

Belonging in BC:

A collaborative plan to prevent and reduce homelessness

Initial Phase 2022-2025



We acknowledge with respect and gratitude this report was produced on the territories of the Ləkʷəŋən peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt (Xwsepsum) Nations, and WSÁNEĆ Nations

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Message from the B.C. Minister of Housing



Everyone deserves a safe, stable, and supportive place to call home, and to feel a sense of belonging in B.C. That's why one of the first actions our government took in September 2017 was to work with partners to create thousands of new supportive homes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Our actions responded to years where homelessness tripled, due to a lack of investment in housing, and aggressive cuts to mental health and addictions services and supports for at-risk youth that left an entire generation to grow up without supports. By 2017, there were nearly 2,500 more people living on the street in Metro Vancouver than in 2001.

By opening new homes with supports, we made important progress and stopped increases in homelessness we were seeing under the old government. In 2020, while there were specific challenges in different areas of the province, for the first time in two decades – overall numbers of people experiencing homelessness in Metro Vancouver stabilized. We worked with communities to resolve encampments in places like Maple Ridge, Nanaimo and Whalley. We had so much more work to do to provide homes for people, but we were making significant progress together.

Then the pandemic upended everything. Shelters were forced to reduce capacity, people who previously might have been couch surfing with friends were forced to live rough, the toxic drug crisis became even more acute and mental health challenges increased for everyone in B.C. – including people experiencing homelessness. As we've come through the pandemic we've also seen record numbers of people moving to B.C. and new pressures of global inflation. While we need these new British Columbians to respond to labour shortages, it has added pressure to our already stretched housing market, effectively pushing people out the bottom.

We took action, leasing thousands of hotel rooms during the pandemic and continuing to open new supportive housing – allowing us to resolve encampments in Vancouver and Victoria. Adding new complex care housing for people who need more intensive mental health and substance use supports that go beyond the supports provided in supportive housing. We're also going upstream – launching new supports to address the root causes of homelessness and prevent people from losing their homes in the first place. And there's more to come through Budget 2023 – building more homes for people and expanding supports for communities and people sheltering in encampments so they can move forward, all as we get new housing built and build a healthy housing ecosystem

This document, *Belonging in BC*, brings together the wide range of initiatives and strategies our government is developing and implementing to ensure people do not become homeless, and that if they do, they can quickly find a stable home. It recognizes the role systemic racism, discrimination and colonialism play in homelessness and reminds us that we all have – and deserve – a place to belong. It also shows the lack of sufficient action and investment in housing in the past that is a significant factor in the current housing crisis. That's why our government has made investing in housing such a central priority. With the creation of a new standalone Ministry of Housing, we won't let up in our work with all levels of government, Indigenous people, the non-profit sector, developers and the construction industry to ensure we have the housing we need now – and into the future.

We're determined to get people the care and supports they need and transform our systems to end the cycle of people falling through the gaps.

We have accomplished much, but much more remains. We are committed to getting the job done so that everyone has a place to belong in B.C.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ravi Kahlon'.

Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing

Summary

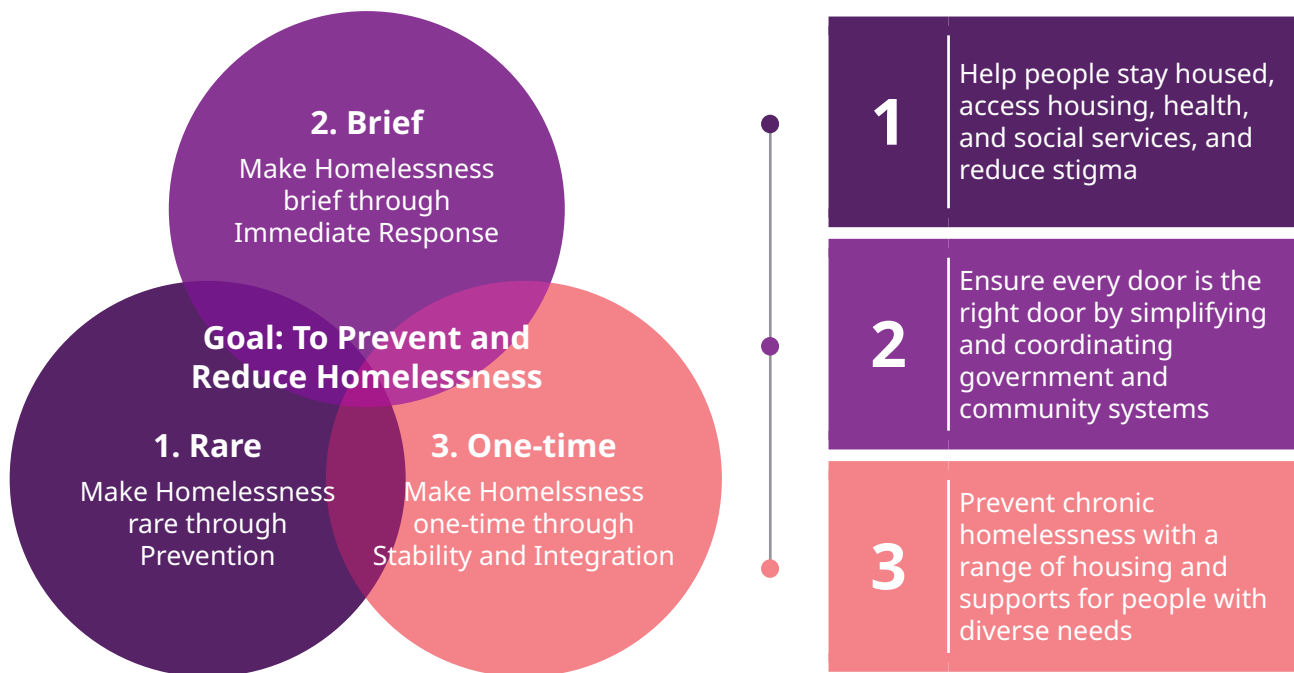
Belonging in BC is a comprehensive Homelessness Plan for the Province, grounded in prioritizing cultural safety, Indigenous¹ and community partnerships, and the inclusion of people with diverse identities and needs. Since 2017, Government has taken significant actions to address homelessness through multiple ministries and partners. This Plan brings together ministry, Indigenous and community partners on a shared path with a plan and policy framework to guide coordinated actions.

The word *belonging* refers not only to having a physical space to call home but also to embracing people experiencing or at risk of homelessness as valuable and cared for members of communities. It recognizes the role systemic racism, discrimination and colonialism plays in homelessness and reminds us that we all have – and deserve – a place to belong.

This Plan sets out the next steps and a framework to be implemented over the next three to five years in partnership with Indigenous peoples and organizations, communities and all levels of government. It is an iterative, responsive and living Plan that builds on successes and measured impacts for future phases.

The vision of the Plan is that B.C. is a place where everyone has a home and community, and the overarching goals are to prevent and reduce homelessness; and to ensure that when it does occur, it is rare, brief and one-time. These goals are to be achieved through three strategic paths: prevention, immediate response, and stability and community integration.

VISION: THAT EVERYONE IN B.C. HAS A HOME AND COMMUNITY



¹ Indigenous includes First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples living in B.C., as well as people who identify as Indigenous but due to the impacts of colonization and trauma may not know or choose to identify with a distinct group or who prefer intersectional identifiers.

