



News Release

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Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness releases 10-year plan *It's the right thing to do and the smart thing to do*

EDMONTON — Strategies to end homelessness over the next 10 years will help Edmonton's most vulnerable citizens to live healthier, more productive lives and save money in the long run, according to the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness, which today released *A Place to Call Home*, its 10-year plan to end homelessness in Edmonton.

The plan recommends a major shift from “managing” homelessness through shelters and other short-term emergency services, to a more cost-effective approach of focused intervention, housing and support services, and prevention programs.

“We are very fortunate in this city to have strong, collaborative social agencies which have been very supportive of our planning process and are keen to get started on these new programs,” said committee chair Linda Hughes.

The plan sets out aggressive targets and strategies around five goals and seeks funding from the provincial and federal government to support the plan. It calls on Edmonton City Council to lead the effort to eliminate homelessness in the city.

Highlights include:

- **Creating a Housing First Action Centre** to coordinate the delivery of a Housing First program by securing units in the private rental market, and contracting with social service agencies for the delivery of around-the-clock services.
- **Partnering with private landlords** to secure 800 units of supported housing within the first three years, with 300 additional units of supported housing in place by December 31, 2013.
- **Facilitating development of 1,000 units of supportive housing** for homeless people with severe needs and 1,650 modestly sized new housing units.
- **Creating a Housing Link** that will help people in crisis find safe and suitable housing.
- **Developing prevention programs**, including an initiative to ensure that no one is discharged from an institution without a place to live.
- **Establishing a Housing Commission:** a volunteer, community board to champion the plan and oversee implementation.

“By the year 2020, when this plan is fully implemented and running at maximum capacity, the cost of dealing with this issue will actually be lower than if the status quo is maintained,” says Hughes. “If we do nothing, we’ll have spent a lot of money and thousands of people will still be living on the streets. By implementing this plan, we’ll save money and put an end to chronic homelessness.”

The committee projects that the cost of implementing its plan will be approximately \$969 million over 10 years. This figure includes operating costs of \$567.5 million and capital costs of \$401.6 million.

A Place to Call Home reflects extensive input from approximately 800 Edmontonians, representing 75 different organizations, including people who are homeless, agencies that help the homeless, the Aboriginal community, business leaders, property developers and landlords, and the three orders of government.

The Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness was established by Mayor Stephen Mandel in January 2008 to fully explore the issue of homelessness and develop long-term, cost-effective solutions for Edmonton. The committee is made up of leading citizens representing government, business, labour, the Aboriginal community, health care and social services.

For a copy of the report and to obtain additional background information, please visit www.endedmontonhomelessness.com

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HOUSING FIRST

Shelters, drop-in centres, and other emergency supports are short-term measures that do not *solve* the problem of homelessness. They simply help *manage* it. Housing First is a key element in the fundamental shift required to end homelessness.

The basic premise behind Housing First is that the first thing people need is the stability of a safe, permanent home before they can start tackling other problems. This is the opposite of the old way of thinking — which is that shelters, addiction recovery, mental health treatment or finding a job are necessary stepping stones that ready clients for permanent housing.

The 10-year plan calls for getting people into housing and then giving them the wrap-around services and support to help them keep their homes and get started on dealing with their other problems. It will take a significant upfront investment ... but it is an investment that will pay dividends ... both financially and in terms of human costs.

How It Works

Rental contracts with landlords are negotiated and signed by the service providers rather than the clients, which provides landlords with guaranteed rent payments and long-term tenants. The landlord is also given contact information for a person to call if issues arise with the tenant.

Rental units scattered around the city avoid the creation of housing ghettos. Housing First uses both private-market rental units and dedicated buildings owned by non-profit providers.

The next step is to provide all the wrap-around services people need to help them stay in their homes and deal with any issues that would lead to the loss of their housing. Services may include psychiatric and/or substance abuse treatment, daily living skills assistance and money management training, and vocational and employment services.

Prescribed time limits will not be set on services. People caught in the trap of chronic homelessness may need intensive, specialized services indefinitely. Others will need help for a limited time before being able to move into more independent living situations.

Housing First plans are tailored to the needs of the person being housed to ensure success. In some cases, clients may have to agree to a one-year program of follow-up services, apply for subsidized housing and income assistance, and agree to their rent being paid directly from the subsidy provider to the landlord.

Housing First is not for everyone. Housing First is not a model that can be applied across the board. The need for interim or supportive housing will always exist, e.g. for youth, people with chronic substance abuse problems, persistent mental illness, cognitive disabilities, or other serious chronic health issues.



