

# RESPONDING TO HOMELESSNESS IN GREATER VANCOUVER

Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

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## A New Regional Plan to Address Homelessness

Members of the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness have produced a new regional plan to alleviate and prevent homelessness in the region. The plan identifies key issues and the wide range of services, supports and housing needed to address homelessness, from addiction to mental health services, from emergency shelters to long-term housing.

## What the Regional Plan Says

The *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* uses a model called the *Continuum of Housing and Support* for addressing homelessness, which consists of three major elements – housing, income and support. All three are critical for preventing and alleviating homelessness.

### Housing

- *Emergency shelters* ~ Single or shared bedrooms or dorm type sleeping arrangements with accommodation for up to one month, which are not viewed as a solution to homelessness, but

can provide a short-term safety net.

- *Transition houses* ~ Temporary housing in a safe, secure environment for women and children leaving abusive relationships.
- *Supportive and second stage housing* ~ Transitional housing to assist people making the transition between emergency shelters and permanent housing, which provides affordable, independent accommodation, sometimes in a purpose-designed building or in scattered site apartments.
- *Independent housing* ~ Permanent affordable housing for individuals who can live independently, which includes creating new social or affordable market housing and maintaining existing affordable housing stock.

### Adequate income

- *Employment* ~ Policies to ensure adequate income from employment and to promote employment through employment assistance.
- *Employment insurance* ~ Eligibility, practices and benefits.

- *Income assistance* ~ BC Benefits eligibility, practices and benefits.

### Support services

- *Outreach* ~ Outreach workers focused on finding homeless people to establish rapport and eventually engage them in needed services.
- *Drop-in centres* ~ Offer homeless people a place to come in off the street, have a meal, use a washroom and shower, wash clothes, obtain counselling and referrals to other services.
- *Health services* ~ Hospital emergency wards, general health clinics, targeted clinics, mobile clinics and dental care.
- *Mental health services* ~ Assessment, counselling, treatment, rehab, referrals, crisis response, case management, and medication management.
- *Substance misuse services* ~ Sobering centres, detoxification, residential and non-residential treatment, supportive recovery homes, counselling, methadone treatment, needle exchange, and supportive housing.

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- *Prevention services* ~ Programs that help households prevent evictions, such as mediation and rent banks, support stable tenancies, and find affordable housing, such as housing registries. Advocacy work aimed at addressing housing and poverty issues, life skills training, and social programs designed to support the family.

## **Why is a Regional Homelessness Plan Needed?**

Many people are living on streets, in temporary, inappropriate or fragile housing, or are at high risk of homelessness. Spending a large proportion of total income on shelter puts people at risk. Just one setback – such as losing a job or a medical crisis – can put these people on the streets.

Local groups have collaborated for more than a decade to develop services and facilities that support people who are homeless, and to prevent homelessness for those at risk. Still, increasing numbers of people are turned away from emergency shelters around the region every day, and demand for other services and facilities – such as second stage and transition housing, residential treatment and detox beds, and 24-hour drop-in centres – increasingly outstrips supply. And until this year, there has not been a coordinated strategy to provide solutions across the region.

Now, a new region-wide plan has been developed to prevent and alleviate homelessness, which will provide a framework to guide allocation of scarce resources and funding. The plan takes a holistic approach to the problem and outlines solutions that can be applied across the region.

The regional plan will target people who are already homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. The plan is intended to identify services and facilities needed to support people who:

- Have no stable shelter of their own and live on the street, in doorways, parkades, parks, beaches, or emergency shelters.
- Live in places that fail to meet basic health and safety standards, security of tenure or affordability criteria.

Many municipalities in Greater Vancouver recognize the urgency of the homelessness issue, and have joined their counterparts and community groups across Canada in supporting the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' declaration of homelessness as a national disaster.

Still, Regional Steering Committee members understand that implementing the regional plan will be difficult, and will require strong leadership from senior governments, municipalities, and business and community sectors.

