

COVID-19: The beginning of the end of homelessness

A report on the barriers and recommendations to ending homelessness in the Capital Region

July 22, 2021 Committee of the Whole

2021



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Purpose

- The purpose of this report is to identify the barriers to ending homelessness and recommendations to resolve those barriers.
- The recommendations will equip the City of Victoria to work with provincial and local partners to prioritize actions that reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness.



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Key Definitions

- **Chronic Homelessness:** At least 6 months of homelessness or recurrent experiences with at least 18 months in past 3 yrs.
- **Functional Zero:** There are enough, or more homeless-serving resources than needed and those services, such as emergency shelters, are being used as intended.
- **Indigenous Homelessness:** Colonization, implemented via Canadian public policies including the residential school system, the 'Sixties Scoop,' and the current child welfare system, are the most common drivers of Indigenous homelessness.
- **Housing First:** Immediate access to permanent housing, offers consumer choice, self-determination, person-driven supports, social and community integration and is recovery oriented (including harm reduction).



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How this report was created

- Collaborative engagement with people experiencing homelessness
- Key stakeholder interviews
- Qualitative analysis, coding text, identifying themes
- Report and research review
- Limitations



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Takeaways from experiences of people who are homeless in the Capital Region

- Diverse people need diverse exits from homelessness
- Accessing housing is confusing and disempowering
- Some in supportive housing do not require onsite support
- Some living in supportive transitional hotels are not connecting with support services they want and need, lack of trust
- Untreated trauma and sobriety are reasons to avoid shelters
- Hannah's story helps us understand long-term 'sheltered homeless'
- Bennet's story draws a line from colonization to homelessness
- George & Abby's stories demonstrate some need structure and accountability to recover from homelessness



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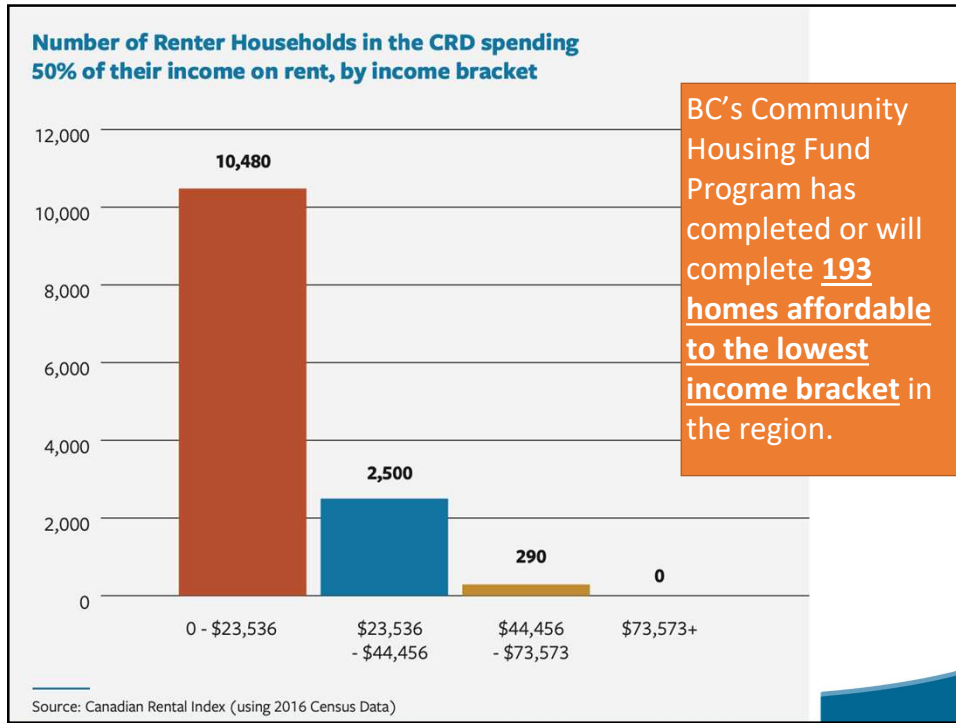
Findings: the barriers to ending homelessness

