



**MEMORANDUM *of*
UNDERSTANDING**

**Homeless Encampment Action Response Teams/
Homeless Encampment Action Response & Temporary Housing
HEART/HEARTH**

1.0 Parties

Between:

The Ministry of Housing (The Ministry) And
The Corporation of the City of Victoria (The City)

2.0 Preamble

Homelessness in British Columbia is a pressing issue affected by housing affordability, mental health and addiction as well as the toxic drug crisis. The Province of BC introduced Belonging in BC: a collaborative plan to prevent and reduce homelessness (“Belonging in BC”) in Spring 2023.

Belonging in BC involves coordination among multiple Ministries, all levels of government, Indigenous partners, communities, and organizations, as well as people with lived experience. Belonging in BC focuses on immediate and long-term actions emphasizing a housing first model with person-centered approaches. Collaboration with local and Indigenous partners is critical to prioritizing cultural supports and the health and safety of individuals to receive rapid integrated services. This is key to helping people stabilize and better access suitable shelter and housing options. To do this, Belonging in BC includes actions to address homelessness and encampments such as the Homelessness Encampment Action Response Teams/Housing (HEART/HEARTH).

3.0 Homelessness Encampment Action Response Teams/ Housing (HEART/HEARTH)

Homeless Encampment Actions Response Teams (HEART): This is a locally based, multidisciplinary outreach model that is developed and coordinated by community partners and supported by BC Housing. HEART brings together Ministry partners, local government representation (e.g. bylaw, engineering), law enforcement representation, Health Authorities, non-profit, and Indigenous peoples to quickly assess the needs of people sheltering in encampments and to provide rapid access to supports and services people need to exit homelessness; successes of community-based models include rapid rehousing, family reunification, and reduction in police interactions.

Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH): This is a new fund administered via BC Housing, to provide for emergency housing, shelter options, and immediate coordinated supports

to assist people in encampments or sheltering in public spaces to come inside, and access temporary or permanent housing options that fit their needs.

4.0 Purpose

This MOU has been developed to recognize the parties’ shared purpose of supporting people in encampments and the unsheltered through commitment to implement HEART and HEARTH, a coordinated approach to resolution of encampments that prevents entrenchment, improves health and safety, preserves dignity for homeless encampment residents, respects the need for culturally appropriate services for Indigenous peoples, and considers the needs of the surrounding community.

- The objectives of the MOU are to:
- Clarify the roles of the key parties leading the implementation of HEART and HEARTH,
- Ministry of Housing, BC Housing, and the City.
- Confirm the shared commitment to work collaboratively within respective areas of jurisdiction to reduce or eliminate the conditions which give rise to encampments, including through the creation of shelters, temporary and/or permanent housing.
- Confirm the shared commitment to work collaboratively within respective areas of jurisdiction to provide unhoused people with access to health, sanitation including washrooms and shower facilities, food, cultural, and social support services.
- Confirm the shared commitment to uphold person-centred, dignified, and culturally safe responses, by engaging and collaborating with Indigenous partners.
- Confirm the shared commitment to engagement and collaboration with

community partners, and to engage with persons with lived experiences of homelessness.

- Confirm the shared commitment to preserving and enhancing the safety, security, and well-being of all members of the entire community.
- Recognize the role of the Province of BC in providing support for housing, healthcare including mental health and addictions care, and the corresponding role of local governments, including the City, in supporting the fulfillment of that mandate by the Province of BC.

5.0 Partner Commitments

The Ministry's role will include:

- Collaborate with the City to plan, coordinate and provide:
 - Outreach services to individuals experiencing homelessness;
 - Data and information collection;
 - Shelter and housing development;
 - Transition planning; and
 - Temporary supports for people experiencing homelessness
- Improve access to a range of supports through cross-Ministry coordination, including health, sanitation, income, harm reduction, fire safety, social and cultural supports.
- Through BC Housing, provide unhoused people with access to health and sanitation services, including washrooms and shower facilities; food and drinking water; cultural and social support services; and services to promote safety and security.
- Through BC Housing, provide oversight and support in the development of shelter spaces, temporary and permanent housing options.

