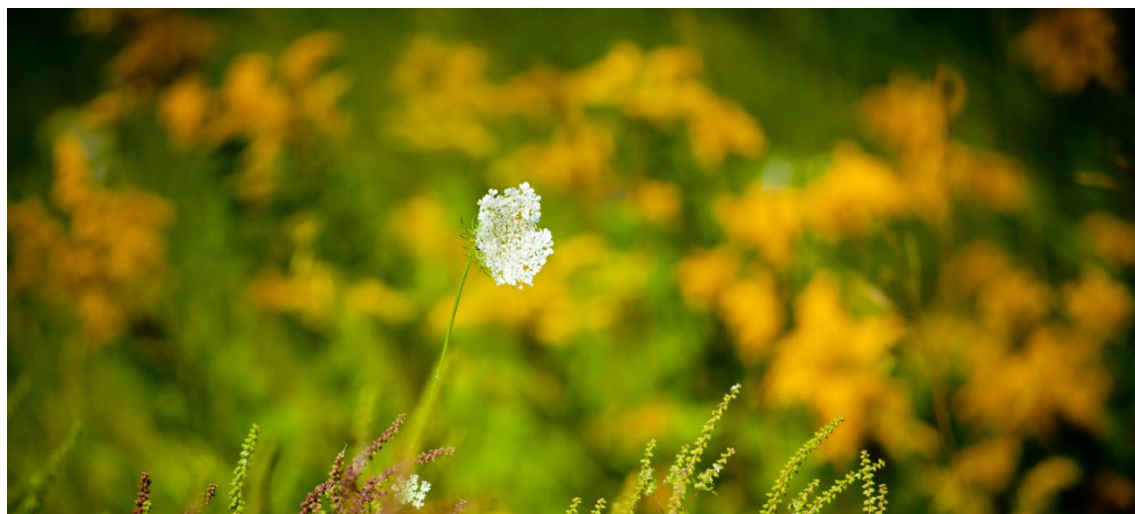
We honour, recognize, and respect Indigenous Peoples as rights holders and stewards of the lands and waters on which we have the privilege to live. In our efforts towards reconciliation, we continue to build and strengthen relationships with First Nations, as well as the large Métis community and growing Inuit community here in Durham. We commit to learning from Indigenous values and knowledge, building opportunities for collaboration, and recognizing that we are all connected.



Durham Region staff commitment

We are committed to engaging and working in partnership with people who are impacted by poverty, and organizations and community groups that support them. We are committed to engaging with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to ensure the Poverty Response Program reflects values, approaches and actions to support Indigenous people living with poverty. We must acknowledge that the root causes of poverty in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities are complex, systemic and a result of historical and ongoing colonialism, and a long history of racism and discrimination.

Addressing poverty in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities will involve understanding the context, listening and implementing culturally appropriate solutions in partnership with Indigenous people. We will build on existing relationships and reach out to local First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, circles, organizations and agencies to ask how they would like to be engaged in this work, and invite them to work in partnership with us to address poverty impacting First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. We are committed to listening, respecting the time of the individuals who would like to work with us, and acting on the guidance we received.



African Ancestral Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Indigenous Africans who were forcefully removed from their native lands and dispersed across the New World. This involuntary migration heavily contributed to the movement of African descended people across the African diaspora, to places like Canada.

It is imperative that we think deeper about the processes that led to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples on this land and settler colonialism. We must examine how these same processes displaced and forcibly removed Indigenous Africans from their lands to exploit their labours in European imperial endeavors to create a New World.

Stolen people, on stolen land.

What we are confronted with today are the vestiges of the transatlantic slave trade, what Dr. Saidiya Hartman calls “the afterlife of slavery.” In entering a conversation about anti-Black racism, it is important to center the humanity of Black peoples, and to examine systems that act upon them.

-Written by Dr. Natasha Henry-Dixon (York University)



Credits and acknowledgements

Davis Pier has been working with Region of Durham Social Services and Health Department to support the development of a comprehensive Poverty Response Program (PRP). A key milestone in this work was bringing people together for a community workshop to listen, learn and share.

Thank you to all who participated in the Durham Region Poverty Response Community Workshop - community voices, service providers, Regional leadership, and people with lived and living experience with poverty.* Your time, honesty and insight made this day a true reflection of our community's strength.

The voices captured here reflect a shared effort to deepen understanding and drive a more compassionate, action-oriented response to poverty. We are grateful for your contributions.

* A full list of participating organizations can be found in Appendix A.



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Section 1

Introduction and context

Purpose of What We Heard Report

This report captures key insights and outcomes from the Durham Region Poverty Response Community Workshop, held on May 21, 2025, at the Ajax Community Centre. The report's purpose is to:



Document the outcomes of the Durham Region Poverty Response Community Workshop.



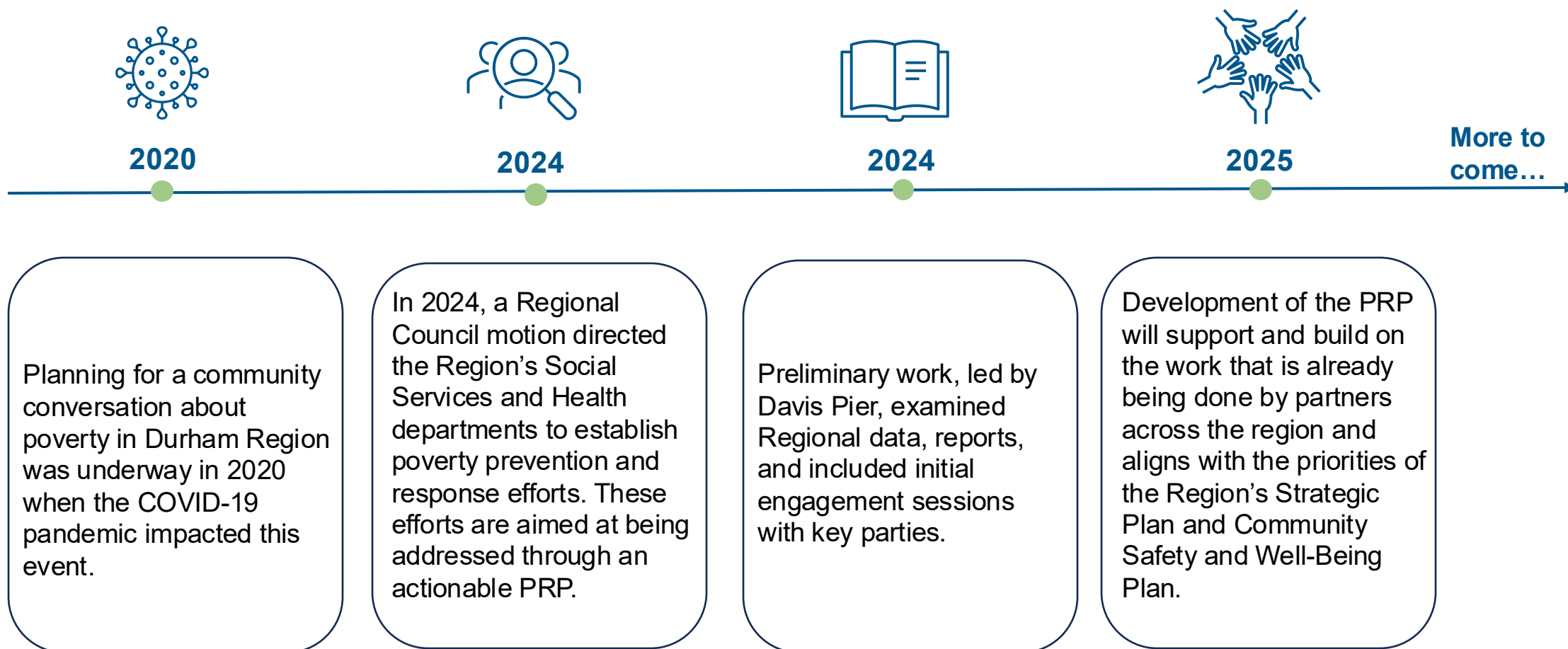
Reflect shared learning, validate priorities and support collective next steps.



Provide a foundation for continued collaboration and action.