- The affordable housing crisis
- The need to transition to person-centred care
- Housing instability: returns to homelessness
- The need for service integration



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Impacts of the housing crisis

- Individuals and families cannot proactively prevent and resolve their own homelessness, this has led to institutionalization of the homeless-serving system.
- Bottlenecks in Mental Health Substance Use (MHSU) residential, shelters, transitional & supportive housing
- Findings question the wisdom of excluding people from non-market housing when they are homeless and do not meet the minimum income requirement

In April 2021, **17** Island Health-operated MHSU beds were occupied by patients who completed treatment and have nowhere to go.

Between December 2020 and April 2021, **38** people from same were discharged into homelessness.

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Impacts of housing crisis: Long-term stays in emergency shelters

- Majority of shelter-users are short-term
- Three big operators expressed concern for those living for 2 - 4 years in their shelters
- Between Dec 2020 & April 2021, 50 people moved out of shelters into either transitional hotels, market, Regional Housing First (RHF) or supportive housing
- No quantitative data available to precisely ascertain scope of issue


BC Housing & B.C. Government performance measures for shelters

- # housed within 60 days
- # chronically homeless housed within 100 days
- # who remain housed at 6 and 12 mos



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CANADIAN SHELTER
TRANSFORMATION NETWORK
☰

TRANSFORMING SHELTER

from an **Emergency Service**
to a **Housing Focus**

“A housing-focused shelter is unrelenting in its pursuit to make homelessness as brief as possible while returning people to permanent accommodation.”


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Outcomes of diversion programs

- Guelph-Wellington since 2018 reduced youth chronic homelessness by 76%
- Mission Services housing placements increased from 167 in 2016 to 512 in 2019.
- Calgary Drop-In housing placements increased from 150 in 2017 to 428 in 2020. Reduced chronic shelter users by 300 individuals in same 3 years.
- Mission Services & Calgary DI showed the strategy works for long-term chronically homeless and high need clientele.



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Victoria's Streets to Homes Program

- Secures housing in the private market
- Provides rental subsidies and intensive case management
- S2H has the capability to support 125 individuals. There are five workers who each support 25 clients.
- For individuals experiencing chronic and or episodic homelessness with mental health, substance use challenges, health concerns, early aging, brain injury, trauma, and or intergenerational poverty.



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Elements of person-centred homelessness response system

- Indigenous cultural safety.
- Service-user determines what services are needed.
- **Willing participation of service-user required.**
- Service-user has a right to retain housing regardless of choices.
- Commits to service-users needs, wishes and aspirations.
- **Asset-based approach, builds on individual's strengths to achieve goals.**
- **Timely access to resources to enhance housing stability.**
- **Emphasizes service-users choice and control.**
- **People chart their own pathway out of homelessness.**
- **Focuses on outcomes.**
- **Requires active dialogue.**
- **Needs, strengths and goals of service-users are inseparable from a person-centred approach.**



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The need to transition to person-centred

- Strong **unmet** desire amongst people exiting homelessness to take an active role in their housing future and recovery from homelessness.
- Frontline workers: trauma informed, Indigenous cultural safety.
- Senior managers: more diverse housing options for women, families, dry housing, gender diversity, communal, seniors, youth, independent subsidized.
- Health and Housing Think Tank - services offered in community or onsite according to different levels of need.



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Housing instability: returns to homelessness

- Long-term residency in emergency shelter or transitional programs
- Lack of dedicated support workers to establish trust, then work with individuals towards better health and housing.
- Lack of a system-wide approach to evictions, with a focus on eviction prevention and rapid rehousing.
- Isolation and loneliness upon transition
- The system envisions multiple moves for some individuals, from shelter to transitional housing, from transitional housing to supportive housing, and from supportive housing to independent housing.
- Lack of mental health care for people experiencing psychosis, paranoia, and suicide ideation.