Ministries and partners are working together in an unprecedented way to deliver an aligned and overarching Plan made up of different components, including:

- **Complex care housing**
- Supporting youth transitions from care; including **new rent supports**
- The new Provincial Homeless Encampment and Action Response Teams (HEART) and Homeless Encampment Action Response for Temporary Housing (HEARTH) initiative to provide for rapid, coordinated, multidisciplinary responses when encampments arise
- A new **supported rent supplement program**, including the Indigenous-led Culturally Aligned Integrated Supports initiative (Appendix C)
- More Community Integration Specialists to ensure people in need, including those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, are aware of and connected to income supports and government programs that can help them
- Permanent housing for people at-risk of and experiencing homelessness, including those in temporary COVID-19 response spaces
- Support for people in encampments to stay safe and healthy as homes get built, and to transition to housing
- Resources for community-based homelessness responses and research, initiatives to address stigma, and advisory committees for ongoing collaboration; **Homelessness Community Action Grants**
- Funding for Indigenous collaboration to prioritize Indigenous-led components and measured impacts throughout the Plan

Immediate actions are backed by more than \$633 million in new funding committed in Budget 2022 (over three years) and \$1.5 billion in Budget 2023 to help thousands of people maintain and access housing and supports. This is in addition to substantial investments in affordable housing and programs that support people with a range of needs who may be at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The Plan is part of a continuum of broader investments by the B.C. government to reduce and prevent homelessness, and to build more affordable, secure housing in the immediate and long term. It is informed directly from community and Indigenous partners, as well as Persons with Lived Experience of Homelessness (PWLE) and builds in ongoing engagement and collaboration.

"I think a lot about the shelter being a home environment, saying at end of day, 'How was your day, can I get you tea or help with laundry?...' if you lived with roommates, family or partner you would have a warm welcome and that's what I want. Our spaces we offer, services are so institutional and colonial. We have a fear of treating people in a home environment. 'They'll get too comfortable,' I hear. But I think people have a right to feel comfortable and at home, wherever home is that day ... to go to bed feeling rested and respected and happy ... a person who is welcomed."

Quotes from engagements with People with Lived Experience (PWLE)

Introduction: An urgent need for action

After significant progress was made pre-pandemic providing housing with supports for thousands of people with nowhere to live, homelessness is once again growing in B.C., made worse by the housing and drug toxicity crises and global inflation. In addition to the impacts on individuals, communities feel more pressure to respond. Across the province, it is estimated that 23,400 people experienced homelessness at one time between January and December 2020, with over half experiencing chronic homelessness.²

The COVID-19 pandemic made life harder for people facing homelessness – leading to an increase in displacement and people sheltering outdoors. British Columbians are more aware of friends, family and community members who face multiple barriers to stable housing. They also know those facing homelessness are in increasingly precarious and unsafe environments. We must also recognize the growing impacts of climate change and frequency of damaging weather events. In recent years, forest fires, floods, atmospheric rivers, heat dome and cold snaps have led to displacement, harm and even deaths of vulnerable people.

Government worked fast during the pandemic to further step up our work to connect people to health, social and income supports and to provide indoor spaces, housing to self-isolate and shelter. In Fall 2020, the Minister of Attorney General and Responsible for Housing was given the mandate from the Premier to “lead government’s efforts to address homelessness by implementing a homelessness strategy,” with the support of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions.

This task was further supported by the 2022 mandate to the new Minister of Housing to “Expand on the new homelessness supports launched in Budget 2022, including long-term housing to address encampments,” as well as related mandate actions to support the development of new housing, Indigenous housing and improved supports and well-being for people in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside – in collaboration with the Ministers of Health, Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and Public Safety and Solicitor General, as well as Indigenous Peoples and Nations, external partners, and others.

We are building on years of work across government and with communities to chart a path for addressing homelessness that responds to urgent needs and spells out our long-term vision. Every level of government, every community and every person has a role in preventing and reducing homelessness.

To that end, our new Homelessness Plan is rooted in collaboration, built on B.C.’s commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and Reconciliation through partnerships with Indigenous people, Nations, and community-based organizations, and informed by the diverse voices most impacted by its implementation, including people with lived experience of homelessness and those who support them.

² Province of B.C. (2021). Preventing & Reducing Homelessness Integrated Data Project. Chronic homelessness is defined as a period of six months or more.

Understanding Homelessness in B.C.

In Canada, social agencies and academic researchers generally define homelessness as a situation where a person or families live without stable, permanent, appropriate housing – or the ability to acquire it. The experience of homelessness can be short, one-time, a cycle or long-term. Homelessness can include people sheltering outdoors, sleeping in tents, cars, and emergency shelters, and staying at one place then another.

“When I was homeless, I called it houseless because my tent was my home. I just didn’t have a house.”

Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the longer it continues, the more it impacts their physical and mental health, and sense of community belonging. Homelessness is defined in different ways, whether it is a more formal description of a person lacking a safe, suitable place to stay or live or whether it is a description of a person disconnected from the elements of home.³

Homelessness is both a complex societal issue and a deeply personal experience typically triggered by a combination of factors – individual, structural, and systemic – and compounded by significant events on a local, national and global scale such as a global pandemic.

The overarching driver of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing and poverty. Many people are only a single paycheque away from not being able to maintain a roof over their heads – particularly given added pressures of global inflation.

Homelessness also results from systemic and social barriers, including the legacy of colonialism; a lack of affordable and appropriate housing; historical underinvestment in housing infrastructure; systemic racism and discrimination; and strains on the financial, mental, physical, and cognitive health of at-risk individuals who may also be navigating personal trauma.

Statistics Canada data shows more than 15% of all B.C. households – including nearly half of all renters – pay more than 30% of their income on housing and vacancy rates remain below three per cent. We have already taken important steps to respond through initiatives such as the [Homes for BC: A 30-Point Plan to Address Housing Affordability](#) and the [2019 TogetherBC: Poverty Reduction Strategy](#), as well as in the significant and innovative responses during the COVID-19 pandemic and concurrent toxic drug and housing crises.

³ The Government of B.C. defines homelessness as being without a permanent address and chronic homelessness as a period of more than six months or frequent shelter visits in a given period of time.

“As far as homelessness goes, everybody needs to realize that everybody is one paycheque away from being homeless. I know that doesn’t really -- it’s hard for some people to put a grasp on that, but it only takes one small step back and you’re homeless, and it could happen to anybody. I’ve met people in good jobs, really good jobs, well-educated people, that are now homeless, because something came up in their life that required money, as usual, and it set people back. It only takes a little bit.”

“This is a long story, but I ended up on the streets – you know, but mostly to put it in a nutshell was I got injured and I couldn’t work any longer. So little by little as all the – like, the social nets fell, I fell down each net little by little and came to the end of the net, which is social welfare, right? And I couldn’t afford my family any longer, and I picked up an addiction.”

Who experiences homelessness in B.C.?

The experience of homelessness is not limited to any gender, age, race, place or person – yet many people are disproportionately impacted due to these factors. The Province has numerous sources of insight to inform our understanding of who experiences homelessness and why. Since 2017, B.C. has conducted **Province-wide Point-in-Time Homeless Counts**,⁴ conducted on a given night to deepen understanding of who is experiencing homelessness, how it manifests in different communities, and what has shifted over time. The most recent count for 2020/21:

- A total of 8,665 people were experiencing homelessness in 25 communities on a given night – an 11% increase from 2018. Of this total, 38% of people were unsheltered and 62% experiencing chronic homelessness. 222 children under 19 were counted. The majority of people (54%) had lived in the community for 10 years or more.
- For the first time, the 2020 Homeless Count survey included a question specifically on race. Indigenous people were disproportionately represented in the counts at 39% compared to comprising six per cent of B.C.'s population. Black, South Asian and Latin American people were also overrepresented.