Background | How did we get here?

The Poverty Response Community Workshop was part of Durham Region's ongoing effort to develop a plan to address poverty through an action-focused program. It brought together community members to share insights, validate ideas, and help shape the program based on lived experience and local priorities.



Section 2

Community Workshop overview

Overview of the Community Workshop

The full-day workshop brought together community leaders, service providers and individuals with lived experience with the goal to build a stronger, more co-ordinated response to poverty in Durham Region by:

- 1 **Building shared understanding across the region.**
- 2 **Fostering connection and learning from one another.**
- 3 **Aligning with other initiatives across the region.**
- 4 **Identifying opportunities for action and next steps.**

The day focused on a shared recognition that poverty is a complex and urgent crisis that requires sustained action. While no single organization can address it alone, lasting and meaningful change depends on collective care and co-ordinated efforts across sectors.

The workshop marked an important early step in the development of a regional Poverty Response Program (PRP).

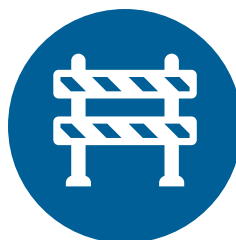
Preliminary research and engagement had already been conducted to better understand the local context of poverty, resulting in the **eight proposed Levers of Change**.

The workshop provided an opportunity to build on and validate earlier work, while also bringing community partners and people with lived experience into the conversation.

It marked a shared starting point for collaboration as the Region begins developing the program with the community.

Lever of Change overview

Levers of Change are key areas where focused action can lead to meaningful improvements.



In the context of the PRP, Levers of Change represent **the systems, conditions or barriers that, if addressed, have the potential to significantly reduce poverty and improve quality of life for those experiencing poverty.**



By identifying and working on these Levers, we can target the conditions and root causes of poverty and create more sustainable, community-driven solutions.



The following page provides an overview of eight key Levers of Change related to poverty in Durham Region, identified through Davis Pier's research and community engagement.

Poverty Response Program Levers of Change

The eight key Levers of Change related to poverty in Durham Region were identified through research and community input. They reflect common challenges faced by people living in poverty and formed the basis of the Community Workshop, where participants explored the levers most relevant to their experience.



Access to food

Food insecurity is a significant issue in Durham, with many individuals and households relying on food banks due to the rising costs of groceries.



Mental health and addictions

Mental health and addictions issues are prevalent particularly among vulnerable populations lacking access to affordable and accessible supports.



Employment

Barriers to finding and keeping employment act as significant challenges to achieving financial independence in Durham Region.



Service access and navigation

Navigating social support services in Durham is challenging and inequities in accessing services and supports are experienced across the region.



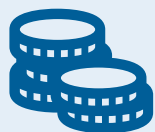
Housing

Housing affordability and supportive housing shortages are critical issues for individuals and families experiencing poverty.



Technological access

Limited access to technology hinders residents with low income by limiting opportunities in accessing services, employment and education.



Income

Barriers to stable and adequate income, such as low wages and high costs, act as an obstacle to achieving financial security in Durham Region.



Transportation

Transportation constraints impede access to essential services, employment and health care, particularly in north Durham.

Community Workshop Agenda | Morning

The agenda below outlines the morning structure of the Community Workshop, designed to create opportunity for learning and sharing of experiences, with the goal to inform next steps in the development of the PRP.

Activity	Details
Durham Region Welcome	➤ Stella Danos-Papaconstantinou, Commissioner of Social Services at The Regional Municipality of Durham. ➤ Dr. Robert Kyle, Commissioner and Medical Officer of Health at The Regional Municipality of Durham. ➤ Mayor Elizabeth Roy of the Town of Whitby, Chair of Durham's Health and Social Services Committee.
"What does it mean to you?"	Participants picked a word related to the eight Levers of Change that resonated with them and shared what it means to them.
Keynote by Mike Davis on Developing a Poverty Response Program	Mike Davis, co-founder and CEO of Davis Pier, discussed the impacts of poverty, shared the rationale behind the PRP, and provided a high-level overview of the work completed to date as well as what lies ahead.
Validation of Levers of Change	Small group discussion that focused on validating the Levers of Change and identifying gaps in the current Levers of Change.
Levers of Change Breakout Discussion #1	Participants joined focused discussions in their primary area of expertise, exploring current challenges and future opportunities for the PRP (See Appendix B for the worksheet used during the session).

Community Workshop Agenda | Afternoon

The agenda below outlines the morning structure of the Community Workshop, designed to create opportunity for learning and sharing of experiences, with the goal to inform next steps in the development of the PRP.

Activity	Details
Levers of Change Gallery Tour	Participants reviewed the different Levers of Change and added their thoughts, questions and comments.
Levers of Change Breakout Discussion #2	Participants joined focused discussions in a secondary area of expertise, exploring current challenges and future opportunities for the PRP (See Appendix C for the worksheet used during the session).
Group Share Back	Participants were asked to share one or two new insights that have emerged in the second Levers of Change discussion.
Related Initiatives Alignment Activity	In small groups, participants were asked to map initiatives that are already happening and indicate how they align with the PRP Levers of Change.
Thank you, what's next and close out	A brief summary of key takeaways from the session, expression of appreciation to participants and an overview of immediate next steps.

Section 3

What We Heard

“What does it mean to you?”

A core part of the day’s engagement was the “What does it mean to you?” activity. Participants chose a word connected to the eight Levers of Change that resonated with their own experiences and shared what it meant to them. This activity helped ground our conversations in lived realities and set the tone for the day. The visual below shows some of the words that emerged, with focus areas like Community, Compassion, Dignity and Hope appearing most often. The **size and scale of each word reflect how frequently it was mentioned**, offering a snapshot of the shared values and priorities that participants brought into the room.