- Through BC Housing, lead operational planning and supports for temporary support services, transitions from encampments to temporary or permanent housing through coordinated access, selection of operators, and as a partner in other service coordination.
- Engage with local First Nations and Indigenous communities to understand their perspectives, needs, and desired role in addressing homelessness and encampment(s) in the City by:
 - Providing information and seeking Indigenous worldviews;
 - Facilitating the provision of culturally safe services and cultural supports, including providing for roles in both HEART and HEARTH specific to Indigenous peoples;
 - Providing support for responses led by Indigenous partners; and
 - Assisting Indigenous communities in coordinating supports for community members that are homeless or in encampments, including resources for people to return to home communities if that is their self-determined goal.
- Recognize the role of the City to identify priorities and make decisions pertaining to sheltering locations, community safety, application of its bylaws and protection of public and private property, while at the same time ensuring that actions taken are done so in the spirit of collaboration with the Ministry and other stakeholders.

The City will:

- Identify appropriate and feasible land/space for HEARTH shelter and/or temporary and permanent housing, and work with the Ministry and BC Housing to expedite land use decisions necessary for rapid provision of shelter and housing.

- Facilitate maintenance of land designated for temporary sheltering, including garbage bin pick up and water utility connections.
- Support the work of the Ministry and BC Housing to provide unhoused people with access to health services; sanitation services, including washrooms and shower facilities; food and drinking water; cultural and social support services; and services to promote safety and security.
- Participate in HEART, including supporting connections and participation of bylaw and law enforcement and fire services, and sharing information with the Ministry, BC housing and, when appropriate, local partners, regarding planned or considered enforcement actions pertaining to encampments.
- Work with the Ministry, BC Housing and other partners to align local approaches with the Provincial approach that resolution of encampments is best achieved through provision by the Ministry, through BC Housing, of housing, supports, and services that meet people’s distinct needs.
- Engage with local Indigenous communities and organizations to understand their perspectives and needs related to homelessness and housing.
- Ensure ongoing engagement and collaboration with community partners and engagement with persons with lived experiences of homelessness.
- Apply its bylaws in a person-centred, dignified, and culturally safe manner with a goal of preventing entrenchment of encampments and ensuring the safety and well-being of both housed and unhoused residents.

Parties will:

- Engage with Indigenous organizations to develop culturally safe and supportive practices and responses and facilitate access to cultural services and supports for unhoused Indigenous peoples.
- . Work with community organizations to leverage existing strengths and structures.
- Recognize that the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness is enhanced through providing and maintaining access to healthcare and life-saving services.

6.0 Partner Commitments in Public Communication

All partners will strive to coordinate communications on actions relating to encampments and homelessness, including supported relocation efforts.

7.0 Partner Roles in Preventing and Responding to Future Encampments

The Ministry:

- To implement a Provincial Encampment Response Framework in communities that outlines the Provincial process, approach, jurisdictional context and learnings; as well as a toolkit for local governments and communities to utilize in encampment responses – developed in partnership across governments and with Indigenous and community partners.
- To lead cross-ministry and coordinated responses to homeless encampments on crown and other lands through the rapid provision of outreach and increased access to supports.
- The Ministry, along with BC Housing, will continue to work to develop a robust and diverse housing ecosystem with supports to prevent homelessness, that will enable shelters to be a bridge to supportive housing and ensure people in temporary supportive housing through HEARTH have permanent housing options available to them that meets their needs.

- Continue to implement the commitments of Belonging in BC, including working across ministries to ensure provincial actions and initiatives to address and prevent homelessness are coordinated and integrated.

The City:

- To support the work of the Ministry, through BC Housing, to continue to work to create diverse housing options, including identifying available land and buildings for housing and shelter and to expedite land use decisions necessary to rapidly respond to housing need.
- To prioritize the approval and establishment of temporary and permanent supportive housing and

shelters, as well as the participation in emergency shelter programs.

- To work with BC Housing to identify and consider municipal levers, such as tax exemptions, zoning, and bylaws, to expedite social housing units and affordable housing in alignment with BC Housing’s funding programs and the community’s housing needs.
- Proactively apply its bylaws to prevent entrenchment of encampments and ensure the safety and well-being of both housed and unhoused residents.

8.0 No Legal Obligations

This MOU is not legally binding and places no legal obligations on the Ministry or the Local Government.

Minister Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing



Mayor Marianne Alto
Mayor of Victoria