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Housing instability: special concern

- The status of the three hotels purchased by BC Housing is unclear. On one hand, they are considered permanent supportive housing according to BC Housing staff, and on the other hand, residents have signed transitional program agreements 'to prepare for housing'.
- Residential Tenancy Policy Guideline (46) for Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, Supportive Housing
- Program agreements vs. residential tenancy agreements
- Eviction prevention & rapid rehousing



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Evidence of service fragmentation

- Participants referred to services they are ineligible for
- Multiple applications for housing, shelters & rent subsidies
- Hospital, MHSU, & corrections discharges to homelessness
- Outreach with no housing resources a source of mistrust
- Lack of common practices, codified standards and coordinated training
- Referrals “trial and error”
- No-one tracking homelessness in Greater Victoria

“Integration is so much more than piecemeal strategies aimed at repairing a broken system; it is a full-scale transformation of that system.” (Turner, 2019)



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Service integration is in early stages

- Frustrated attempt to launch a shared homeless management information system (HMIS) in 2017, back on the table in 2021
- Coordinated Access & Assessment (2019)
- Pandemic unlocked new level of information sharing and cooperation between BC Housing and Island Health
- Many services and agencies co-located at transitional supportive hotels.



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What is a HMIS & a by-name-list and why do they matter?

- Backbone to coordinated access
- Precisely identify housing and resource needs
- Real time information on how the system is working
- Cycle of continuous improvement
- Develop targeted interventions i.e. youth diversion program in Guelph
- Track progress towards community goal such as functional zero homelessness
- **There is no pathway to ending homelessness that does not include a real-time, person-specific database.**



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As of Date: Jul 12, 2021

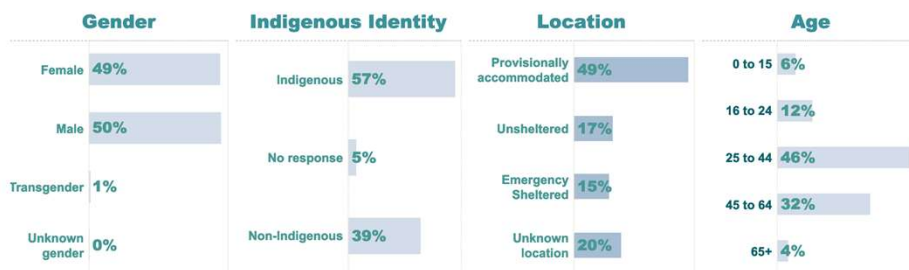
Number of people in Edmonton in July 2021

experiencing homelessness	newly entering homelessness	housed so far this month	housed in the last 6 months	supported by housing programs
2,525	48	43	756	1,740

You are viewing a profile of

People housed in the last 6 months

12,822 people were housed through **Housing First** and related programs since 2009.



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Common Elements of Integrated Homeless-serving System ⁸	Elements of Victoria's Homeless-serving system
Interagency management info system	Early stage of development
Co-locating services within programs	Supportive transitional hotels
Dedicated authority for system planning and system coordination	Absent
Common protocols and policies	Absent
Coordinated service delivery and training	Absent
Having staff dedicated to integration	Absent
A local interagency coordinating body	Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

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Federal Context: beginning of the end of homelessness

- Reaching Home: Solid evidence-based framework for reducing chronic homelessness by 50% + \$\$ (2019)
- Rapid Housing Initiative (2020)
- Affirmed the right to housing National Housing Strategy Act (2019)
- Commit to ending chronic homelessness in 10 yrs (2020 Throne Speech)
- CMHC commit to housing all Canadians by 2030

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Local Context

- The City launched the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness in 2007 to ensure a regional and integrated approach to ending homelessness.
- CRD has important role: 1) federal government partner to ending chronic homelessness through Reaching Home program, and 2) Regional Housing First program.
- The City does not have a homelessness function, but Victoria housing strategy has actions to prevent homelessness and recognizes the right to housing.