COST OF HOMELESSNESS

- Studies across Canada estimate **the annual cost of homelessness is \$66,000 - \$120,000** for every person who is without a home for more than one year or experiences frequent periods of homelessness.
- The Calgary Homeless Foundation estimates **an annual cost of \$30,000 - \$35,000 to house one person and provide the services** he/she needs to remain in a stable environment, versus a cost of \$94,000 for one person homeless for one year.
- Sixty-five U.S. studies state that it costs \$35,000 - \$150,000 per person per year for chronic homelessness.
 - A person is considered chronically homeless if he/she has been living without a home for a year or more, or have been homeless multiple times in the past several years.
 - The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness estimates that 10 - 30 per cent of the people who are homeless are chronically homeless. Yet they use 50 per cent of the resources.
- **The 2008 homeless count found that 3,079 Edmontonians do not have a home.** The number has tripled since 1999. Assuming a growth rate of 8 per cent per year (the average from the last three homeless counts), there would be approximately 6,500 homeless by 2018 if we continue to manage homelessness as we do now.
- **To provide emergency shelters for just 40 per cent of the homeless population** (as we do now), **the cost of shelters alone would be more than \$54 million per year by 2018.** By comparison, the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness estimates operating costs of \$90 million in 2018 to implement the 10-year plan.
- **Shelters comprise just a fraction of the overall cost of homelessness**, which includes frequent emergency room visits and ambulance trips, longer hospital stays, and police, court and incarceration costs.
- **According to Alberta Health Services, health-care costs related to homelessness were \$33 million in 2008.** Ambulance costs were \$4.7 million.
- **Average stay in hospital for homeless person is 28 days (excluding Alberta Hospital),** versus nine days for those not homeless. If Alberta Hospital is included, the average is 66 days for a person who is homeless. One day in hospital costs approximately \$1,400.

Examples of Cost Savings Potential

- In Denver, Colorado, a permanent supportive housing project for people who are homeless and suffering from chronic disabilities resulted in annual reductions in ER visits that amounted to **\$31,545 per person in savings per year**.
- In Portland, Oregon, 35 chronically homeless people with disabilities were each costing hospitals \$42,000 a year. A program to provide permanent supportive housing resulted in **\$16,000 per person in savings**.
- In Rhode Island, the cost of services for 48 clients in a Housing First program saved close to half a million dollars a year after they became housed.
 - The cost of hospital stays, alcohol and drug treatment, ER visits, incarceration and emergency shelter stays was more than \$31,000 per client the year prior to being in supportive housing. The year after, it was just over \$7,000 per client.
 - Overall, the costs while in this Housing First program were about **\$425,000 less than the institutional costs** over one year of homelessness.
- **People housed through Toronto's Streets to Homes program reported improvements in nearly all quality of life indicators** (health, mental health, food quality, sleeping, personal safety and social interaction).
 - Nearly half (49 per cent) of those who reported using alcohol in the past said their alcohol use had decreased, including 17 per cent who said they had quit altogether.
 - Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of those who reported using drugs in the past said their use had decreased, including one-third who said they had quit using drugs.

The Plan

A Place to Call Home has one mission: to end homelessness. It has **5 goals**, each with a time-lined **target** and strategies to ensure success. In summary they are:

1 Provide permanent housing options for all people living on the street and in public places.

Target: By 2011 all people living on the street or in public places will have been given the option of permanent, supported housing.

2 Ensure an adequate supply of permanent, affordable housing with appropriate supports for people who are homeless.

Target: By 2012, secure 800 supported housing units, in partnership with private landlords. Another 300 units will come on-line in subsequent years.

Target: By 2019, secure 1650 modestly sized units, the first 200 coming on-line in 2011.

Target: By 2014, develop 1000 units of permanent supportive housing.

3 Ensure emergency accommodation is available when needed, but transition people quickly into permanent housing.

Target: By 2012, decrease the number of sheltered homeless to 2006 levels.

Target: By 2014, decrease the average length of stay at an emergency shelter to less than 7 days.

4 Prevent people from becoming homeless.

Target: By 2014, reduce the need for emergency shelter capacity by 50%.

5 Establish a governance structure and an implementation process for the Plan that builds on the strengths of the community; develops capacity; promotes collaboration, innovation and cost-effectiveness; and measures progress.

Target: The Homeless Commission will produce an annual report card, documenting the progress on implementing Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. The report card will be submitted to all orders of government.