The support of local governments is important for new projects serving the homeless as they move into local communities, or as existing services are expanded. To address this challenge, continuing dialogue is needed to reinforce the message that homelessness can be ended for many, and prevented for others. No homeless person in need of shelter should ever be turned away. The problem is solvable and solutions are available. As a result, we not only have a moral obligation to take action, but the economic rationale is also strong. The Steering Committee believes implementing the *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* will result in fewer people who are homeless or at risk, reduced health care costs, and less reliance on crisis and emergency intervention, which will ease the stress on current programs and services.

In addition, Greater Vancouver has been ranked by the United Nations as one of the world's best urban areas in which to live and do business, with a high rating for "quality of life." However, homelessness is a telling indicator that quality of life is at risk for many people.

## How the Plan Was Developed

- In December 1999, the federal government announced new funding to address homelessness across Canada, including \$305 million for a new program, *Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI)*, administered by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). Under this program, approximately \$25.1 million has been allocated for Greater Vancouver over a three-year period to fund services and projects that assist people who are homeless.
- In March 2000, the Regional Steering Committee was formed, with representatives from government, community organizations, health authorities, shelter operators, agencies and service providers, to develop a plan to address homelessness region-wide.
- Stakeholders identified priorities to address urgent needs, at a workshop in June 2000. They also helped the Steering Committee identify gaps in a regional inventory of existing services and facilities for people who are homeless.
- Based on this input, Steering Committee members developed a preliminary regional plan, and put out a call for proposals for urgent priority projects under the first year of SCPI funding. Twenty-two projects across the region were recommended for funding to the federal government.

- 115 stakeholders had an opportunity to review the draft policies and actions in the preliminary plan, at a workshop in February, 2001, where the plan received general agreement. Stakeholder feedback was incorporated into the final plan.
- The *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* is now being distributed for endorsement to a wide array of stakeholders. Community organizations, municipalities, and relevant provincial ministries are being asked to approve the guiding principles of the plan, and to endorse the plan as a working document. In addition, the plan will evolve as outreach continues to particular sectors of the homeless population.

## Endorsing the Plan

Over the next few months, all Regional Steering Committee members will present the *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* to their respective Board, organization, Ministry or municipal Council to explain:

- How the plan has been developed.
- The principles of the plan.
- The continuum of housing and support.
- Policies and strategies proposed in the plan.

As well, the plan will be widely distributed to stakeholders who attended the planning workshops, or received a request for an

Expression of Interest for SCPI funding last fall.

Each organization will review and decide the level of endorsement it can provide. The Regional Steering Committee is seeking approval of the plan's guiding principles, and endorsement of the plan as a working document. Endorsation of the plan could take 6-10 months.

As part of the endorsement process, sessions will be held in shelters or drop-in centres in the region to give people who are, or have been, homeless an opportunity to review the plan. Collaboration with the urban Aboriginal community and youth sectors in the region will continue in order to provide more specific strategies to address the needs of these segments of the homeless population.

## How Will the Regional Plan be Used?

Implementing the regional plan rests upon the individual and collaborative actions of a wide range of people. Because the plan is not a piece of legislation or a bylaw, implementation relies on voluntary adoption and commitment.

Community groups, service providers, federal, provincial and local governments, and health authorities are expected to turn to this plan for direction when:

- Issues related to homelessness arise during daily business, for example, when new services or

facilities are under consideration.

- Developing longer term plans, such as revising an Official Community Plan, developing housing policies or redesigning social programs.
- Making funding decisions.

At the same time, homeless people and community groups can use this plan to advocate for needed services, as can municipal representatives when appealing to senior governments for programs and funding assistance.

### Federal Government Approval

The federal Minister responsible for programs on homelessness, Claudette Bradshaw, approved the *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver* on May 9, 2001. Federal approval of the plan was required to begin the process

of selecting projects for the second and third year of SCPI funding.

