



Elgin St. Thomas
Coalition to
End Poverty

Strategic Direction and Action Plan 2026-2030

Updated November 2025

MISSION: Work collaboratively to eliminate poverty in Elgin St. Thomas through sustainable solutions

VISION: Elgin St. Thomas is a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive because no one lives in poverty

Values:

Equity and
Inclusion

Collaboration Innovation Compassion Accountability

Core Functions:

Advocacy, Communication, Education

Defining our Values

Equity and
Inclusion

Creating opportunities for diverse voices to be heard through intentional actions to be representative of the wider community and reduce barriers to participation

Collaboration

Working together as individuals and organizations and communities to foster positive change

Innovation

Thinking outside of the box by encouraging new ideas and innovative solutions, and adapting approaches where change is needed

Compassion

Being trusting, open to different perspectives, communicating clearly and encouraging active listening

Accountability

Following our action plan and reporting on progress and areas for improvement. Committing to results, and being financially accountable to members



Action Areas



Transportation

Goal: Increased accessible and affordable transportation options that meet the needs of those reliant upon public or active transportation.



Actions

- Participate in conversations and consultations around local transportation master plans and support coalition members and agencies to participate
- Advocate for inclusion of voices of lived expertise in consultation processes
- Share best practices and encourage innovative solutions applicable to rural environments
- Advocate for transportation options that are affordable and accessible for those who need them most.

Transportation

Key Partnerships

- Middlesex Connect
- Four Counties Transit
- Municipal councils and staff
- Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament
- Other communities that have a mix of urban and rural areas similar to Elgin St. Thomas
- Community transportation volunteer programs
- Partners who offer transportation for clients

Measuring Success

Evaluation, monitoring and accountability +
Measures that would indicate community success:

- The coalition has a clear understanding of the current state of transportation options in our region and the experiences of those who access public transportation with a focus on improvement suggestions
- Increased use of public transit services
- Increased community connectedness through active transportation routes (trails and neighbourhood connections)



Housing

Goal: Everyone has access to housing that supports their needs and is accessible and affordable regardless of income.



Actions

- Advocate alongside people with lived expertise of poverty for communities that have diverse housing options including combined and mixed generational communities, mix of density, affordable housing including below market, geared to income housing, portable housing benefits, and rent control policies
- Advocate for growth that includes housing options for all income levels
- Encourage and advocate for tenant focused support systems to maintain existing housing

Housing

Key Partnerships

- Local home builders
- Local landlords
- Local housing providers (i.e. Indwell, Eastwood Homes)
- Municipal councils and staff
- Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament
- St. Thomas Home Builders Association
- St. Thomas Economic Development Corporation
- Housing Stability Alliance
- Elgin Ontario Legal Clinic
- Ontario Tenant Association
- Community Legal Education Ontario
- The Homeless Coalition of St. Thomas

Measuring Success

Evaluation, monitoring and accountability +
Measures that would indicate community success:

- Community permitting represents a diverse mix of housing options across the housing continuum including increased permit applications for affordable and accessible housing
- Decreased waiting lists for rent-geared-to-income housing
- Decreased number of people experiencing homelessness – (Built for Zero Canada Data)
- Decreased number of community members in core housing need (Stats Canada Data)



Hear My Voice



Goal: Decrease stigma and NIMBYism ('not in my back-yard') within our community by fostering a collective understanding of the causes and experiences of poverty and effective solutions.

Actions

- Host or support pre-election all candidates' forums with a poverty focus and encourage voter participation in local, provincial and federal elections
- Share information (including local data and storytelling) with the community about the experience of poverty in St. Thomas Elgin to decrease stigma and NIMBYism
- Develop a lived experience engagement strategy and opportunities for co-design
- Encourage diverse membership in the coalition including key influencers, change makers and decision makers

Hear My Voice



Key Partnerships

- People with lived expertise of poverty
- The Nameless
- The Homeless Coalition of St. Thomas
- Age Friendly Elgin
- Indigenous voices
- Elgin Ontario Health Team
- Media partners (Establish Media, MyFM, CTV London, Hometown St. Thomas)
- Business leaders (Chamber of Commerce, St. Thomas Elgin, Aylmer)
- Municipal councils and staff
- Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament
- Thumbs Up St. Thomas

Measuring Success

Evaluation, monitoring and accountability + Measures that would indicate community success:

- The coalition reports back on opportunities and actions that were taken including outputs (i.e. 3 media reports)
- People with lived expertise are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of efforts made
- Decreased experiences of discrimination and stigma related to experiences of poverty
- Increased empathy and compassion towards those with differing experiences
- Increased civic participation (voter turnout and event participation)

Income Supports



Goal: Community members have access to adequate income that supports their needs and allows for community participation.