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Equity & Housing Gaps within the City

- The need for better methods to ascertain housing needs that quantify the scope of housing need for those that are at risk of homelessness.
- The need for disaggregated data to identify groups that are systemically excluded from housing.
- Tracking losses of low-cost housing and the impact on homelessness.
- Anti-stigma training and welcoming homeless action plans for recreation centres, neighbourhood associations and other civic places.
- Coordination of extreme weather responses.
- Emergency shelter and supportive housing site selection and land-use planning.



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Provincial Context

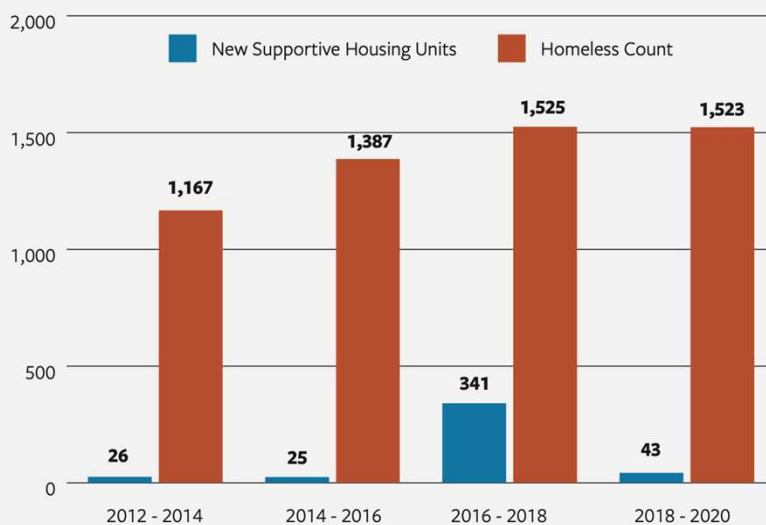
- Leased or purchased 5 hotels in response to the pandemic. 2 hotels will close, 3 will be redeveloped into mixed income housing.
- Island Health and BC Housing working together.
- With federal government, 280 new permanent supportive housing opening by 2022.
- Developing a new homeless strategy.
- David Eby appointed Minister of Housing and new Attorney General tasked with developing a new homelessness strategy, supported by 6 Ministers: Children and Family Development, Health, Mental Health and Addictions, Municipal Affairs, and Social Development and Poverty Reduction.
- Don't take your foot off the gas now!



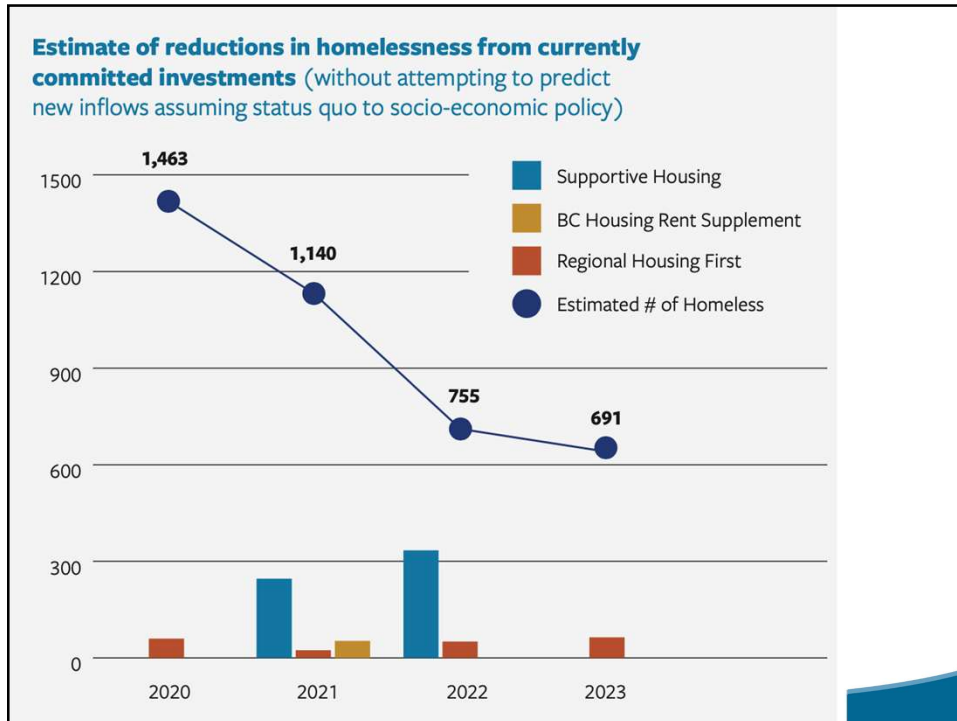
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2011-2021 Capital Region
New supportive housing units compared with the estimated number of people experiencing homelessness