### Governance

The Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness was formed to develop a regional plan. Now, a governance body is needed to take responsibility for implementing, updating and monitoring the plan. Steering Committee members are examining options and have identified several criteria. Under any governance model, the Regional Steering Committee will continue to play a strong advisory role. The governance body should:

- Have a regional mandate.
- Have demonstrated experience in policy development and implementation, and in managing partnerships.
- Possess administrative capacity.

- Demonstrate links to the community process that developed the plan.
- Possess credibility with levels of government and other stakeholders.

The regional plan is intended to be a dynamic document, which can be revised as circumstances change. As a result, stakeholders need to periodically review its policies and the progress being made on actions set out in the plan. The governance body will need to organize opportunities for review, and will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating implementation of the plan, including:

- A regular review and report of accomplishments, with a summary of extra housing and support capacity created.
- A full review and update of the plan, midway through its lifetime, about 5 years from now

## Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) ~ Year 1 Status Report

The Regional Steering Committee recommended 22 urgent priority projects to the federal government for the first year of SCPI funding - worth approximately \$9.6 million. To date, 21 of these projects have been approved and contracts signed with HRDC for an investment of approximately \$8.1 million. Here's an analysis of how the \$9.6 million has been allocated for the 22 recommended projects:

Number of projects recommended for Vancouver	13	Number of projects recommended in other Greater Vancouver communities	9
Cost of projects recommended within Vancouver	\$7.6 million	Cost of projects recommended in other Greater Vancouver communities	\$2 million
Percentage of funding for projects within Vancouver	79%	Percentage of funding for projects in other Greater Vancouver communities	21%

### Funding Expenditures in Greater Vancouver

Percentage of funding for needs assessment projects	1%	Percentage of funding for facilities and services	99%
Percentage of funding for capital costs	90%	Percentage of funding for services	10%

## SCPI ~ Year 2 Projects

Approximately \$8 million of funding is available in Greater Vancouver for the second fiscal year of SCPI, ending March 31, 2002. The Regional Steering Committee will continue to review and recommend projects for this next round of SCPI funding, and has set out the following schedule:

- A call for Expressions of Interest went out on May 18, 2001.
- The submission deadline for proposals is June 26, 2001.
- The Regional Steering Committee will hold proposal-writing workshops in early June to assist groups in drafting proposal packages.
- The Regional Steering Committee will evaluate submissions and make recommendations for funding to HRDC at the end of July.
- HRDC will require four to six weeks to carry out “due diligence” on recommended projects, and to complete signed contracts with proponents.

*In the third fiscal year of the SCPI program, which ends March 31, 2003, approximately \$8 million will be available. A call for EOIs for this third year will likely go out in late December of this year.*

## What's Next?

- Discussion sessions, led by shelter and drop-in centre operators, will be held with people who are homeless to

ensure the plan meets their needs.

- Steering Committee members will continue to collaborate with community groups representing urban Aboriginal and youth stakeholders to ensure the plan reflects the particular priorities and policy directions required for those sectors of the homeless population.
- The Steering Committee will identify options for a governance body to oversee long-term implementation of the plan.
- Stakeholders will be asked to review and endorse the plan.
- An action plan will be developed to set implementation targets for the next two years.
- An evaluation plan will be developed to measure outcomes.
- An electronic version of the plan and this bulletin will be posted on the GVRD website.
- A call for Expressions of Interest for second year SCPI funding will be distributed to stakeholders in May.
- Members of the Steering Committee will present the plan to community agency Boards, stakeholder groups and municipal Councils in Greater Vancouver, and request their endorsement.
- A public education strategy to raise awareness about alleviating homelessness will begin in the fall.
- Through these information bulletins, the Steering Committee will continue provide stakeholders with

updates on the accomplishments of the plan.

## ***What's Already Being Done to Address Homelessness?***

In each bulletin, existing community-based projects to address homelessness in Greater Vancouver are profiled. This issue focuses on employment training programs for street youth.

### **Picasso Café**

A group of community volunteers established the Option Youth Society in 1986 to help young people leave the streets, develop life and work skills, and find gainful employment. More than 350 at-risk youth have completed job training at the Picasso Café in Vancouver, the first employment program to pay market wages to street youth in Canada, which became a model for similar programs elsewhere in the country and the U.S.