Section 3.1

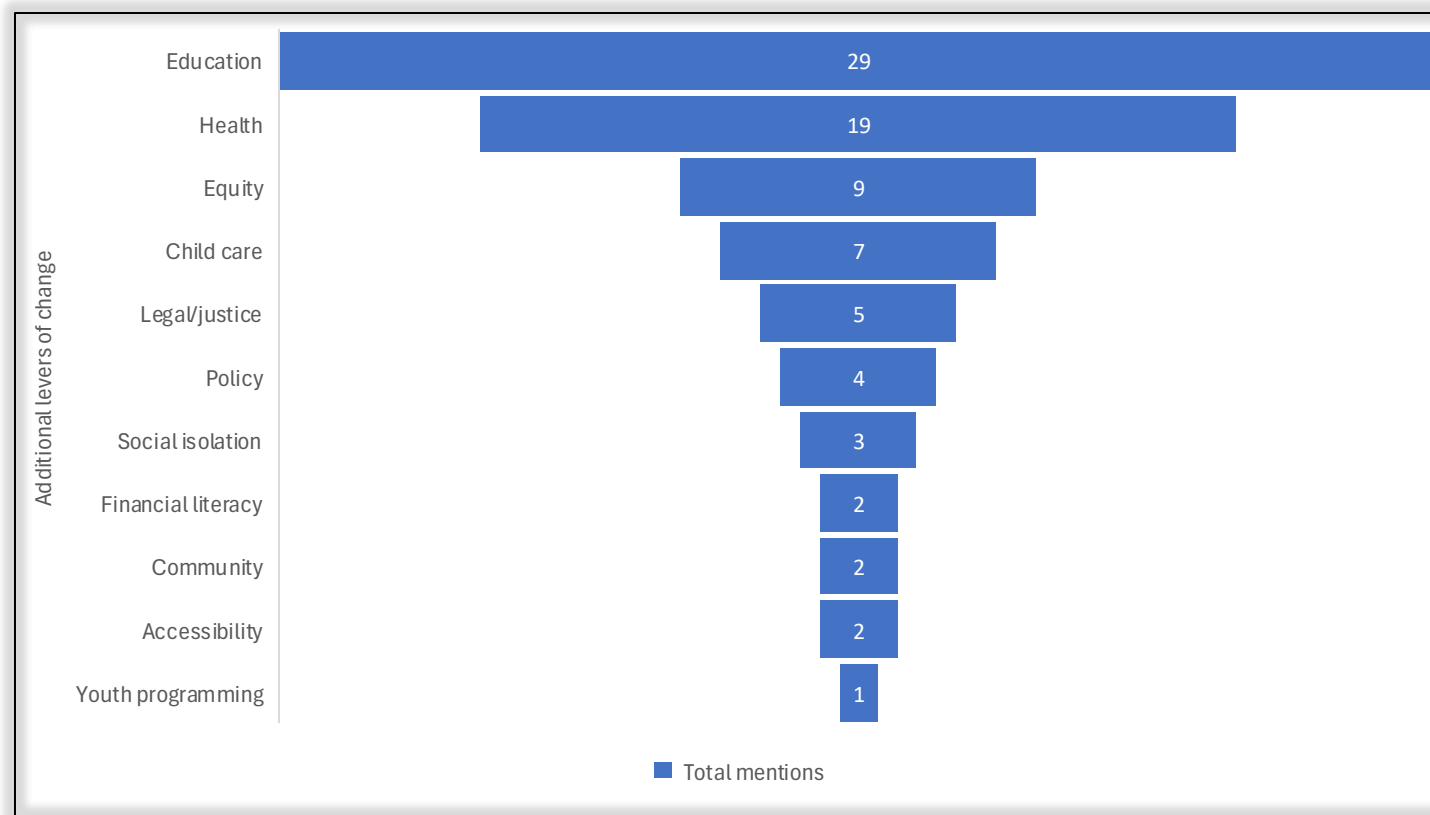
Validating the Levers of Change

Validating the Levers of Change | Overview of results

Through the Levers of Change validation activity, participants were asked “**are these the right Levers of Change to focus on?**” and “**are there any major challenges or barriers missing?**” While all participants agreed that the eight Levers are critical for the PRP to focus on, some participants had suggestions for additional areas of focus that could be integrated within the eight Levers or become standalone Levers.

Figure 1 below illustrates the frequency in which other Levers of Change were mentioned:

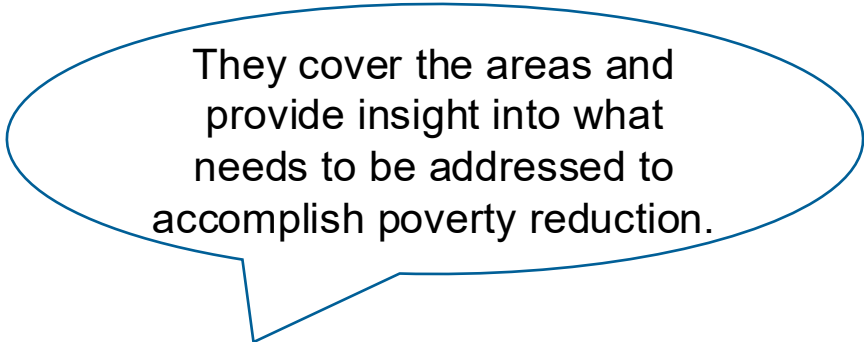
Figure 1: Frequency of additional areas of focus mentioned



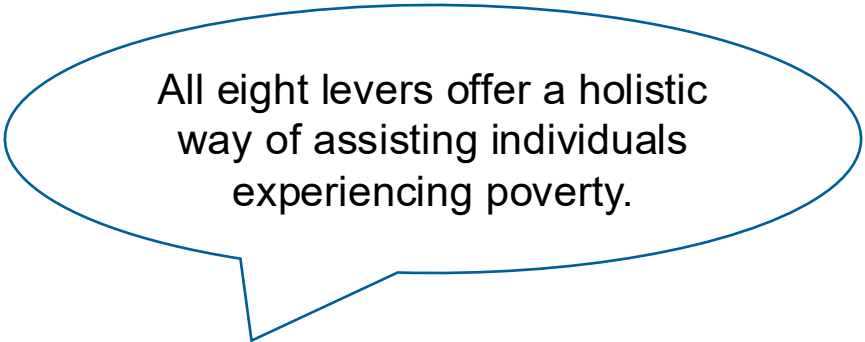
Validating the Levers of Change | Initial Levers of Change

Participants also shared why they agreed with the eight initial Levers of Change being the right focus for the PRP and they emphasized how these areas are connected and often overlap. This reinforced the findings from the preliminary research work, which also highlighted the relationships between the Levers.

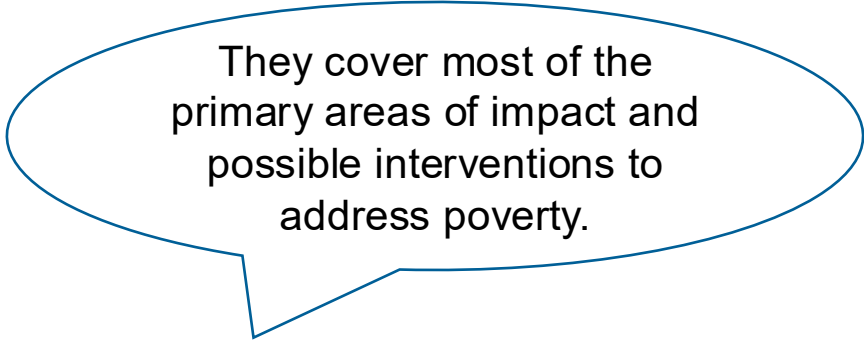
Below is a sampling of quotes shared by participants supporting the eight initial Levers of Change:

A blue-outlined speech bubble pointing downwards.

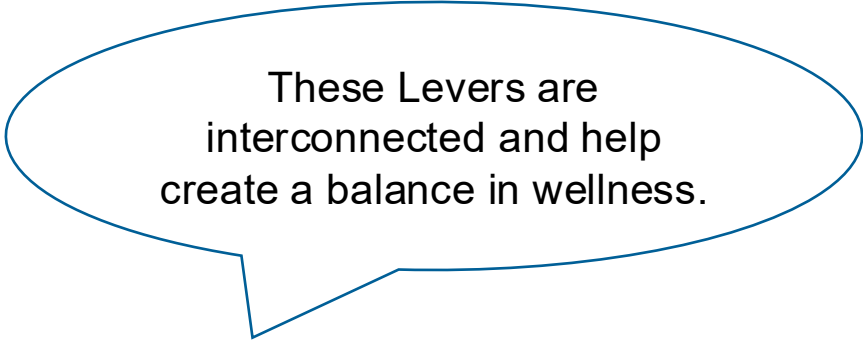
They cover the areas and provide insight into what needs to be addressed to accomplish poverty reduction.

A blue-outlined speech bubble pointing downwards.

All eight levers offer a holistic way of assisting individuals experiencing poverty.

A blue-outlined speech bubble pointing downwards.

They cover most of the primary areas of impact and possible interventions to address poverty.

A blue-outlined speech bubble pointing downwards.

These Levers are interconnected and help create a balance in wellness.



Many participants pointed out that the eight Levers of Change are closely connected and often overlap. They noted that real progress in one area often depends on progress in others, and that working on just one Lever at a time could overlook the bigger picture of poverty and well-being. Overall, there was strong agreement that the Levers need to be addressed together to make meaningful change.

Validating the Levers of Change | Additional areas of focus mentioned

Education, health, equity and child care were the most commonly suggested additional focus areas, each mentioned by more than five participants. Participants felt these areas should either become their own Levers of Change or be clearly included within the existing Levers.

The following provides a summary of participants' rationales across these four possible additions to the Levers of Change:

Education



Education was cited as both a missing Lever and a root cause of systemic challenges. Participants mentioned the importance of early childhood education, access to schooling, adult education and extracurriculars as areas needing attention.

“Access to education is critical to finding sustainable employment and maintaining self-worth.”

Equity



Equity was highlighted as a critical lens that should be applied across all Levers. Participants emphasized the importance of addressing systemic racism, discrimination, marginalization, and that certain groups face compounded barriers due to their identities or circumstances.

“Equity-based services understanding the need of the population are needed.”

Health



Physical health was emphasized as requiring greater focus as a Lever of Change among participants, beyond mental health and addictions. The complexity of health challenges in underserved populations and equity in health care access were mentioned as some potential areas of focus.

“I believe this should be grouped with mental health and addictions.”

