
3.8 Elected Officials

“As a society, particularly government, we need to not just provide money but provide the right plan and policy and leadership. We need to lead in such a way that the individuals, corporations and charities can all participate in the homelessness cause. Any society does not want to see any citizens without a home. Homes are a fundamental human right. This is very important given the wealth of Canada and Alberta. We have an obligation to make sure no one is left behind.”

One-on-one and small group sessions were held with over 20 individuals in various levels of government.

Over planning, under delivering

Elected officials acknowledged that there is a problem with homelessness, and that there is a need for the three levels of government to work together to resolve it. Some were tired of ‘over planning, under delivering.’

“I know these solutions can work, but I also know that the City of Edmonton has been studying this for 20 years and has yet to do anything about it.”

“What I need to see is if there is anything different than Jan Reimer’s or Bill Smith’s plans. I’d like actual results, not just another plan.”

“The City of Edmonton has had plans for 20 years, but the problem is still there. This is the clinical definition of insanity!”

Cost savings?

Elected officials also thought that a strong policy framework was important and acknowledged the high costs of homelessness. However, not all officials were convinced that Housing First would result in great cost savings.

Elected officials also had some ideas on how the initiative should be managed.

- The supporting agencies need to keep working with people who are homeless. Agencies need to keep fine tuning their services until they are strong.
- Stay until the problem is solved; long term obligations, stay the course.
- Never walk away from the client, don’t give up if it fails.
- If we are going to sell this, we need to be very concerned about the potential for violence; staff are at risk.
- Goal to end homelessness is fine-but be careful how you screen clients.
- People who are homeless don’t need policing or babying, they need coaching and structure.
- Implement rules that will empower people who are homeless.

☛ *“The problem with measuring success on the social agenda is that data never has an impact. How do we demonstrate success? The reality is that you will never save a dollar, but might flatten the curve a bit. There will be a short-term increase in cost, as you will be helping people stabilize. Easiest thing to do is say it will save you money, but...”*

☉ Positive affirmation

All acknowledged that ending homelessness was an idea whose time had come, and it was a trend that was sweeping the province.

☛ *“We have the money. We have the resources. We have the will. We have the job market that could be a win-win for both. We are busy coming up with an immigration strategy for foreign workers, but maybe the answer is closer than we think. We need to look in our own backyard.”*