Picasso Café is a licensed restaurant and catering service, and a registered private post secondary institution. Students receive 950 hours of academic and on-the-job training, including a one-month practicum at a local restaurant, as well as life skills coaching, employment counselling, and job search and placement support. Students graduate with a Food and Beverages or Culinary Arts certificate from Vancouver Community College. More than 80% of Picasso Program graduates obtain full time employment.

## Sanctuary Foundation

The Sanctuary Foundation in New Westminster also runs several career training programs to help youth acquire educational and employment skills.

Street youth told organizers they wanted short programs to learn a trade and earn income. The 14-week Bicycle Mechanics Program includes class instruction and work placement. Participants learn anger management, conflict resolution, life skills, job search techniques, mechanical assessment and repair skills. Transportation and a daily hot meal service are provided. From June to December, youth are hired on municipal bike patrols to conduct traffic counts and surveys. A computer program offers training in Youth Entrepreneur Website Design. The Whistler Ski Technician Program provides a paid work experience for youth 18-30 from the North Shore and Tri-cities, who aren't eligible for Employment Insurance. And the organization feeds hungry students and residents in the Lunch Box Café, where a new commercial kitchen is used to teach cooking skills and Food Safe Program courses.

## 800 New Housing Units for Homeless People

In April, the provincial government announced \$100 million for 800 new housing units – through the *HOMES BC* program – for people facing homelessness, which will be built in partnership with non-profit housing societies, local health authorities, community service and health providers, other ministries and the private sector. Many homes will also offer support services to help people with mental illness, drug and alcohol addictions, or a history of abuse. Some of this housing will also be created in partnership with the federal SCPI program.

## New Research

A number of research projects on homelessness are currently being carried out or are planned in the region, including:

*Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)* ~ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) developed this database to track shelter usage across Canada. Shelter operators ensure no confidential information is released, while providing data to compile regional profiles of shelter users. The database is now coordinated by BC Housing. For information, contact Andy Erkau at BC Housing, at 439-4750, local 275.

*Roundtables on Best Practices Addressing Homelessness* ~ CMHC recently produced this research report in its *Distinct Housing Needs Series*. Contact

Carl Gomez at CMHC, at (604) 737-4067, for information.

*Local Responses to Homelessness: A Planning Guide for B.C. Municipalities* ~ The BC Ministry for Social Development and Economic Security (MSDES) recently produced this planning guide to help BC communities assess the needs of their homeless populations, and develop local responses. The guide is available on the ministry website at [www.sdes.gov.bc.ca](http://www.sdes.gov.bc.ca).

*Homelessness – Causes and Effects* ~ In mid-April, MSDES released another publication in its four volume series, based on two years of research. The series is also posted on the ministry website at [www.sdes.gov.bc.ca](http://www.sdes.gov.bc.ca).

*Survey of Homeless Youth/Literature Review* ~ The McCreary Centre Society – [www.mcs.bc.ca](http://www.mcs.bc.ca) – recently released *No Place to Call Home: A Profile of Street Youth in British Columbia*. This report presents the results of a study of more than 500 street youth, aged 12-19, who are living on the street or involved with street life, in six BC communities. The centre has received funding from HRDC to conduct qualitative research on homeless youth in Vancouver to build on this quantitative research. In addition, the Institute of Health Promotion at the University of British Columbia will produce a synthesis of available literature on homelessness in Greater Vancouver.

*New Research on Homelessness* ~ The Greater Vancouver Regional

District will begin a ten-month research project in May with four main goals:

- To provide an estimate of the number of people who are homeless and at-risk within each community in the region.
- To develop a demographic profile of this population.
- To develop a data management system for the information
- To develop a feasible and affordable methodology for collecting information on how people enter and exit homelessness, through first person interviews.

For information, contact Verna Semotuk at (604) 432-6384.