Child care



Child care was identified as a gap in the current framework and important in breaking generational poverty cycles. Participants reported a lack of affordable, accessible and reliable child care as a barrier to employment, education and more.

“Child care can be interconnected with existing pillars like employment, mental health, income and access to food.”



Section 3.2

Understanding the current state

Levers of Change breakout discussions

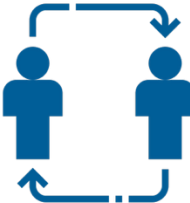
A core component of the day's engagement was the Levers of Change discussions, where participants engaged in focused, worksheet-guided dialogue around assigned Levers of Change (See Appendix B and Appendix C for the worksheets). These discussions were designed to:

An icon depicting two stylized human heads in profile. The left head contains a lightbulb, and the right head contains a gear. Above the heads is a circular checkmark.

Deepen our understanding and research of these Levers of Change

An icon of a calendar with three rings at the top. A large right-pointing arrow is superimposed over the calendar.

Identify a path to tomorrow

An icon showing two stylized human figures. Arrows connect them in a circular path, indicating a cycle or interaction.

Identify who needs to be involved

An icon representing a checklist. It shows three rows, each with a checkmark in a box followed by a horizontal line.

Identify current work and initiatives happening in the region today

Understanding the current state | Levers of Change

Participants were asked to reflect on the current landscape for each Lever of Change in the region. Key themes across each Lever emerged when asked: “What does this issue or area look like right now in your community or day-to-day life?” The following provides an overview of the current challenges across Levers.

Current state



Durham Region residents with low incomes are currently experiencing challenges and barriers across all eight Levers of Change, while community organizations in the region are experiencing funding constraints that limit their ability to meet increasing levels of demand for services.

Key insights

Funding constraints: Community organizations are facing funding and resource constraints across several Levers of Change, which limit their ability to meet increasing levels of demand and expand services and supports.

Interconnectedness of Levers: Many residents living with low income in Durham experience overlapping Levers of Change, which must be addressed holistically rather than in silos.

Service access constraints: Durham residents lack access to needed supports and services across multiple Levers of Change, whether it is accessible transportation close to home, mental health and addiction supports, or subsidized housing.

Rural access challenges: Rural and north Durham residents have difficulty accessing the same community services and supports that are available in urban centres and south Durham.

Understanding the current state | Challenges and barriers

Participants reflected on the current landscape for each Lever of Change in the region by responding to the questions, “**what does this issue look like right now in your community?**” and “**what’s making it hard to improve this issue?**” Insights were synthesized into the summaries below that capture the current state for each Lever of Change.



Employment

The Region is experiencing high unemployment, with many individuals holding multiple part-time jobs. Seniors, youth and newcomers find it hard to navigate the system and secure jobs, and there have been layoffs in the manufacturing sector with no new hiring.

Other challenges include limited transportation options in the north, hindering access to job opportunities, and people lacking the technological skills needed for job searches and applications.



Transportation

Rural and north Durham communities face challenges with transportation due to infrequent service and a lack of available and accessible options, leading to overbooked community transportation services as demand exceeds existing resources.

Other challenges include high costs, communication barriers, and the lack of live transit information/updates, which lead to missed appointments and social connections.



Mental health and addictions

The region is experiencing a mental health and addictions crisis, with increasing issues among youth. Rising overdose rates, stigma, a lack of trauma-informed care, long wait times to access services and limited long-term recovery options are leaving people without needed help.

Other challenges include complex intake processes, limited outreach, insufficient capacity to meet demand, and lack of appropriate and peer-based services.



Access to food

Food insecurity is widespread across the region, driven by barriers to accessing nutritious and affordable food. Residents with low income, seniors, students and families are most affected, with many facing inconsistent access to food programs.

Other challenges include reduced donations and volunteers, transportation limitations, a lack of culturally relevant food options from available services, rising food costs and limited cooking skills/resources.

Understanding the current state | Challenges and barriers (con't)

Participants reflected on the current landscape for each Lever of Change in the region by responding to the questions, “**what does this issue look like right now in your community?**” and “**what’s making it hard to improve this issue?**” Insights were synthesized into the summaries below that capture the current state for each Lever of Change.



Service access and navigation

Residents face challenges accessing services due to poor co-ordination, lack of a central intake system and high demand. People often struggle to reach their ODSP caseworkers, apply for OW following provincial changes or access services in rural areas.

Stigma, cultural and language barriers, and misinformation further complicate access and navigation. People retell their stories across disconnected services, leading to frustration and service fatigue.



Technological access

Many residents face barriers to technology access, with limited or no internet, and low levels of digital literacy. Public spaces like libraries provide some support, such as access to devices and internet connection, but people struggle with travel and receive limited support to fill out government forms needed to get benefits.

Other challenges include people lacking updated devices and/or access to printers, fax and cameras needed for online services.



Housing

The region faces a housing crisis marked by a severe shortage of affordable options, long waitlists for social and supportive housing, and growing homelessness. Young people and residents with low-income struggle to find housing. Many live in shelters, encampments or unaffordable and unsuitable rental units.

Barriers include limited shelter space, a lack of transitional and supportive housing, complex application systems and discrimination from landlords.



Income

Many are experiencing income insecurity, including seniors on fixed incomes, social assistance recipients, and those working multiple low-wage or part-time jobs. Minimum wage does not reflect the cost of living and rising costs for basic needs are making it difficult for people to stay afloat or get ahead.

Barriers include low social assistance rates, limited access to well-paying jobs, and few supports to build financial literacy or long-term stability.

Understanding the current state | Initiatives at work (part 1)

Participants reflected on the current landscape for each Lever of Change in the Region by responding to the question, ‘**what’s helping make things better or move in the right direction?**’ Responses were synthesized into the summaries below, highlighting what is currently working well for each Lever of Change.