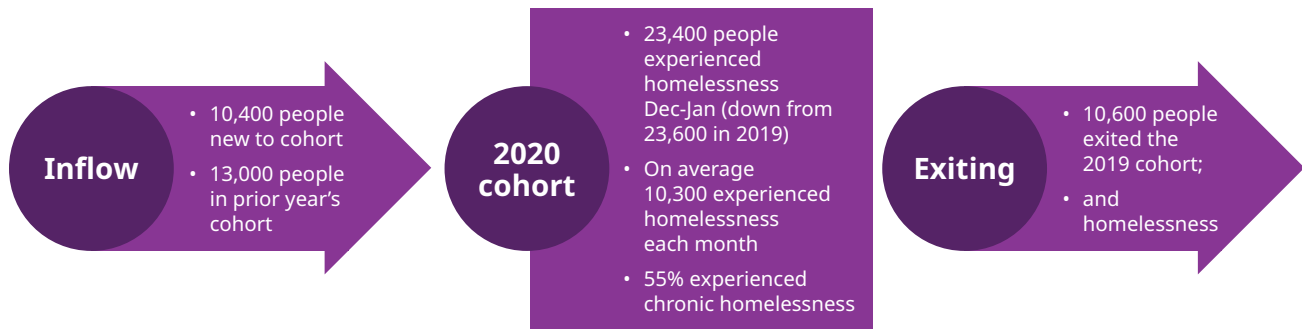
The majority of those surveyed identified as male (68%), with 30% identifying as female and two per cent as another gender. Gender-based violence and systemic oppression create additional risks for women and gender diverse people experiencing homelessness to sleep outdoors or in shelters, leading to systemic undercounting of this population of “hidden homeless”.

- A total of 30% of people cited insufficient income as primary reason for housing loss, followed by substance use issues (22 per cent).
- Youth (under 25) made up 11% of those surveyed, and 36% of everyone surveyed said they were currently or had been a youth in government care.
- The next homeless count is taking place throughout Spring 2023.

“Access to affordable housing would be wonderful. I’ve been looking but the prices are crazy. I run into a lot of places where the prices are just way too high. I’m on PWD [Persons with Disabilities benefit]. Last time I looked at a bachelor suite, it was \$1,300. That’s not just out of my price range, it’s out of my entire income.”

⁴ <https://www.bchousing.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2020-21-BC-Homeless-Counts.pdf>

The Preventing & Reducing Homelessness Integrated Data Project through the BC Data Innovation Program began in 2019 as a partnership between the then Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, the Ministry of Citizen Services and BC Housing. The Ministry of Housing is now a lead partner. For the first time, we are able to pull together data on a total number of people who experienced homelessness during a given year – instead of just a point in time count on a given day. Data sets to measure homelessness include people who receive income or disability assistance with no fixed address for a period of three months or more as well as those who utilize shelters. Initial findings showed:



The Office of the Human Rights Commissioner recognized the B.C. government's Data Innovation Program as an example of a strong approach to protecting the privacy of personal information while still sharing demographic data across public bodies. The program is based on world-leading best practices for managing safe access and use of confidential or sensitive information. Future work of this project can align with Anti-Racism Initiatives as datasets are revised to collect race-based data, with the purpose of understanding the impacts of racism and addressing systemic inequalities.

Indigenous Homelessness

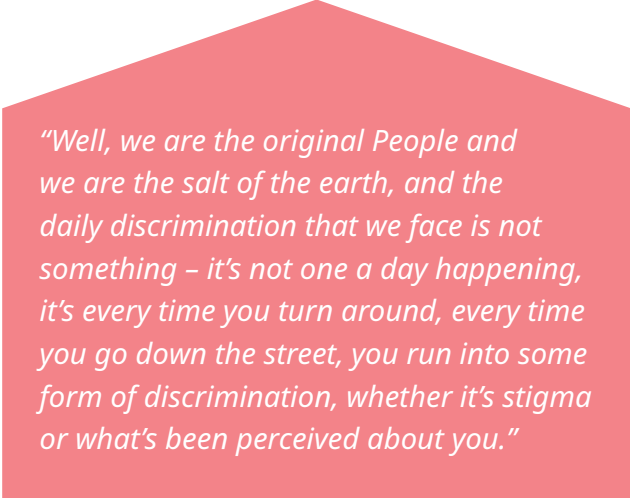
Indigenous peoples have distinct and diverse identities and ways of knowing that are to be respected and learned from on the path to reconciliation. In many Indigenous worldviews, homelessness is defined as broader than lacking a physical place to live. Indigenous homelessness describes individuals, families, and communities experience of isolation from relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, and languages, and disconnection from the cultural, spiritual, emotional, or physical aspects of Indigenous identity.⁵ Indigenous peoples' experiences of homelessness must be understood within the context of colonialism and its disproportionate and continued impact on Indigenous peoples, communities, families, Nations, and cultures.

In British Columbia, 78 per cent⁶ of Indigenous peoples from First Nation, Métis, Inuit or other backgrounds live in urban and off-reserve areas by choice, necessity or systemic displacement. This is why the Provincial Homelessness Plan takes a distinctions-based, inclusive and intersectional approach to ensure the people most in need are centred. Indigenous-led and serving organizations are a pillar of Government's plan to address homelessness and First Nations, Métis and Inuit leadership are key partners.

The Province supports the external-to-government, Indigenous-led [BC Indigenous Homelessness Strategy](#),⁷ developed by an the BC Indigenous Homelessness Steering Committee comprised of 18 Indigenous-serving organizations and through engagement with Indigenous peoples across the Province – including First Nations, Métis and Inuit people with distinct identities, as well as urban, rural and northern Indigenous populations.

The BC Indigenous Homelessness Strategy makes 33 Recommendations to Government that align with the strategic pillars and goals of the *Belonging in BC* Homelessness Plan, with the recognition that there is a need for Indigenous-led approaches to empower Indigenous people and support work already underway through Indigenous organizations and community. This approach is supported by Article 23 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act: *"Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing, and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions."*

The Province is committed to working with the BC Indigenous Homelessness Steering Committee members to address and support their implementation of the actions in alignment with government's current and future work.



"Well, we are the original People and we are the salt of the earth, and the daily discrimination that we face is not something – it's not one a day happening, it's every time you turn around, every time you go down the street, you run into some form of discrimination, whether it's stigma or what's been perceived about you."

5 Thistle, J. (2017.) Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

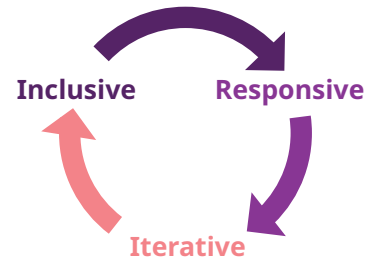
6 <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/supporting-communities/urban-off-reserve-aboriginal-people>

7 <https://www.ahma-bc.org/bcindigenoushomelessness>

Building a Homelessness Plan

The *Belonging in BC* Homelessness Plan builds on input from multiple government initiatives and targeted engagements across the province with community partners, Indigenous organizations and Nations, and people with lived experience. Partnerships with organizations serving urban Indigenous and racialized peoples, people living with disabilities (including those with brain injury and cognitive issues),⁸ women, youth, seniors, people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ and others with diverse needs are crucial to ensure people are included in the design and delivery of programs meant to support them. This includes helping organizations build capacity and resources.

This new plan is built on a commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and organizations. It recognizes the unique and diverse intersections of Indigenous identities (including 2SLGBTQIA+) and will prioritize Indigenous-led organizations and initiatives to build capacity and expertise over time. It will be informed and guided by an Indigenous Advisory role (one of the plan's actions) to ensure ongoing engagement.