## Street Youth Study

- A new report on more than 500 youth aged 12-19 reveals young people are living on the street, or involved in street life, in large and smaller BC communities. The study includes youth from Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, Victoria, Prince Rupert, the Sunshine Coast, and the Fraser Valley.
- Most street youth have experienced physical or sexual abuse at some time.
- Most have run away or been kicked out of their homes.
- About half the youth say they have an addiction problem, and about 25% are involved in the sex trade.
- More than a quarter of street youth have attempted suicide in the past year.

- Over one-third have been in government care, including foster care or group homes, and nearly half have spent time in a custody centre.
- Nearly two-thirds of street youth in Vancouver and one-third in Victoria come from other provinces.

(Source: *No Place to Call Home: a profile of street youth in British Columbia*, McCreary Centre Society, March 2001)

## Costs of Homelessness

- In a recent study, 10 people who were homeless, and five who were previously homeless but are now housed, were interviewed. In 1998/99, providing health care, criminal justice and social services (excluding housing) to the homeless individuals cost, on average 33% more than housed individuals (\$24,000 compared to \$18,000).
- Annual service costs for homeless individuals ranged from \$4,000 to more than \$80,000, since some people do not make much use of the system. The range was not as wide for housed individuals – from \$12,000 to \$27,000.
- Supportive housing has been found to help people end the cycle of homelessness, stabilize their lives and re-establish connections with the community.
- Supportive housing is also cost effective compared to emergency facilities that specialize in serving clients with mental illness. An emergency shelter with higher

levels of support costs \$60-\$85 per day, compared to \$20-\$25 for a supportive hotel, \$21-\$38 for a self-contained

- apartment with some support, or \$67-\$88 for an enhanced apartment.
- Combined service and shelter costs for the people who were homeless ranged from \$30,000 to \$40,000 per person for one year – including the costs of staying in an emergency shelter. These costs were \$22,000 to \$28,000 per person for the housed individuals who stayed in supportive housing.
- In this study, providing supportive housing to people who had been homeless saved the provincial government money, proving prevention to be more cost effective than emergency response.
- Emergency facilities, however, continue to be an important part of the housing continuum.

(Source: *Homelessness – Causes and Effects: The Costs of Homelessness in B.C.*, Ministry for Social Development and Economic Security, February 2001)

## Who's on the Regional Steering Committee?

**The Regional Steering Committee includes representatives from emergency shelters, tenants' rights groups, service providers, housing providers, health regions and health service providers, labour, urban Aboriginal organizations, immigrant and refugee service organizations, municipal, provincial and federal governments, and the Greater Vancouver Regional District.**

## Survey of BC Shelter Users

- A new report profiles demographic data on shelter clients who stayed at most of the emergency shelters across BC, on November 19, 1999.
- The report notes that using shelter data does not capture the full extent of homelessness, because it excludes those who do not use shelters but sleep 'rough,' or groups for whom there are few suitable facilities, such as women, youth, and Aboriginal people.

	<i>Lower Mainland</i>	<i>Other Urban Centres in BC</i>	<i>Aboriginal (in BC)</i>	<i>Youth in BC (16-24)</i>	<i>Women in BC</i>
<b>Gender</b>	%	%	%	%	%
Male	81	74	58	74	
Female	19	25	41	26	
No answer	0	1	1	0	
<b>Age</b>					
Under 19	8	10	18		18
19-24	14	7	15		10
25-34	23	24	24		30
35-44	28	30	25		22
45-54	18	14	7		12
55-64	6	6	4		5
65+	4	8	6		3
<b>Family Status</b>					
Single	90	81	73	85	73
Couple	4	3	10	7	8
Family with children	6	9	17	4	18
No answer	1	7	1	3	1
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
Caucasian	70	61		63	52
Aboriginal	13	26		22	36
Asian	5	1		4	2
Other	7	3		8	7
No answer	4	9		2	3

(Source: Homelessness – Causes and Effects: A Profile, Policy Review and Analysis, Ministry for Social Development and Economic Security, April 2001)

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