Employment



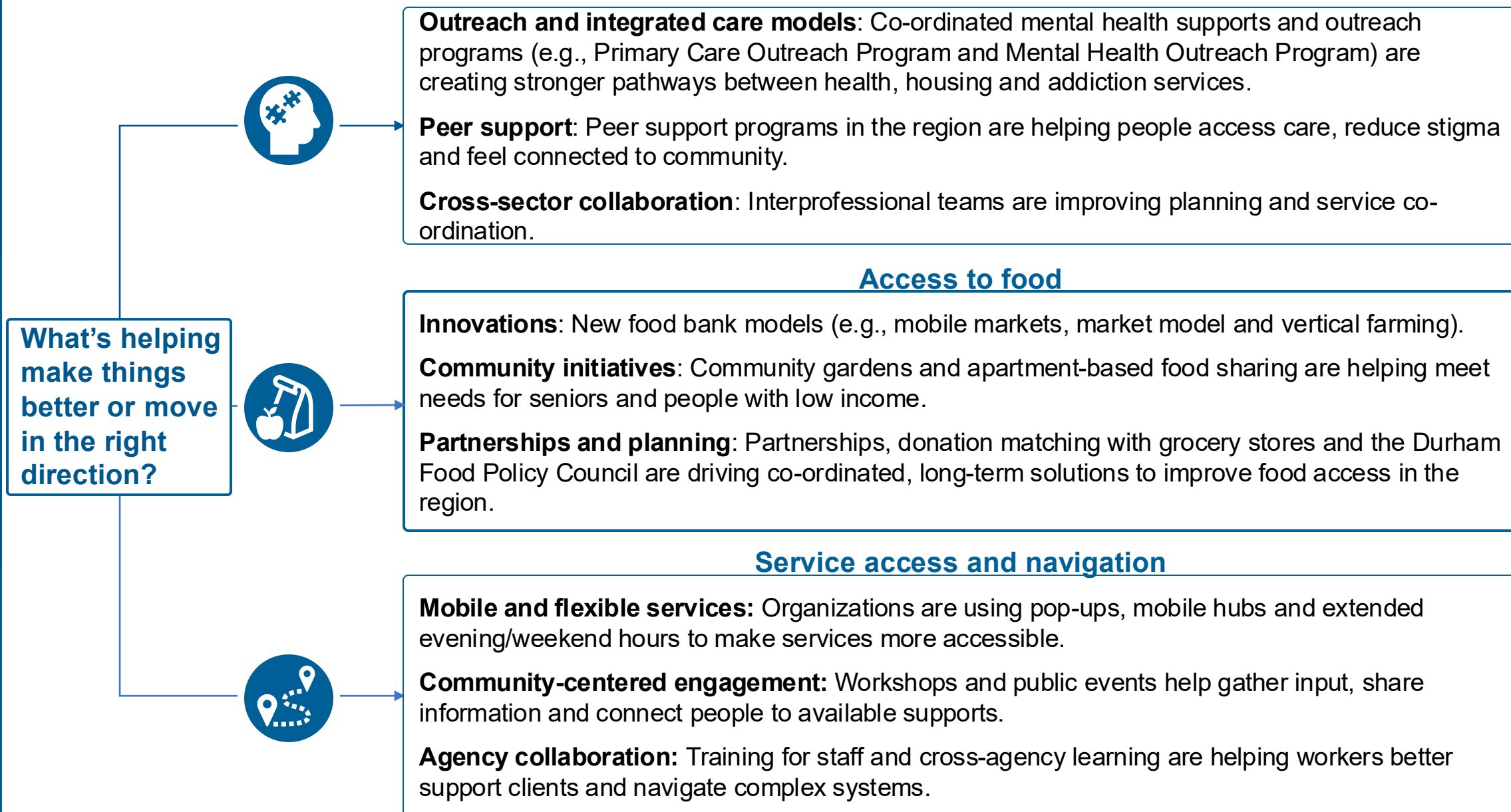
Transportation

Community events: Engagement is helping gather information from public transit users.

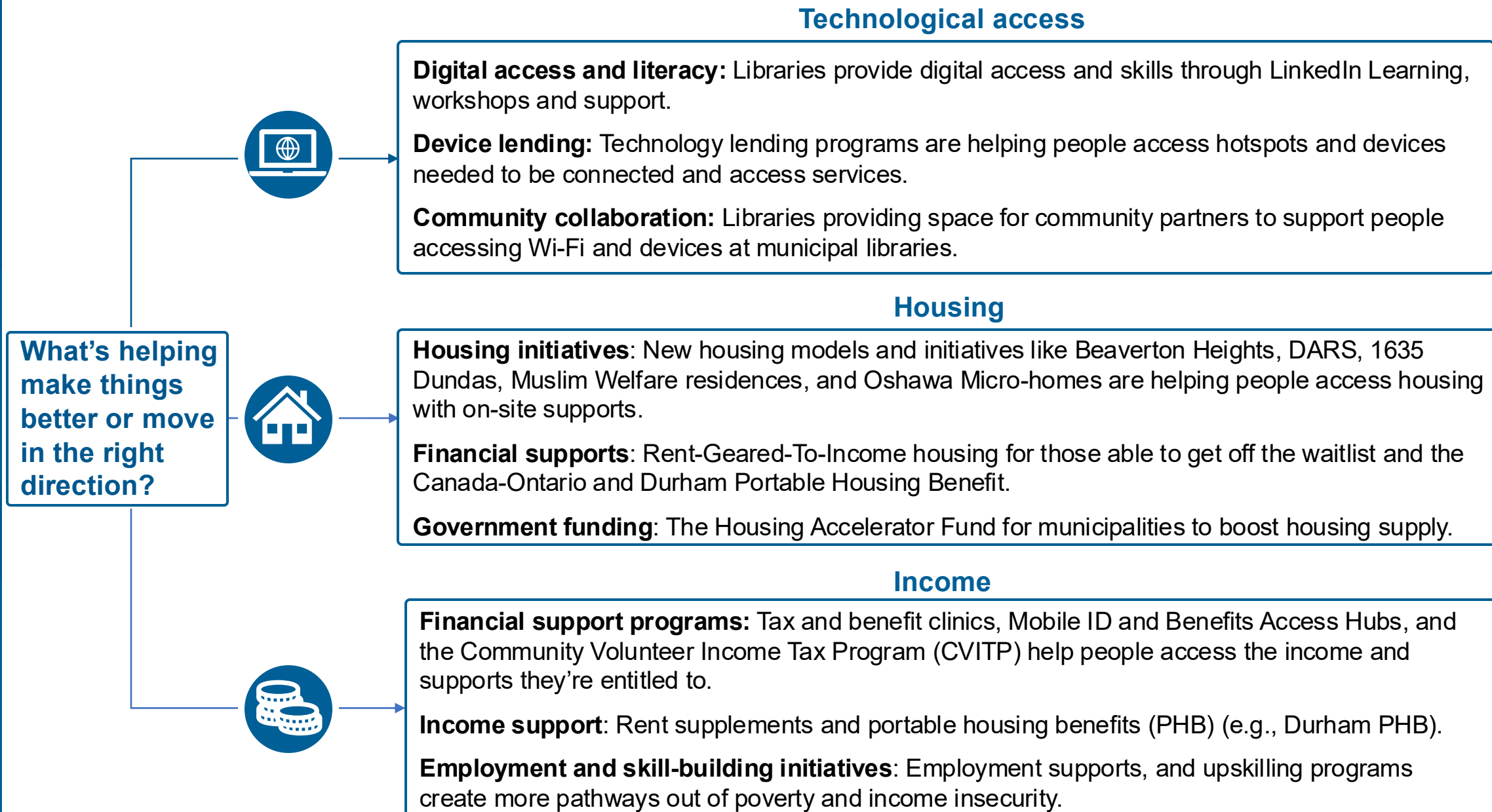
Flexible services: On-demand and specialized services for those who are unable to access fixed routes. Taxi by-law changes are also helping access for people.

Accessibility support: Durham Region Transit's work with the Abilities Centre and the launch of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program are improving accessibility for riders with cognitive disabilities.

Understanding the current state | Initiatives at work (part 2)



Understanding the current state | Initiatives at work (part 3)



Understanding the current state | Stories from the Region

This activity let participants see the region from the perspective of its residents. Using a simple template, they wrote first-person stories based on their own experiences or those of others affected by a Lever of Change. The exercise encouraged participants to step into the shoes of others and express how a specific Lever is shaping people's lives in the Region of Durham.

Quotes from the activity:

"As a mature student living in poverty, I can't afford tech and software required to take a diploma or degree program, which means I stay in low paying or precarious job."

"As a young person with a history of homelessness, there is nowhere affordable to live and I am on a treadmill of instability."

"I am a newcomer. I am not eligible for some supports because they don't have a tax return. I am not able to access programs during my first year in Canada."

"As a resident who is homeless, I find it difficult to access mental health supports when I go to emergency departments. I face a lot of barriers and am mentally discouraged."

"As a person with physical disabilities, I find it near impossible to find accessible housing so I continue to access shelters."

"As a senior, I live on a fixed income so I find it difficult to afford housing, food, transportation, etc."

Understanding the current state | Stories from the Region (Key Insights)

The following illustrates the key insights derived from the experiences and observations of Durham Region residents and community organizations.

1 **Working hard, still struggling**

Even with full-time jobs or two incomes, many households can't keep up with the rising cost of living. Residents are doing their best, but it's often not enough to cover essentials like rent, groceries and child care. This leaves people feeling frustrated and exhausted - working hard but falling behind.

2 **Barriers that block opportunity**

Conditions such as disabilities, lack of transportation, or limited access to technology make it challenging for people to find or keep work. Residents want to contribute and improve their situations, but face barriers that limit their options and independence.

3 **Support that misses the mark**

Help is out there, but it often doesn't fit people's real-life situations. Programs may have strict eligibility rules or assume a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't work for everyone. Residents feel overlooked and unsupported, even when they actively seek help.

4 **A strain on mental health**

The pressure of making ends meet without enough support takes a toll. Many residents report increased anxiety, depression and a sense of hopelessness. Struggling to meet basic needs affects not just finances, but people's overall well-being and sense of dignity.

5 **Difficult trade-offs every day**

Many people are forced to choose between food, housing and health care. These are not rare emergencies - they're everyday decisions. Constantly having to choose between basic needs creates stress and instability, especially for families.