We heard a call from Indigenous and community partners to root the Plan in cultural safety, which is an outcome of respectful, safe and inclusive interaction free of harm and discrimination. **Cultural Safety Principles**, developed with input from Indigenous and community partners, guide the Plan, and include:

- Listening to and learning from Indigenous and racialized communities as the experts in the needs of their community, and responding respectfully;
- Ensuring diversity within populations is respected and accommodated, with resulting actions viewed through a decolonized, trauma-informed, and intersectional lens;
- Ongoing development of cultural competency and humility are integrated into all processes, policies, and decision-making;
- Ensuring programs and policies benefit Indigenous and racialized peoples in B.C. by furthering self-determined goals;
- Creating relationships with these communities that are collaborative, authentic, ongoing, and reciprocal; and
- Ensuring that processes are transparent, accessible, and provide opportunities for mutual capacity-building between government, Indigenous, and racialized communities.

⁸ There are significant correlations with brain injury, cognitive issues and risk of homelessness. <https://braininjurycanada.ca/en/homelessness/>

Engagement and Inclusion

Engagement and collaboration to further develop and implement the Plan is ongoing, and includes building relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and racialized peoples and representative organizations to address specific community needs and long-term planning.

From the beginning we have sought to include the people who are directly and personally impacted by homelessness. Recognizing that personal experiences and identities will require tailored approaches to addressing homelessness, we will continue our collaborative engagement to better understand the needs of diverse populations, including but not limited to:

- First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous people
- Racialized and immigrant communities
- Rural and urban communities
- People living with disabilities, including those with brain injury and cognitive issues
- People with mental health and substance use challenges
- 2SLGBTQIA+ people
- Women
- Youth (in and out of care)
- Seniors
- Veterans

The Plan builds on previous and concurrent engagements and includes targeted engagements with people with lived experiences of homelessness, Indigenous partners and key partner organizations. This includes:

- Concurrent Homelessness Plan engagements leveraged: Youth Transitions (Ministry of Children and Family Development), Complex Care Housing and Adult Substance Use Framework (Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions) and others.
- **Summer 2021:** Ministry of Housing staff engaged with people with lived experience of homelessness in seven communities across all regions of the province.
- **Winter 2022:** Cultural safety principles engagement and development with organizations serving Indigenous and racialized people.
- **Spring/Summer 2022** external partner engagement and Plan feedback:
 - BC Indigenous Homelessness Strategy Steering Committee
 - Homelessness Services Association of BC
 - Engaged Communities Canada Society
 - Surrey Area Network of Substance Users
 - BC Non-Profit Housing Association
 - Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness
 - BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner
 - First Nations Leadership Council

- **Indigenous engagement** (ongoing):
 - Summer 2022 engagement invitation to all First Nations and Métis leadership
 - Fall 2022 targeted outreach to First Nations communities
- **Fall 2022 engagement sessions** on an Integrated Support Framework. This engagement aimed to help confirm clinical and non-clinical wraparound supports and service navigation under this new model of care – **See Appendix C:**
 - More than 100 participants, nine sessions, five regions
 - Ministries, services providers, First Nations, local governments community partners

Ongoing engagement and collaboration are built into the Plan actions and supported by funding, including the creation of advisory committees for Indigenous Peoples and People with Lived Experience of Homelessness.

In developing this plan, ministries and community partners came together for the first time to build complementary plans addressing homelessness. Consistent feedback themes included:

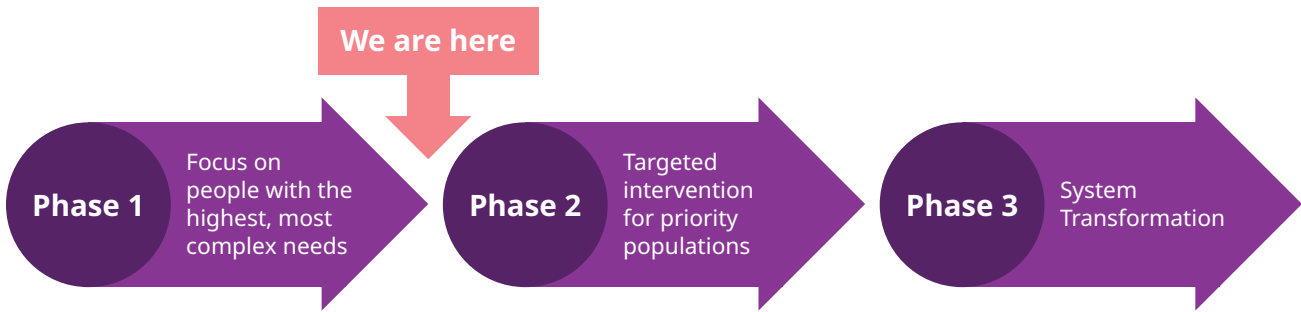
- Housing is a human right and a humanitarian issue;
- Affordability, low incomes and a lack of affordable places to live are the biggest barriers to stable housing;
- Basic needs like food, clothing, washrooms and laundry facilities must be met before people can access other services;
- Challenges navigating government and community services;
- Social, cultural and personal identities impact how people experience homelessness, and experiences of racism and stigma prevent people from accessing important services and health;
- Overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, and those with distinct needs, requires targeted, co-developed and commensurate supports;
- Homelessness looks different in rural areas than urban centres, and each experience presents unique challenges as well as opportunities;
- Homelessness responses and planning needs to address climate change and impacts;
- People want, and deserve, a home that is welcoming, safe and fosters community.

“My youth outreach worker saved my life. She was so amazing. I think about her often when I think about my past and being on the streets....She came with me for important stuff: when I got my wisdom teeth removed; she showed up for my grad; she just knew what was important. The stuff you’d expect your parents to show up for, she thought about that.”

The new *Belonging in BC* Homelessness Plan responds directly to this input through following actions and more:

- Creating new housing options, including a wraparound support rent supplement program to help more people access and maintain housing in their community without waiting for new housing to be built;
- Investing in basic needs, like food security and personal living items, and supports to help people experiencing homelessness navigate community and government services through an Integrated Support Framework;
- Grounding the continued development and implementation of the Plan in an understanding that personal experiences and identities will require distinct approaches;
- Partnering with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Indigenous and community organizations to target supports in implementation and build capacity for local response;
- Building collaborative engagement with diverse communities into all aspects of the strategic plan actions;
- Providing tools for communities to support those at risk or experiencing homelessness in ways that work for and are defined by them, in recognition that communities are experts in their own needs.

Phase One of the BC Homelessness Plan



Strategic goals

THREE OVERARCHING GOALS			
Prevention	Immediate Response	Stability & Integration	
Make homelessness rare. Help people at risk stay housed with the supports they need to pay rent, access housing, health, and social services, and reduce stigma	Make homelessness brief. Ensure every door someone might knock on to end or prevent homelessness is the “right” door by simplifying and coordinating government and community systems	Make homelessness one-time. Prevent chronic homelessness by providing a range of affordable housing for people with diverse needs and integrating supports that promote community inclusion and belonging	
SUPPORTED BY FOUR STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS: WE AIM TO			
1. Transform housing and health systems and programs to reduce barriers to support.	2. Strengthen community partnerships to build capacity and respond to local needs.	3. Ensure programming and service delivery includes input from people with distinct needs and perspectives	4. Apply better data on drivers and impacts of homelessness to improve policy and program design and development.

Actions

1. Transform housing and health systems and programs to reduce barriers to support

Phase One actions through Budget 2022 include:

- **Complex Care Housing:** An innovative model providing housing with intensive health, mental health care and additional supports for people struggling with complex substance use and mental health issues.
- **Permanent Housing Plan:** This plan ensures 3,000+ people in temporary and leased COVID-19 spaces will transition to permanent housing through new housing investments and by creating space in supportive housing in 2022/23.
- **Supported Rent Supplement Program:** A new wraparound support rent supplement program so more people experiencing or at risk of homelessness can access market rental housing when they are ready, and receive the clinical and non-clinical supports they need outside of a congregate living setting.
- **Integrated Support Framework:** A new integrated and coordinated service model to deliver a suite of wraparound supports to improve stability, choice/personal agency and inclusion for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness across unsheltered and housing settings. Initial phase will be the supported rent supplement program.