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Recommendations under four calls to action

- Resolve the housing crisis by re-aligning policies and programs to realise the human right to housing
- Lead a full-scale transformation of the homeless-serving system
- Improve standards and introduce accountability mechanisms
- Engage people experiencing homelessness as equal partners
- *Full 28 recommendations listed on pages 88 - 96*



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1. That B.C. resolve the housing crisis by re-aligning policies and programs to realize the human right to housing

- New priorities, targets, and goals, resulting in housing strategies to prevent homelessness and to facilitate exits from homelessness.
- Government-wide procedures and practices would be reviewed to ensure they do not cause or maintain homelessness.
- Homelessness is a *prima facie* violation of the right to housing. As such, homelessness is a prioritized area of action.
- Align B.C. with the City of Victoria and Federal Government



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2. That B.C. strategically support new and expand existing rent supplement programs

- Building supportive housing takes years, whereas homelessness is a daily emergency for the person.
- After supportive housing and RHF program completions several hundreds will remain homeless.
- Rent supplements wrapped into rapid rehousing or diversion programs can return individuals to market housing after a brief experience of homelessness and reduce the risk of chronic homelessness.
- Rent supplement programs, with community supports, can introduce choices, enhance community integration resulting in greater alignment with Housing First.
- Expand Streets to Homes



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Prioritized recommendations under Full Scale Transformation of the Homeless-Serving System

- 8. That the Government of B.C. ensure all homeless programs have a laser-like focus on the goal to ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring in its forthcoming homeless strategy.
- 14. That GVCEH, CAA, CAB, prioritize a HMIS and by-name-list.
- 15. That the GVCEH track # entering/exiting homeless & duration and report publicly, monthly.
- 19. The homeless-serving system support the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness as the lead organization to drive collaborations and facilitate systems integration.
- 20. That the Government of B.C. provide core funding to the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness to develop an integrated homeless-serving system.



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Prioritized recommendations to improve standards and accountability mechanisms

- 22. B.C. define length of program duration at emergency shelters and transitional housing programs.
- 23. BC Housing operating agreements ensure landlords and tenants of supportive housing enter into residential tenancy agreements.



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Recommendations to engage people experiencing homelessness as equal partners.

- BC Housing and Island Health fund or implement a user-centred design process with people experiencing homelessness to inform the program design of new supportive housing sites.
- That the homeless-serving system collaborate with clients to take an active role in their health and housing future and support self-determination through access to case management.
- That housing operators and BC Housing develop a communications strategy to facilitate two-way communication with people who are experiencing homelessness.



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Recommendations to the City of Victoria

6. That the City of Victoria fully embrace the Human Right to Housing to guide its future responses to homelessness, and to continue to advance housing rights.
7. That the City of Victoria establish a full-time staff position in the 2022 budget with a focus on homelessness in the city.*
11. That the City of Victoria support Indigenous-led regional collaborations to end homelessness.

*Review the funding and services agreement with the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness and consider providing an equitable amount of funding to the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness in the 2022 budget.**

*Included in COTW report for Council consideration today.



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Thank you!