Section 3.3

Building a vision for the future

Future vision summary

Participants were asked to reflect on the future possibilities for each Lever of Change in the region. Key themes across each Lever emerged when asked: “**what does the future look like for this Lever of Change?**” Responses were synthesized and the following provide a glimpse of the possibilities for change.

Future vision



Residents in Durham Region envision a future where basic needs like housing, food, income and health are met through community-driven, collaborative solutions. Each Lever of Change reflects a desire for systems that are more inclusive, co-ordinated and grounded in lived experience.

Key insights

Collaboration is critical: Success across all areas depends on co-ordinated efforts between government, community groups, service providers and residents.

Prevention and stability: There’s a strong push to shift from crisis response to upstream solutions, like livable wages, stable housing and mental health support.

Access and equity: People want services and supports that are easier to reach, more inclusive and tailored to diverse needs - especially for underserved groups.

Community-led innovation: Residents value grassroots solutions (community hubs, gardens, mobile services) and want more opportunities to shape the services they use.

Future vision | Levers of Change vision statements

Participants reflected on future possibilities for each Lever of Change in the region. In response to the question, **“what does the future look like for this Lever of Change?”**, common themes emerged. These were synthesized into guiding statements that capture the future vision for each Lever.



Employment

Support fair wages, local job creation and inclusive work environments by investing in training, mentorship and employment supports.



Service access and navigation

Simplify and strengthen services with “one-stop” access points, mobile support and better outreach - especially in underserved areas.



Mental health and addictions

Provide timely, trauma-informed and culturally safe care with better funding, housing supports and reduced stigma.



Housing

Create safe, affordable homes with rent control, co-ops, and wraparound supports to prevent homelessness and promote stability.



Transportation

Make transportation safer, more accessible and responsive to community needs, with more options for seniors and in rural areas.



Technological Access

Bridge the digital divide with public Wi-Fi, device lending, rural internet, and tech education starting early and reaching all.



Access to food

Expand access to affordable, healthy food through community gardens, fresh food banks, school meals and local food partnerships.



Income

Ensure livable income through better rates for OW/ODSP/EI, fair pay, and programs that build financial security and reduce barriers.

Getting from today to tomorrow | Actionable starting points

Across Durham Region, community members and service providers are identifying tangible, near-term actions ("starting points") to address poverty and improve well-being. These actions were identified by participants to build momentum toward long-term change by meeting immediate needs and demonstrating what's possible through collaboration and innovation. These ideas for actions act as early starting points as the next phase of the Program's development begins:

Transportation

- Continue growing volunteer-led shuttles.
- Expand Durham Region Transit (DRT) On-Demand services.
- Allow car seats on public transit to support families.
- Maintain strong response systems for transit feedback.

Income

- Increase access to tax and benefit clinics.
- Expand financial empowerment and budgeting programs.
- Enhance community development initiatives tied to economic security.
- Create union-rate jobs in housing and public infrastructure sectors.

Employment

- Launch or expand employment grants for newcomers and seniors.
- Develop mentorship programs for job seekers.
- Enhance settlement and newcomer employment services.
- Ensure equal benefits for part-time workers.
- Support financial literacy and debt management programs.

Access to food

- Grow community garden programs and urban farming.
- Offer cooking classes using food bank staples.
- Implement school breakfast and lunch programs.
- Support food banks to increase collaboration and fresh food access.

Getting from today to tomorrow | Actionable starting points (con't)

Across Durham Region, community members and service providers are identifying tangible, near-term actions ("starting points") to address poverty and improve well-being. These actions were identified by participants to build momentum toward long-term change by meeting immediate needs and demonstrating what's possible through collaboration and innovation. These ideas for actions act as early starting points as the next phase of the Program's development begins:

Technology access

- Add Wi-Fi and charging stations to public buses and public spaces.
- Launch tech rental programs at colleges and access hubs.
- Provide individual tech training for students before school starts.
- Expand rural internet infrastructure and public phone access.
- Include tech literacy in high school graduation requirements.

Service access

- Install food pantries in libraries.
- Deploy mobile hub vehicles for rural and remote service delivery.
- Train frontline staff on service navigation and bias.
- Use signage (e.g., bus stops) and public marketing to share service info.
- Create ID and employment resource guides.

Mental health

- Launch or expand RAAM (Rapid Access Addiction Medicine) clinics.
- Provide direct cash transfers to individuals in crisis.
- Reduce counseling waitlists and improve access.
- Offer trauma-informed training at libraries and community hubs.
- Use public ads and media to reduce stigma and promote resources.
- Require mental health training for health care providers.

Housing

- Repurpose vacant buildings for transitional housing.
- Prevent discharges from institutions into homelessness.
- Use surplus public land for affordable housing.
- Pilot trauma-informed and wraparound housing supports.
- Educate landlords and public on housing rights and stability.
- Pilot modular builds.
- Launch rent subsidy pilots.

Getting from today to tomorrow | Who needs to be involved

To move this work forward, it's essential to recognize the ecosystem of actors needed at different levels. This framework groups key partners into **Champions** who lead and advocate for change, **Collaborators** who co-design and deliver services, and **Contributors** who support the work through infrastructure, tools and community connection.



Champions (lead and advocate for change):

- Government leaders (municipal, provincial, federal)
- Politicians and policy-makers
- Individuals with lived experience
- Community leaders and advocates



Collaborators (design and deliver services):

- Health care providers and mental health agencies
- School boards and post-secondary institutions
- Employers and workforce development organizations
- Non-profits and community-based organizations
- Transportation services



Contributors (offer tools, infrastructure or space):

- Libraries and library boards
- Rotary Clubs and service clubs
- Sector leaders
- Faith groups and cultural organizations

Getting from today to tomorrow | Addressing the root causes

Participants identified opportunities for longer-term investment and structural change to help the PRP address the root causes of poverty. Achieving this will require systemic reforms and sustained investment across several key areas.

Stigma

Reduce stigma around homelessness and mental health.

Youth support

Improve support for youth, especially 2SLGBTQ+ youth and those facing barriers to work.

Income

Advocate for social assistance rates and make income supports easier to access.

Mental health and addictions

Make mental health and addiction care easier to get and better connected to other supports.

Technological access

Ensure everyone has access to the internet and devices, especially through libraries.

Access to food

Improve food access by reducing waste and supporting local food programs.

Housing

Build and protect more affordable housing, with wraparound support services included.
Make rent more affordable and improve housing conditions.

Section 4

Recommendations and next steps

What we've accomplished

Over the past few months, we've built a strong foundation for the PRP by conducting research, listening to community voices and aligning with Regional priorities. Efforts across both the initial phase of research and engagement and the Community Workshop include:



Research and engagements

- ✓ Completed **desk research and population analysis** to understand the landscape of poverty in Durham.
- ✓ Conducted **in-depth engagement with community members, the Region and community organizations** to develop an understanding of key populations and challenges faced by those experiencing poverty in Durham Region.
- ✓ Created a **Current State Summary** of poverty in the Region, highlighting challenges, gaps and existing efforts to serve as a foundation for the Program.
- ✓ Developed **Guiding Principles** to ground future work in shared values.
- ✓ Built a preliminary **Roadmap** to guide the work ahead.



Community Workshop

- ✓ Validated the key **Levers of Change** identified in earlier engagements with Community Workshop participants, including community voices, service providers, Regional leadership, and people with lived and living experience of poverty. Enhanced the recommended final list of Levers of Change for future work.
- ✓ Hosted **deep discussions** with diverse participants to explore the current state of the Levers of Change and future opportunities for change.
- ✓ Used a **Gallery Walk** to reflect on insights and surface new ideas.
- ✓ Mapped **connections between issues, services and people**, helping identify opportunities for more coordinated efforts.

What we've learned

Through this work, a clear picture of the challenges facing residents in Durham Region has emerged:

The challenges are complex, connected and ever-increasing. People are facing barriers across multiple areas at once, like housing, income, transportation, food, health and more. These Levers of Change don't exist in silos - progress in one often depends on action in another. Trying to address any one area in isolation won't be enough; A holistic, longer-term approach is necessary.

The system is strained. Residents with low incomes are struggling to meet their basic needs. At the same time, community organizations are facing growing demand with limited resources and funding.