Phase One/Two actions through Budget 2023 include:

- **Complex Care Housing:** 240 additional purpose-built Complex Care Housing units at approximately 12 locations across the province to support people with more complex mental health and addictions challenges. These units provide supports to those experiencing overlapping mental health challenges, developmental disabilities, substance abuse issues, trauma, and/or acquired brain injuries.
- **Housing with Integrated Supports:** 3,800 additional supportive housing units with increased supports for people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness.
- **Homelessness Supports:** Increased health supports, housing access, social inclusion and system navigation in the Homelessness Plan that build and expand over time; the Integrated Support Framework.
- **Immediate Shelter & Supports:** Homeless Encampment Action Response for Temporary Housing (HEARTH) includes funding for emergency housing, shelter options and immediate coordinated supports to assist people in encampments or sheltering in public spaces.
- **Additional funding for the successful BC Rent Bank program,** through which 18 rent banks across the province help people with low incomes maintain and access rental housing, preventing homelessness and evictions.
- **Transform government systems** so they are more accessible, inclusive, and easy to navigate. Every door should be the right door to exit homelessness.

2. Strengthen community and Indigenous partnerships to build capacity and respond to local needs.

Phase One actions through Budget 2022 include:

- Encampment Response Coordination and Best Practice: Funding to protect the health and safety of people in encampments through supports such as site management and engagement; food; storage of personal items; cultural supports and ceremony; access to washrooms and showers; and transition to housing. Development of an Encampment Resource Guide for communities.
- Homelessness Community Action Grants Program: Grants of up to \$50,000 for community partners to address local needs, try new programs, and build local knowledge and capacity. New funding builds on the successful \$6-million program launched in 2019. (*See Appendix D – Profiles of Community Grants in Action*).
- Welcome Home Kits: Non-profit providers will supply kits to people moving from homelessness into more stable housing.
- Community Inclusion Project: Resources developed through input from nearly 100 people with lived experience of homelessness to help promote social inclusion and reduce stigma and misperceptions around homelessness.
- Staffing Support for Non-Profit Partners: Helping non-profit service providers to increase safety and reduce workload for staff to meet the complex needs of clients.

Phase One/Two actions through Budget 2023 include:

- Homeless Encampment Action Response Teams (HEART): Regional multidisciplinary teams for rapid response to encampments, based on the award-winning model used in Greater Victoria and a Seattle project featured in the New York Times.

Long-term vision: Build stronger partnerships across all sectors through collaborative projects and new funding and programs that build capacity and expertise at the local level. These partnerships will identify and deliver local responses and promote belonging and inclusion for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

3. Ensure programming and service delivery includes input from people with distinct needs and perspectives:

Phase One actions through Budget 2022 include:

- Indigenous Advisory Committee: Through a request-for-proposal process convene a broad group of Indigenous people representing urban, rural, and intersectional perspectives to provide an inclusive and distinctions-based Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) lens on homelessness responses, program design, and delivery.
- Lived Experience Steering Committee: Through a request-for-proposal process convene a diverse forum of people with lived experience of homelessness to advise on the implementation of the Homelessness Plan.
- Youth Transitions: A plan to proactively house youth transitioning to adulthood from government care to reduce their likelihood of experiencing homelessness, developed in collaboration with youth and community partners, and including financial support, earnings exemption, help with the cost of housing, improved access to transition workers, enhanced life skills and mental-health programs, and better medical benefits until age 27. This includes rent supplements to help prevent homelessness.

Phase One/Two actions through Budget 2023 include:

- **Encampment Strategy Coordination:** To reduce and prevent homelessness encampments, the Province will improve coordination across agencies, including First Nations and Indigenous communities as well as community partners. Encampment responses include complex land management, social and legal coordination issues, as well as emergency response planning. Additional investments will ensure improved and more timely responses.

Long-term vision: Include diverse voices in the early creation of program design and delivery to better address the intersecting needs, rights, circumstances, and barriers faced by people experiencing homelessness.

4. Apply better data on drivers and impacts of homelessness to improve policy and program design and development.

Phase One actions through Budget 2022 include:

- **Provincial Homeless Count:** Conduct a third count across 20 communities in 2023 to deepen our understanding of who is homeless, how they are living, and what has shifted over time. Funding will allow us to coordinate both surveys and methods with the Federal Government and other communities to ensure data integrity across the province.
- **Preventing and Reducing Homelessness Integrated Data Project:** Analyze government data sets to establish homelessness numbers by year, month, and through a cohort model to measure impact. This new, innovative data project will provide a clearer understanding of who is homeless in B.C. and how people move in and out of homelessness.
- **Women and Homelessness Research Project:** New research on women's homelessness will enable better support for women, since current data collection methods generally undercount and misrepresent women's experiences of homelessness.
- **Monitoring and evaluating:** Development of a Performance Measurement and Evaluation framework for the Homelessness Plan for understanding, tracking and measuring progress on addressing homelessness.

Long-term vision: Use evidence, including data, research, wise practices, and the experiences of people with lived/living experience of homelessness in the development of policies and programs, and to determine how programs and policies change and affect lives. Align data principles with new anti-racism legislation and human rights approaches.

Measuring impacts

To help establish baseline data and ensure ongoing accountability, we will track the actions and impacts of multiple ministries against the Plan's three goals. Examples include (but are not limited to):

Prevention:

- Reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness for the first time, particularly from communities that are overrepresented in the homeless population
- Increasing the number of affordable and supportive housing units
- Reducing the number of people discharged from health and correctional facilities to homelessness
- Reducing the number of new income assistance clients with no fixed address

Immediate Response:

- Reducing the number and size of large, complex encampments
- Reducing police/justice interactions with people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness
- Reducing harm/death for those experiencing homelessness and in encampments
- Increasing Indigenous housing and supports options
- Increasing system capacity and readiness for warm weather encampment response
- Increasing the number of complex care housing spaces for adults with complex mental health and substance use needs

Stability and Community Integration:

- Reducing chronic homelessness
- Increasing connections to income supports and community-based navigators
- Increasing health supports to those experiencing or at-risk of homelessness
- Reducing drug toxicity deaths related to unstable housing and homelessness
- Reporting back to PWLE on performance measures and impacts, and course correcting based on iterative feedback

We commit to:

- Measuring outputs: e.g., the number of people supported, housed
- Measuring distinct impacts: e.g., the reduction of Indigenous homelessness
- Reporting on social impacts, personal journeys
- Developing a Performance Measurement Framework and reporting on progress annually

Next Phases

Planning and implementation for Phase One and Two of the *Belonging in BC* Homelessness Plan are underway through Budget 2022 and Budget 2023 with a focus on immediate response and serving people with distinct and intersecting needs. The Plan is intended to be iterative, inclusive and responsive, building from best practices and learnings. As such, Phase Three of the Plan, which focuses on systems transformation, will be developed with ministry, community and Indigenous partners based on impacts, successes and addressing gaps from the first two phases. This will be achieved through ministry working groups, implementation tables, the Indigenous and Persons with Lived Experience advisory roles and ongoing engagement.

Building on Investments and Best Practices

The *Belonging in BC* Homelessness Plan builds on a foundation of government actions and investments in the homeless-prevention sector since 2017.