Actions

- Promote 'Living Wage' certification with local employers
- Share information with the community about food security resources for those with limited income
- Support front-line service workers promotion of local resources and services available to community members through information sharing
- Promote local free income tax preparation clinics and benefits of tax filing
- Advocate for universal basic income and participate in available consultations
- Advocate for adequate social assistance

Income Supports



Key Partnerships

- St. Thomas Public Library
- Elgin County Libraries
- Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) providers
- Food Providers Network
- Caring Cupboard – St. Thomas Elgin Food Bank
- Harvest Hands
- Food Providers including Grace Cafe, The Inn, The Caring Cupboard
- St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce
- Ontario Living Wage Network
- Elgin St. Thomas Social Services (Ontario Works)
- YWCA
- Ontario Disability Support Program services
- 'Disability Without Poverty' Advocacy Group
- United Way Elgin Middlesex
- Municipal councils and staff
- Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament

Measuring Success

Evaluation, monitoring and accountability + Measures that would indicate community success:

- Decreased rate of community members living with low income (Low Income Measure After Tax)
- Report on number of community meals provided
- Report on number of free tax clinics held and uptake
- Increased access to income tax filing services and decreased non-filers
- Decreased number of community members who are reliant on charity food access
- Increased local momentum for Living Wage certification and increased local certifications
- Increased social assistance and income supports including Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program

Community Connectedness



Goal: Community members are aware of services and support available to them; and they are able to access these services with reduced barriers.

Actions

- Encourage collaboration and build connection between agencies to foster information sharing, warm transfers, co-location of services, and a 'no wrong door' approach
- Communicate and provide education on available services within the community including new services and service changes
- Advocate for and encourage diverse communication pathways to ensure information reaches those who need it the most
- Support the development or maintenance of a registry of local social supports through information sharing
- Support local efforts to improve access to primary care services for people experiencing poverty
- Support and encourage system navigation supports and resources for members of our community
- Advocate for increased local support to access technology and the internet to support access to services and information

Community Connectedness



Key Partnerships

- Food Providers including the Food Providers Network, Community Meals, Grace Cafe, Harvest Hands, and The St. Thomas Elgin Food Bank
- Municipal councils and staff
- Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament
- Local school boards
- Local media partners
- Community volunteers
- Indwell
- City of St. Thomas Public Library
- Elgin County Libraries
- Service Canada
- Service Ontario
- Elgin St. Thomas Social Services
- Elgin Ontario Health Team
- YWCA
- 211 Services and listings
- United Way Elgin Middlesex

Measuring Success

Evaluation, monitoring and accountability +
Measures that would indicate community success:

- Increased knowledge of community services and resources among partner service providers and members
- Increased relationships and connections between direct service providers
- Community members report increased awareness of and access to services

Community Belonging

Goal: Everyone has the opportunity to participate and feels welcome and included in their local community regardless of income level.



Actions

- Support and encourage the development of free community spaces that facilitate gathering, community connection, and access to culture
- Advocate for increased access to community spaces i.e. meeting spaces, kitchens, social spaces, gardens
- Advocate for increased access to recreation and sport opportunities for children and youth living with low income, including free opportunities
- Encourage a 'Know your Neighbour' approach to community to facilitate belonging and connection in local neighbourhoods
- Support and advocate for access to healthy foods and meals through community kitchen and community meal approaches
- Advocate for and promote community spaces for those with common experiences to foster a sense of community and connection, including safe spaces for communities and groups
- Share existing programs and resources that support community belonging with members and partners

Community Belonging

Key Partnerships

- Food Providers Network
- Municipal councils and staff
- Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament
- Local School Boards
- Indigenous voices
- Community and Recreation Centres
- Elgin County Libraries
- City of St. Thomas Public Library
- St. Thomas Local Immigration Partnership
- Elgin Pride
- Age Friendly Elgin
- GenWell
- The Nameless
- United Way Elgin Middlesex
- YWCA
- Destination Church
- Ignite Youth Centre
- Queer Qlub
- Local Chambers of Commerce
- Tourism Elgin and St. Thomas

Measuring Success

Evaluation, monitoring and accountability +

Measures that would indicate community success:

- Canada Quality of life Framework data – (General Social Survey Data)
- Percentage of residents who feel a very strong or somewhat strong sense of belonging
- Residents report they are able to access community spaces, find connection, and feel a sense of belonging within their wider community and neighbourhood



Pathways to Employment

Goal: Community members have access to, and knowledge of employment connection supports that allow them to enter the job market or maintain current employment.



Actions

- Engage with partners to foster opportunity and skill development for community members who are not currently connected to employment
- Advocate for accessible and affordable childcare infrastructure that allows parents to participate in the workforce
- Participate in conversations and share information with community partners about upskilling and education opportunities
- Encourage storytelling along with local data about successful pathways to employment
- Encourage open communication pathways between social services, coalition members, and local employers or employment and business-related entities

Pathways to Employment

Key Partnerships

- Economic Development Corporations
- Workforce Planning and Development Board
- YWCA
- Fanshawe College
- London Regional Employment Services
- Employment Services Elgin
- St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce
- Aylmer Chamber of Commerce
- Local Employers
- Municipal councils and staff
- Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament
- Local School Boards
- Media partners

Measuring Success

Evaluation, monitoring and accountability +
Measures that would indicate community success:

- Decreased rate of unemployment
- Increased attendance at local job fairs
- Increased opportunities for upskilling
- Decreased barriers to entering employment
- Community members are aware of resources available locally to support entry into employment opportunities



Community Calls to Action

The following 'calls to action' for local service providers were shared by our members during community consultation process. As these actions are outside of the scope of the direct coalition work, we are calling on our partners to consider how to further incorporate these key actions:

- Incorporate peer support strategies where able
- Wherever possible, facilitate warm transfers between services
- Foster a 'no-wrong-door' approach, directing and connecting community members to available services and resources external to your organization or core work
- Incorporate and intentionally engage people with lived experience and expertise in poverty when planning new services or service changes