There are gaps in key areas. In addition to the original eight Levers of Change, participants repeatedly emphasized the need to focus more on education, health, equity and child care - either as new areas or by strengthening how they're reflected in the current framework.

People want community-driven, inclusive solutions. Residents envision a future where supports are co-ordinated, responsive and grounded in lived experience. There's a strong desire to move away from fragmented services and toward more collaborative and accessible systems.

There's a clear push to move from ideas to action. Participants expressed a desire to shift from talking about problems to implementing practical, visible solutions. There is growing urgency to act and demonstrate progress on the ground.

Next steps

We've compiled these insights into this What We Heard report, and it's clear that the foundation for change has been laid. To keep momentum, Durham Region's Social Services and Health departments will be taking the following next steps:

A. Design Poverty Response Program structures

This phase should:

- Define **who is responsible** for leading and delivering the work and build a dedicated governance structure.
- Clarify **decision-making processes** and how **community voices and lived experience** will be included in program decisions.
- Establish **how efforts will be funded and resourced**, and **how the Region will support the program into the future**.
- Determine **how success and impact will be measured** and tracked across the Program.

Next step

Building on the momentum of the Community Day Workshop, Durham Region is prioritizing the establishment of a governance group and Program structure to lead the PRP moving forward.

B. Develop and launch an action plan

This phase should:

- **Complete additional engagement on other areas of focus heard from the Community Day Workshop**, with a focus on child care and education.
- **Develop a roadmap for the Program**, which will identify the order of clear starting points for the updated Levers of Change following additional engagements.
- **Leverage the Program roadmap to build an action plan**, identifying clear starting points, initiatives, metrics for impact, and recommendations that align with community needs and Regional goals.
- Begin to action this plan through early implementation steps.

Next step

After establishing a governance group and Program structure, the above steps will be taken to ultimately develop and launch a Poverty Response Action Plan.

Once the Program Design Phase and Action Plan are complete, the next step is to work with the community to begin implementing the Levers of Change, starting with those prioritized by the governance group in the Program's evolving roadmap.

Section 5 Appendices

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Community Workshop participating organizations

Organization	Organizations (part 2)	Organizations (part 3)
AIDS Committee of Durham Region	Durham College	John Howard Society of Durham
Ajax Public Library	Durham College - Social Impact Hub	Lived Experience Advisory Committee
Basic Income Canada Network	Rotary Club of Whitby	North House
Blue Door	Durham Community Foundation	Region of Durham Child Care and Early Years programs
Brock Township Public Library	Durham Community Health Centre	Region of Durham Communications and Engagement
Christian Faith Outreach Centre (CFOC)- Doors of Compassion	Durham Community Legal Clinic	Region of Durham Community Programs
City of Oshawa	Durham Region Accessibility Advisory Committee	Region of Durham Social Services
City of Pickering	Durham Region Anti-Racism Taskforce (DRART)	Simcoe Hall
Clarington Library, Museums & Archives (CLMA)	Durham Region Health Department	The Gap Committee
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Durham	Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corporation	The Nourish and Develop Foundation
Conseil des Organismes Francophones de la Region de Durham (COFRD)	Durham Region Transit	Town of Whitby
Community Development Council Durham	Durham Workforce Authority	Township of Brock
Community member with lived experience	Family Services Durham	Whitby Public Library
Cornerstone Community Association	Feed the Need in Durham	Durham Mental Health Services (DMHS) Lakeridge Health

Lever of Change Breakout Discussion #1 | Worksheet

Lever of Change Breakout Discussions

Using the stickies and markers provided, write out your answers and pin them to the worksheet.

Understanding the Current Landscape

What does this issue or area look like right now in your community or day-to-day life?

What's helping make things better or move in the right direction?

What's getting in the way or making it hard to improve this issue?



Stories from the Region

Using the following story template, try to build an understanding of the impact of this lever of change.

Ex: As a resident of North Durham, I find it hard to access public transit to get to work, which means I have limited job opportunities.

As a..
I..
So I..



Lever of Change Breakout Discussion #2 | Worksheet

Lever of Change Breakout Discussions

Using the stickies and markers provided, write out your answers and pin them to the worksheet.

Building a Collaborative Vision for the Future		
What does the future look like? What are the outcomes we want to see in 5/10/25 years?	Are there "quick wins" we can prioritize?	What are the 3 key takeaways we can share with the larger group? 1. 2. 3.
Where are there opportunities for action and change?	Who needs to be engaged as key partners moving forward?	For discussion #2 only What are 1-2 new insights we can share with the larger group? 1. 2.

Alignment Activity | Regional initiatives with high alignment to PRP (part 1)

Initiative	Lever(s) of Change related to	Link for information
Housing-Focused Street Outreach Teams	- Service access and navigation - Housing	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/homeless-hubs-and-street-outreach.aspx
Durham Employment Services	Employment	https://www.durham.ca/en/employment-services/index.aspx#2
Employment Ontario	Employment	https://www.ontario.ca/page/employment-ontario
Social Services - Lived Experience Advisory Committee	Informing all levers	N/A
Back Door Mission/Mission United Hub	- Mental health and addictions - Service access and navigation - Income	https://www.backdoormission.ca/services.html
Opening Doors – Community Development Council Durham	Housing	https://www.cdcd.org/programs-and-services/#:~:text=Opening%20Doors%20in%20Durham
Beaverton Heights transitional program	- Housing - Service access and navigation - Employment	https://www.durham.ca/en/news/region-of-durham-celebrates-opening-of-beaverton-heights-transitional-housing.aspx
DARS Farmhouse	- Housing - Employment	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/durham-charity-affordable-housing-pickering-farm-1.7359918
Integrated Mental Health and Addictions Planning Committee	Mental health and addictions	N/A
Youth Mental Health Engagement Strategy	Mental health and addictions	N/A
DCHC Welcoming Streets and Mobile Van	- Housing - Service access and navigation	https://www.durhamchc.ca/our-services/equity-based-programs/unsheltered-health-wellness/

Alignment Activity | Regional initiatives with high alignment to PRP (part 2)

Initiative	Lever(s) of Change related to	Link for information
Primary Care Outreach Program (PCOP)	- Mental health and addictions - Service access and navigation	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/resources/IEHSD/SS-Outreach-Teams-Handout---Revised-002.pdf
Mental Health Outreach Program (MHOP)	- Mental health and addictions - Service access and navigation	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/resources/IEHSD/SS-Outreach-Teams-Handout---Revised-002.pdf
Mobile ID and Benefits Access Hub	Service access and navigation	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/mobile-benefits-hubs.aspx
Pinewood Drop-In Addiction Support	Mental health and addictions	https://www.lakeridgehealth.on.ca/en/ourservices/pinewood-addiction-services.asp
Food Durham Vertical Farm	Access to food	https://globalnews.ca/video/11201533/feed-the-need-durham-explores-vertical-farming-to-help-meet-rising-demand/#:~:text=To%20help%20solve%20the%20affordability%20crisis%2C%20Feed%20the,the%20non-profit%20organization%20launched%20a%20vertical%20farming%20
Aids Committee of Durham Region (ACDR) Vitamin Bank	Mental and physical well-being	https://www.aidsdurham.com/
Transitional Rehabilitation Housing Program (TRHP)	- Housing - Service access and navigation	https://cmhadurham.ca/find-help/our-services/transitional-rehabilitation/
Durham Region Income, Employment and Homelessness Supports (IEHSD) programs and workshop team	Housing	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/income-employment-and-homelessness-supports-division-programming.aspx

Alignment Activity | Regional initiatives with high alignment to PRP (part 3)

Initiative	Lever(s) of Change related to	Link for information
Durham Youth Services	Housing	https://durhamyouth.com/
Region of Durham Housing Services and Durham Regional Local Housing Corp.	Housing	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/durham-regional-local-housing-corporation.aspx
Eviction Prevention programs & supports	- Housing - Service access and navigation	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/housing-supports.aspx#Housing-outreach-workers-and-eviction-prevention-workers
The Market Food Bank	Access to food	https://www.feedtheneedinurham.ca/market/
1635 Dundas Street East	- Housing - Service access and navigation	https://yourvoice.durham.ca/helpaddresshomelessness
Ajax Hub	- Housing - Service access and navigation - Mental health and addictions - Income	https://www.cfoc.ca/theajaxhub
Lakeview Hub	Employment	https://durhamworkforceauthority.ca/history/lakeview-hub/
178 Athol Transitional Housing Program	- Housing - Mental health and addictions - Service access and navigation	https://cornerstonedurham.com/transitional-housing/