2018: We recognized that housing stability and supply is key to reducing homelessness in B.C. and committed a historic \$7-billion over 10 years, working with partners to deliver 114,000 affordable homes, in the *Homes for BC: A 30-Point Plan*. More than 35,000 homes are already completed or underway throughout the province. Nearly 15,000 homes are open and close to 11,000 are under construction with many others in the development approvals or initiation stages.

2019: A year later, we took significant steps to address the poverty and mental health and addiction challenges that are inextricably linked to homelessness. We launched B.C.'s first-ever poverty reduction strategy – **Together BC** – to reduce overall poverty in B.C. by 25% and child poverty by 50% by 2024 (which includes making housing more affordable as a priority action item). **Pathway to Hope** – an ambitious roadmap for improving mental health and addictions care in B.C., was also released in 2019.

2020: When the COVID-19 pandemic hit amidst toxic drug and housing crises, we moved quickly to support the most vulnerable, providing supportive housing and emergency shelters, responding to encampments, and implementing rent protection measures.

More than **3,000 spaces** were opened for people from encampments and others in need. This included people living in unsafe, dense encampments at Oppenheimer Park in Vancouver and Topaz Park and Pandora Avenue in Victoria.

More than 4,700 people facing homelessness have moved into new supportive housing units the Province has opened in 30-plus communities across B.C. since 2017

Nearly **2,300 supportive homes** are also underway in B.C., including more than 700 homes coming to Vancouver and more than 250 in Victoria. Youth in government care were also supported to stay in their homes past their 19th birthday through temporary housing agreements.

As part of our efforts to ensure people most in need of support had access to safe, secure housing during the pandemic, government invested over **\$376 million to purchase 27 hotel and motel properties in 12 communities** across the province. Combined, these properties provide 1,575 homes for people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. Over the long term, many of these sites will be redeveloped into affordable rental housing for people in these communities.

2021: BC Housing funded more than 2,700 temporary shelter spaces and approximately 580 extreme weather response shelter spaces throughout the province.

The number of total emergency shelters spaces increased from 1,500 temporary spaces and 290 extreme weather response spaces in 2020. This was in addition to the more than 1,800 permanent shelters that are open year-round.

2022: In January 2022, Government announced the first-of-its-kind **complex care housing** for British Columbians that need a level of support that goes beyond what is currently available in supportive housing. Complex care housing is a ground-breaking approach to provide enhanced supports that address the needs of people with overlapping mental health, substance use, trauma and acquired brain injuries who are often left to experience homelessness or are at risk of eviction.

Through Budget 2022, the Province invested nearly \$35 million over three years to improve supports for young people from care transitioning to adulthood. This includes a \$600-a-month rent supplement to assist young adults with the cost of private rental housing and new Youth Transition Support Workers who will support youth in care starting at age 14 in accessing services until they are 25, among other supports.

Government investments in other priority areas will also have significant impacts on improving the lives of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. These include:

- Continued support for the Pathway to Hope mental health and addictions strategy
- \$3 million over three years to provide welcome home kits to people moving from homelessness into more stable housing
- Climate-related disaster response funding

- Additional \$166 million over the fiscal plan to bring government's annual housing investments to \$1.2 billion by 2024/25, including \$100 million in 2022/23 to non-profit housing providers to accelerate the construction of mixed-income housing
- The Strengthening Communities' Services program provides \$100 million in funding to help B.C. communities address the impacts of homelessness, support people and strengthen community health and safety. The program – which is a part of the Safe Restart Agreement funded equally by the Province and the Government of Canada – is being administered by the Union of B.C. Municipalities
- The Peer Employment Program provided \$8 million annually in 2021-22 and 2022-23 to support over 1,000 vulnerable people at risk of, and experiencing homelessness, to gain life/work skills, employment wrap around services and supports. Funding was provided through the Canada-BC Workforce Development Agreement, administered by the Ministry of Postsecondary Education and Future Skills
- Work to develop a provincial food security framework that will support population groups most likely to experience food insecurity, co-led by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction and Ministry of Agriculture
- Increasing capacity at the Residential Tenancy Branch to add up to 50 new staff to cut wait times and doubling the Compliance Enforcement Branch to support renters, landlords and prevent housing loss

The *Belonging in BC* Homelessness Plan lays out our path to reduce and prevent homelessness across the Province with clear goals and a suite of immediate actions over the next three years. Building partnerships and collaboration during this first implementation phase is crucial to the success of the Plan, and to future phases. Ongoing engagement with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous communities, service providers and organizations serving Indigenous peoples and those with distinct needs and lived experience will help determine this path. We will learn from each other, from our progress and from robust data collection. Together, we can reach our goal to make homelessness rare, brief and one-time, and to support communities in creating a home, and a place, for everyone to belong.

Appendix A: Homelessness Plan Actions and Funding

BUDGET 2022 - \$633 MILLION OVER 3 YEARS		PHASE 1
Transform Systems		Timeline
Complex Care Housing: \$164 million over 3 years to expand the Complex Care housing model to at least 20 more sites, with plans to support up to 500 people. – <i>Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions</i>		In progress, ongoing
Permanent Housing Plan: \$264 million over three years to invest in a permanent housing plan for the 3,000 people who were temporarily housed in leased or purchased hotels and other spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. – <i>BC Housing</i>		In progress, ongoing
Homelessness Supports: \$170 million to increase health supports, housing access, social inclusion and system navigation in the Homelessness Plan that build and expand over time; including a new program wraparound support rent supplement program to help 3,000 people access market housing by 2024/25 and the Integrated Support Framework. – <i>Ministry of Health and Ministry of Housing</i>		Early 2023
Staffing Support for Non-Profit Partners: \$7-million to build capacity and supports. – <i>BC Housing</i>		In progress, ongoing
Expansion of Community Integration Specialist Services: Utilizing existing resources to further expand the role of community-based income and social supports, and navigating government services. – <i>Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction</i>		In progress, ongoing
New minimum shelter rate for people receiving income assistance or disability assistance helps people experiencing homelessness with incidental expenses. Clarified policy that people experiencing homelessness are eligible for some moving expenses. – <i>Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction</i>		Implemented, ongoing
Strong Partnerships		
Encampment Supports: \$4 million for encampment supports, including site management, engagement, and support for food, sanitation, storage, and the safety of people in the encampments and as they move to indoor spaces. – <i>BC Housing</i>		In progress, ongoing
Homelessness Community Action Grants: \$6-million to extend this successful program through SPARC BC, providing community and Indigenous organizations, First Nations, and Local Governments with funding for projects addressing homelessness and to build capacity. – <i>Ministry of Housing</i>		In progress, ongoing

Community Inclusion Project: \$50,000 to complete anti-stigma resources for the public, media and government organizations based on stories from people with lived experiences of homelessness. – <i>Ministry of Housing</i>	Spring 2023
Welcome Home Kits: \$3 million over three years for non-profit providers to supply kits to people moving from homelessness into more stable housing. – <i>Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction</i>	In progress
Inclusive Programs and Service Delivery	
Youth Transitions Housing: \$35 million for youth transitioning from care, including a new financial supplement, rent supplements, and improved supports and benefits until age 27. – <i>Ministry of Children and Family Development</i>	In progress
People with Lived Experience Committee: \$150,000 to facilitate the inclusion of people with lived expertise of homelessness and supporting organizations to participate in policy and programs. – <i>Ministry of Housing</i>	Summer 2023
Indigenous Advisory Committee: \$150,000 to facilitate Indigenous engagement and collaboration in policy and programs. – <i>Ministry of Housing</i>	Spring 2023
Strengthen Data and Evidence Informed Policy	
Provincial Homeless Count: \$1.6 million to facilitate the 2023 Homeless Count. – <i>Ministry of Housing through BC Housing</i>	Spring 2023
Women and Homelessness Research Project: \$100,000 for a research project on the intersections of women and homelessness. – <i>Ministry of Housing</i>	Spring 2023
Evaluation Framework: \$3 million to support development and implementation of a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Framework for the Homelessness Plan to understand, track and measure program on preventing and responding to homelessness. – <i>Ministry of Housing</i>	More info to come
BUDGET 2023 - \$4.9 BILLION OVER 10 YEARS	
PHASE 1 & 2	
1. Transform Systems	Timeline
Complex Care Housing: \$520 million in funding for 240 additional purpose-built Complex Care Housing units at approximately 12 locations across the province to support people with more complex mental health and addictions challenges. These units provide supports to those experiencing overlapping mental health challenges, developmental disabilities, substance abuse issues, trauma, and/or acquired brain injuries. – <i>Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions</i>	More info to come
Housing with Integrated Supports: 3,800 additional supportive housing units for people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. – <i>BC Housing</i>	More info to come