Alignment Activity | Regional initiatives with medium alignment to PRP (part 1)

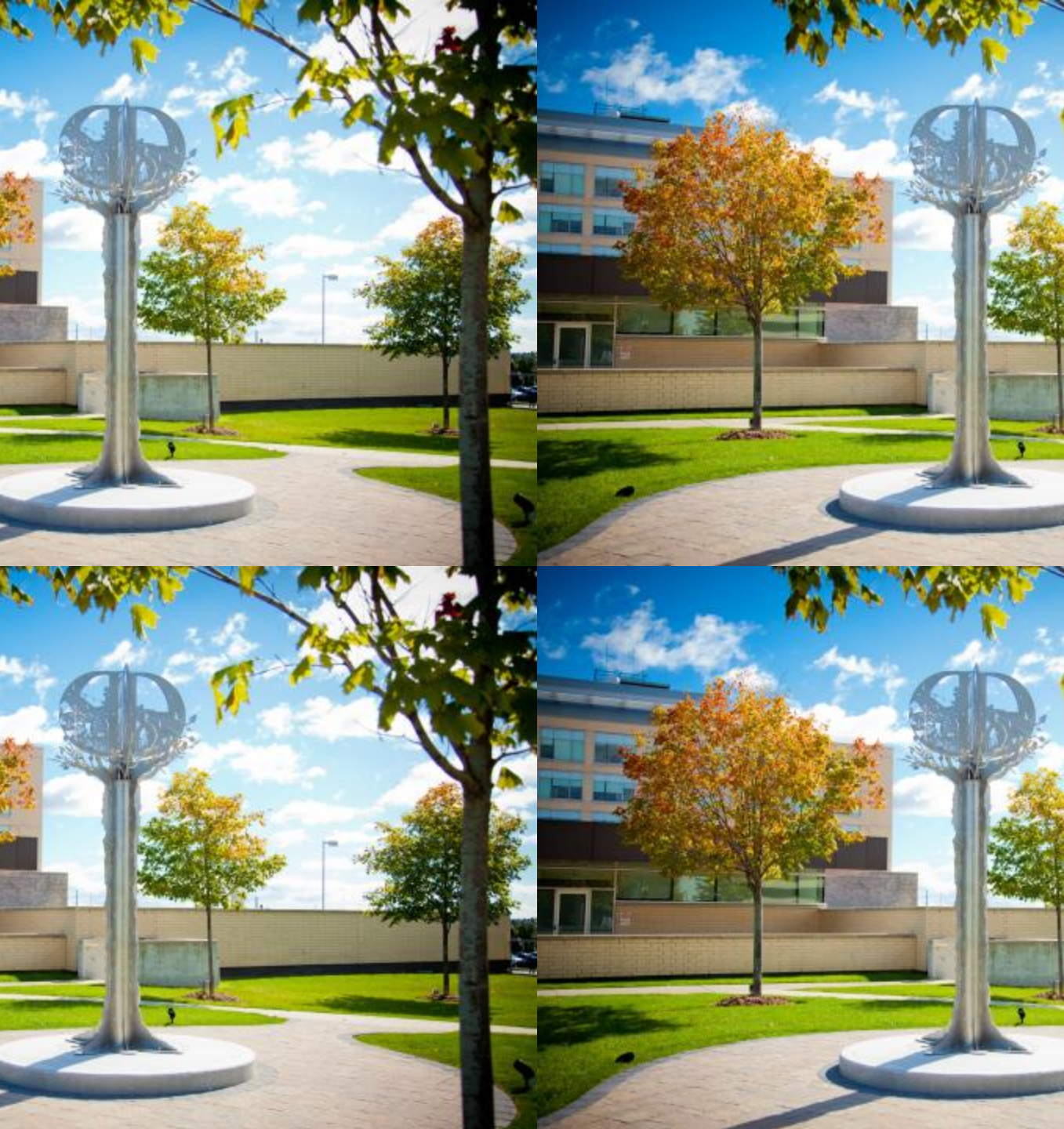
Initiative	Lever(s) of Change related to	Link for information
Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC)	Mental and physical well-being	https://www.durham.ca/en/health-and-wellness/healthy-babies-healthy-children-hbhc.aspx
Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corporation (DRNPHC) – Community Support Programs	Housing	https://www.durham-housing.com/
John Howard Society Durham Region	- Housing - Employment	https://johnhoward.on.ca/durham/
Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hubs	Mental health and addictions	https://www.durhamchc.ca/blog/new-hart-hub-to-open-in-durham-region-supporting-recovery-and-wellness/
Durham Mental Health Services	Mental health and addictions	https://dmhs.ca/
Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB)	- Housing - Income	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/apply-for-housing.aspx#Canada-Ontario-Housing-Benefit-COHB-
Income tax programs and free clinics	Income	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/file-your-taxes.aspx#Find-out-if-you-are-eligible-to-use-a-free-tax-clinic
Productivity Hub New Life	Employment	https://neighbourhoodcentre.newlifeadventistchurch.com/nlnc-productivity-hub/
Durham Region Transit Assistance Program	Transportation	https://www.durhamregiontransit.com/en/fares-and-passes/fares.aspx?_gl=1*1ndhvtc*_gcl_a_u*MjAwNzkyNjg3Mi4xNzQ2NDk3MTU2#ACCESS-pass-and-Transit-Assistance-Program-TAP-

Alignment Activity | Regional initiatives with **medium** alignment to PRP (part 2)

Initiative	Lever(s) of Change related to	Link for information
Basic Income Canada Networks	Income	https://basicincomecanada.org/
Community Safety and Well-Being Plan	- Service access and navigation - Mental health and addictions	https://www.durham.ca/en/living-here/information-hub.aspx
Senior socialization clubs and programs	Mental and physical Well-being	https://shorturl.at/pNdJx
Safety Network Durham	Service access and navigation	https://www.safetynetworkdurham.ca/about-us
Simcoe Hall Community Programs & Food Bank	Access to food	https://simcoehall.com/
Durham Region Non-Profit Housing Corporation - Complex Tenant Challenges Pilot	- Housing - Service access and navigation	https://shorturl.at/cxCsZ
Durham College - Community Employment Services	Employment	https://www.employmenthelp.ca/
The Nourish and Development Foundation hub and food market	Access to food	https://tndf.ca/
North Durham Social Development Council	Service access and navigation	https://www.cdcd.org/ndsdc-membership/
Canadian Mental Health Association - Mental Health and Addictions Peer Support (MAPS) Program	Mental health and addictions	https://cmhadurham.ca/find-help/our-services/mental-health-and-addictions-peer-support-maps-program/
GAP Committee	Service access and navigation	https://gapcommittee.ca/#:~:text=We%20build%20community%20by%20bringing%20together%20the%20expertise,to%20prevent%20and%20end%20homelessness%20in%20Durham%20Region.

Alignment Activity | Regional initiatives with low alignment to PRP

Initiative	Lever(s) of Change related to	Link for information
Niagara Poverty Reduction Network	- Housing - Mental and physical well-being - Income	https://wipeoutpoverty.ca/
Local community garden programs	Access to food	https://www.durhamdigs.ca/gardens/
Pickering Library outreach vehicle (Bookmobile)	Service access and navigation	https://pickeringlibrary.ca/news/pickering-public-library-launches-ovee-a-new-mobile-outreach-vehicle-bringing-library-services-to-every-corner-of-the-community/
1635 Dundas Community Liaison Committee	Housing	https://www.durham.ca/en/news/region-of-durham-appoints-members-to-1635-undas-community-liaison-committee.aspx
Durham Region Anti-Racism Taskforce (DRART)	Service access and navigation	https://yourvoice.durham.ca/durham-region-anti-racism-taskforce
Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC)	Housing	https://www.durham.ca/en/regional-government/property-assessment-and-the-municipal-property-assessment-corporation-mpac.aspx



Thank you.

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