Homelessness Supports: \$1.7 billion to increase health supports, housing access, social inclusion and system navigation in the Homelessness Plan that build and expand over time; the Integrated Support Framework. – <i>Ministry of Housing and Ministry of Health</i>	More info to come
Immediate Shelter & Supports: Homeless Encampment Action Response for Temporary Housing (HEARTH) includes \$218 million in funding for emergency housing, shelter options and immediate coordinated supports to assist people in encampments or sheltering in public spaces. – <i>Ministry of Housing, BC Housing</i>	2023
Additional \$7.5 million in funding for the successful BC Rent Bank program, through which 18 rent banks across the province help people with low-incomes maintain and access rental housing, preventing homelessness and evictions. – <i>Ministry of Housing</i>	Spring 2023
2. Strong Partnerships	
Homeless Encampment Action Response Teams (HEART): Regional multidisciplinary teams for rapid response to encampments, based on the award-winning model used in Greater Victoria and a Seattle project featured in the <i>New York Times</i> . – <i>BC Housing</i>	Summer & Fall 2023
3. Inclusive Programs and Service Delivery	
Encampment Strategy Coordination: To reduce and prevent homelessness encampments, the Province will improve coordination across agencies, including First Nations and Indigenous communities as well as community partners. Encampment responses include complex land management, social and legal coordination issues, as well as emergency response planning. Additional investments will ensure improved and more timely responses.	Fall 2023
4. Strengthen Data and Evidence Informed Policy	
Initiatives to support strengthened data and evidence informed policy continue through funding provided in Budget 2022.	More info to come

Appendix B: Integrated Support Framework

The Integrated Support Framework (ISF) is a model, or system, of health, social, cultural, and housing supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness across settings from encampments and shelters to supported housing, complex care and private market rentals with supports. The ISF provides a vision for an approach to providing wraparound supports and making it easier for people to access and navigate supports and services. Supports provided using the ISF will be delivered through partnerships and strive to be accessible, culturally safe, gender- and healing-informed and incorporate supports that meet peoples' unique and intersecting needs.

Who will the ISF benefit? The ISF will make it easier for people to access and navigate supports and services. It provides a framework for the provision of supports that serve people experiencing homelessness or those with precarious housing, including:

- People experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including those sheltering outdoors, residing in encampments, in emergency shelters, or living in SROs, supportive recovery houses, congregate supportive housing or leaving correctional or treatment facilities with no return address who are moving amongst temporary housing situations
- People with social and community support needs
- 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing homelessness
- Youth experiencing homelessness, seniors and women and children leaving violence
- Indigenous people, who are overrepresented in homeless populations and face systemic and interpersonal discrimination accessing supports, housing and resources
- People from marginalized/racialized communities who are overrepresented in homeless populations and face systemic and interpersonal discrimination accessing supports, housing and resources
- People with disabilities, including physical, long-term health, end-of-life, mental health and cognitive issues, brain injury and severe allergies, who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and who have moderate support needs

What Principles Guide the ISF?

- Housing first approach
- Healing-informed, culturally diverse, culturally safe and person-centered care
- Harm reduction approach
- Client-centred, collaborative
- Preservation of dignity, personal agency
- Family and community centred
- Gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) principles to create an atmosphere of safety and respect for diverse populations
- Prioritize people with distinct needs – Indigenous, Métis, Inuit, First Nations, urban, rural, racialized and immigrant populations, youth, seniors, women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people with disabilities
- Flexibility and adaptability for local health/housing partnership solutions

How will the ISF be delivered and implemented?

The ISF is intended to be a guiding document and model of support to best serve a person’s specific needs. Implementation of the model will take time and this ISF is a step in that process, providing a vision for what a coordinated system of supports should be by guiding program, policy and investment planning. It will be used as a tool to tailor supports to individuals and settings, and to better evaluate support programs. The ISF will be delivered by the identified partners in the Framework, and potentially others. Not all people receiving services under the homelessness plan will require each service described under the ISF, as some services may already be accessible in community. The ISF model will be implemented over time, as services and models come online, and will build on best practices.

WHAT IS THE INTEGRATED SUPPORT FRAMEWORK?



Wraparound Supports	Settings	Modality	Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System navigation & Coordinated Case Management • Physical Health, Mental Wellness and Substance Use supports • Housing supports • Indigenous Cultural supports • Social, Emotional & Community Supports • Personal Care & Personal Living Supports • Food Security Supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoors, in encampments • Shelters • Congregate housing – supportive, single-room occupancy hotels (SROs) • Transitional housing • Market housing with rent supplements • Community-based, e.g., Friendship Centres, Neighbourhood Houses, community care clinics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-located/onsite programming & activities • Mobile in-reach • Outreach • Community, e.g., Friendship Centres, Neighbourhood Houses, community care clinics • Virtual/telephone supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PWLE • Health Authorities • BC Housing • Local governments • Indigenous governing bodies • Indigenous organizations • Non-profit housing providers • Community organizations • Landlords • Police



- A model, or system, of health, social, cultural, and housing supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness across settings from encampments and shelters to supported housing, complex care and private market rentals with supports
- ISF supports will be delivered through partnerships and strive to be accessible, culturally safe, gender – and healing – informed and incorporate supports that meet peoples’ unique and intersecting needs

Appendix C: Profiles of Impact and Indigenous Innovation

Culturally Aligned Integrated Support Framework – Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness

The first phase of the new Supported Rent Supplement Program applies the principles of the Integrated Support Framework and includes an innovative Indigenous-led model.

The Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness (ACEH) serves First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Indigenous peoples on Vancouver Island, grounding its work in traditional principles, the voices of the Indigenous street community, evidence-based design and research.

ACEH has developed a dual-model of housing care that provides culturally supportive housing with decolonized harm reduction that successfully serves Indigenous people in various housing forms throughout Greater Victoria.

ACEH will now apply its model to the Cultural Aligned Integrated Support Framework rent supplement program, providing up to \$600/month rent supplements with wraparound health, cultural, emotional, social and housing supports in partnership with ministries. The new program will begin in Greater Victoria in early 2023 and expand across the Island, in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Homelessness Community Action Grants

Budget 2022 funded an additional \$6-million in the successful [Homelessness Community Action Grant Program](#). Delivered through the Social Planning and Research Council of B.C. (SPARC BC), this \$12-million total in grants will help communities and organizations to build understanding and capacity in homelessness responses and prevention. This program is designed to support local action and knowledge about homelessness and its causes, increase public awareness and respond to gaps in services for people experiencing homelessness.

In 2019, the Province provided \$6 million to establish the grant program and more than 182 community-based research projects have been completed to date. Each of these projects tell an important story about the community, collaboration and distinct needs. These projects are a model for communities across the Province to learn from and be inspired by. For a full list of projects and grants, visit: sparc.bc.ca

Success Stories

Hupačasath First Nation partners to build housing pods homes and community

The Hupačasath First Nation is using the Homelessness Community Action Grant program to build unique pod homes and community supports for members at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This includes a ‘housing pod’ pilot program. The project has participation of the City of Port Alberni and BC Housing, through donation of land and resources. Construction of the pods will be assisted by community members who will reside in them, allowing for a feeling of ownership over the spaces and participation in the community.

“The community members who will live in [the pods] are going to build them. They’ll have a sense of ownership when they come in and have the key in their hand. It’s a dry warm place to sleep – it’s a basic human right, having a dry warm place to sleep,” said Chief Councillor Brandy Lauder, Hupačasath First Nation. “It comes down to our core values of who we are as the Hupačasath First Nation. We all had a dry warm place to sleep, a sense of belonging.”

The pods will create a welcoming place for community members to find a sense of home and belonging and gain new skills and developing knowledge around construction. Further initiatives include partnering with the Port Alberni Native Friendship Centre and other organizations to explore the health, service, and support needs of unhoused community members. This project will seek to understand current needs, identify gaps, and identify new pathways for creating community and social inclusion.

Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness centres inclusion and language in the Unsettling Stigma Project

“If you label people, that’s where they stay. All you want is to feel human again.” – Unsettling Stigma Project Participant

The Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society (ACEH) set out to hear directly from First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples with lived experience of homelessness about the impacts of stigmatizing language on their lives and solutions to unsettle it. One hundred and ten voices were centred as part of this project and from these voices, important learnings emerged. Resoundingly, the ACEH heard that terms commonly used including “hard-to-house,” “chronically homeless,” and “street-entrenched,” are harmful as they convey personal blame and a sense of unwelcome permanency. Cited longer term impacts of stigmatizing language include mental health decline and avoidance of services. With a focus on solutions, many shared recommendations for how we can change the conversation around Indigenous homelessness to promote respect and dignity. Preference was expressed by participants for the use of person-first, community-centred, strength-based language like “Street Family” and “Unhoused Community,” for the reason that they increase feelings of belonging. Participants also recommended addressing stigma in our services and supports through increased peer involvement, strengthening education about colonialism, shifting our narrative at the systems-level, and through listening to personal stories about Indigenous homelessness. The Unsettling Stigma Project provides concrete ways that government, organizations, and the public can actively help reduce stigma and contribute to create safer communities for Indigenous peoples at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Peer-based Surrey organizations partner to include lived experience, build skills and inclusion

Lookout Housing and Health Society and the Diverse Organization Providing Education and Regional Services (D.O.P.E.R.S.) partnered to conduct peer-led research project and survey to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experience of homelessness to better inform future program development. The project also has identified opportunities to leverage peer knowledge and helped to create space to share the stories and insights of over 100 participants.

“I was both an interviewer and interviewee. Being a part of this work has been awesome and painful. I learned new skills and how to conduct interviews, how to connect with people. Participating made me feel like I was worthy again; that we are finally being heard actually listened to. It felt like I mattered; that people finally are seeing me. That I matter. Thank you for helping me remember that I live here to; that I am someone,” said participant Ken N.

Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness Society engages LGBTQ2S+ youth in Comox Valley on housing and supports

Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness Society is a non-profit, residential housing program in the Comox Valley and provides people and families with access to housing that helps prevent homelessness. Through the grant program, Dawn to Dawn is conducting a community-based research project which engages LGBTQ2S+ youth about the feasibility, design and implementation of a new housing project. The project, called Rainbow House, will provide specialized supports for LGBTQ2S+ youth aged 16 to 28. The knowledge from the research project is essential as very few LGBTQ2S+ youth seek refuge in the shelter system as they report discriminations and feeling more vulnerable and unsafe in shelters. This initiative will aid the development of targeted strategies that help youth with housing and support needs and help develop specialized housing where they are able to feel safe and comfortable.

“Social justice is an integral part to understanding the plight of the unhoused. The funding providing by SPARC provided Dawn to Dawn to allow the stories of the unhoused to further this understanding,” said Grant Shilling, Community Facilitator, Dawn to Dawn Action on Homelessness Society.

Aboriginal Housing Society of Prince George uses Community Voicemail Project to stay connected

The Aboriginal Housing Society of Prince George Community Voice Mail (CVM) Program provides front-line workers from a variety of non-profit organizations, housing providers employment agencies and other organizations help to connect those living in poverty, experiencing homeless or who may have multiple barriers. This free service allows participants to have a stable phone number which can be accessed 24 hours a day and removes the barrier for many to obtain a phone contract or to add money to a pay-as-you-go phone inhibit one’s right to communication. The program promotes consistent, ready access and connection to services, workers, and family; it is a valuable tool for participants to reach their goals including accessing mental health or substance use services, finding employment, or accessing housing. It helps organizations to stay connected to the people they serve, and ensures individuals have information they need about health, housing, shelter, and employment events and services. AHS PG is conducting community-based research into the outcomes of the program, as well as training participating organizations, and building awareness.

It is nice to be a part of a program that offers a hand up. It is joyous to see the shocked look in one’s face when they learn the program is free. We at Aboriginal Housing Society are grateful to be involved in this initiative,” says Hawa Ayorech, Community Programs Coordinator, Aboriginal Housing Society of Prince George.

“Leaving a number one can be reached at, is a requirement for housing applications. A CVM number offers anonymity and has been used successfully to help tenants obtain housing. The story does not end there, one of the persons who obtained housing is a young mom who had lost her children due to unsuitable accommodations. Through our weekly broadcasts this lady had learned of our Wellbriety groups. Having a support team helped her with her sobriety. Four months later she was reunited with her young children. Today her children are back in school. She has remained committed to her sobriety, is in counselling and recently started a job.”

A Way Home Kamloops Society brings together diverse youth voices

A Way Home Kamloops Society undertook a project to engage the BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness (BCCEYH) in the development of a B.C. made Provincial plan for addressing youth homelessness. Key activities included co-ordination and organization of five “think tanks” that engaged homeless youth with lived experience to identify potential gaps in the current system of services and supports for vulnerable and at-risk youth, along with the organization of a youth-led homelessness conference.

“Through this project, diverse youth voices will be brought together in a meaningful way while investing in their futures and youth homelessness prevention. By providing the opportunity to learn critical employment and skills development, these young leaders can further grow, form connections with likeminded peers, and find a deeper sense of belonging and purpose in their journeys. An opportunity such as this gives tremendous hope and the means to co-create a better world, one where youth with lived expertise can take stage and light the way towards change for future generations to come,” said Kira Cheeseborough, Project Coordinator, A Way Home Kamloops Society.

Senior Services Society sets up collaborative to promote inclusion, housing stability

The Senior Services Society established a Seniors Housing Collaborative to help vulnerable and low-income seniors in Metro Vancouver with access to affordable housing and supports through the grant program and other funding. Seniors with lived experience act as advisors to promote diversity, inclusivity, and intergenerational connection. The project has allowed the society to work with a housing innovation consultant, in addition to enacting knowledge mobilization, the creation of quarterly podcasts, and the development and publication of a list of recommendations to aid seniors.

“The Seniors Housing Collaborative was established to shift policy and practice so low-income seniors can age in the right place with appropriate services and strong networks. Membership includes 20+ people, including housing and service providers, municipal representatives, and eight seniors with diverse perspectives on the rental landscape. We are engaging other speakers to continue our work to draft policy briefs and nurture partnerships for change,” says Alison Silgado, CEO, Senior Services Society of BC.