2014/15 Progress Report on Housing and Homelessness in Alberta

Provided by the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness to the Minister of Human Services, Alberta Government

December 2015

Contents

Message from the Co-Chair

The Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness is pleased to provide the *2014/15 Progress Report on Housing and Homelessness in Alberta*. Two years into its three year mandate, the Council continued to provide advice to government on policy changes required to achieve the objectives of *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years* (Alberta's Homelessness Plan)*,* and how to lay the foundation for permanent, sustainable, provincial systems focused on prevention and rapid re-housing.

The first few years of Alberta's Homelessness Plan focused on rethinking our approach to homelessness. Local policy makers and practitioners agreed that when people experience housing loss, the person, our community and our province is more successful when the response is Housing First.[1] National and international research supports Housing First as a cost-effective, successful tool for ending chronic homelessness. Continued collaboration, local leadership, and significant investment from the provincial government translated into permanent housing and individualized support services for over 11,000 Albertans.

We are well on our way, but to reach our goal of ending homelessness, our focus must now be on homelessness prevention and increasing the supply of non-market housing. There is a clear link between a lack of supply of affordable housing and an increasing risk of people becoming homeless. The Alberta Government's commitment to proceed with a housing strategy is a necessary step to achieving the goals of Alberta's Homelessness Plan*.* A funded housing strategy is urgently needed to ease non-market housing pressures across the housing and supports spectrum and throughout the province. A complimentary supports strategy is equally critical to building a seamless, client-centred system. This means that people will access the supports they need, when they need them, to stay in their current housing, or to move to permanent, stable, suitable housing.

Integration of housing and supports *across systems* is also important. Local leaders and partnering agencies have done a remarkable job in re-shaping the homeless serving-system to rapidly re-house people who become homeless. To make further progress, systems across government and community need to integrate to ensure people at risk of or experiencing homelessness have access to a range of supports, including addictions treatment, mental health services, and the right type of housing.

The Council will continue to act on the priorities it has identified as being critical to the success of Alberta's Homelessness Plan, and for sustaining our collective success beyond the life of the

Plan. In this way the groundwork can be laid for a dynamic, integrated, multi-system approach to housing and homelessness in Alberta.

This report presents the current state of affairs on housing and homelessness in Alberta, impacts of Alberta's Homelessness Plan, and the Council's assessment of the necessary future directions to support the Plan's success. From all Council members, thank you for the opportunity to continue to be involved in this important work.

Sincerely,

Franco Savoia, Co-Chair
Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL: ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS SINCE 2013

- Provided strategic advice to the Alberta Government that is influencing provincial housing and homelessness policy.

- Led the development and now guiding the implementation of *A Housing and Homelessness Research Strategy for Alberta,* in partnership with the Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research, to support evidence-based housing and homelessness-related decision making.

- Fostered an integrated housing and homelessness policy approach within government through the development of policy tools, including the Housing and Supports Spectrum, a Homelessness Diversion Framework, and a funding framework to improve contractual processes for homelessness capital projects.

- Provided a housing and homelessness lens on significant government-wide policy initiatives such as the Municipal Government Act Review, the Early Childhood Development Strategy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

- Recommended specific policy solutions that the Alberta Government must put in place in order to end homelessness in Alberta:

    - Develop provincial housing and supports strategies to address Alberta's long-term housing needs for vulnerable Albertans;

    - Make new investments in housing and supports;

    - Guide the integration of housing and homelessness systems within government and community;

    - Implement strategies that focus on homelessness prevention;

    - Put more focus on ensuring specific populations have access to specialized housing and supports.

State of Housing and Homelessness in Alberta

Alberta's Homelessness Plan marked a significant shift in how Alberta understands and responds to homelessness.

Since 2009, government and community partners have achieved remarkable success in re-designing systems that are moving people out of homelessness and into permanent housing. As a result of their efforts, Alberta has become a national leader in ending homelessness and strengthened an understanding of the links between ending systemic homelessness and the need for sufficient affordable[2] and appropriate housing. While Alberta has made substantial progress in moving from a "housing ready" to a Housing First approach, the current lack of affordable housing hinders continued success.

> **When Alberta's Homelessness Plan was released in 2009, it signified a shift in perspective. Alberta no longer viewed homelessness as an inevitable and intractable social problem, usually the result of individual factors, but as a preventable and solvable situation that is a result of multiple system failures.**

"Homelessness" is defined as individuals and families without stable, permanent, appropriate housing or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.

Homelessness in Alberta

Urban Homelessness in Alberta

Alberta's seven largest cities coordinated a point-in-time (PIT) count to measure how many Albertans were experiencing homelessness on one day in October 2014. Cities participating in the *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count* included:

- Calgary
- Edmonton
- Grande Prairie
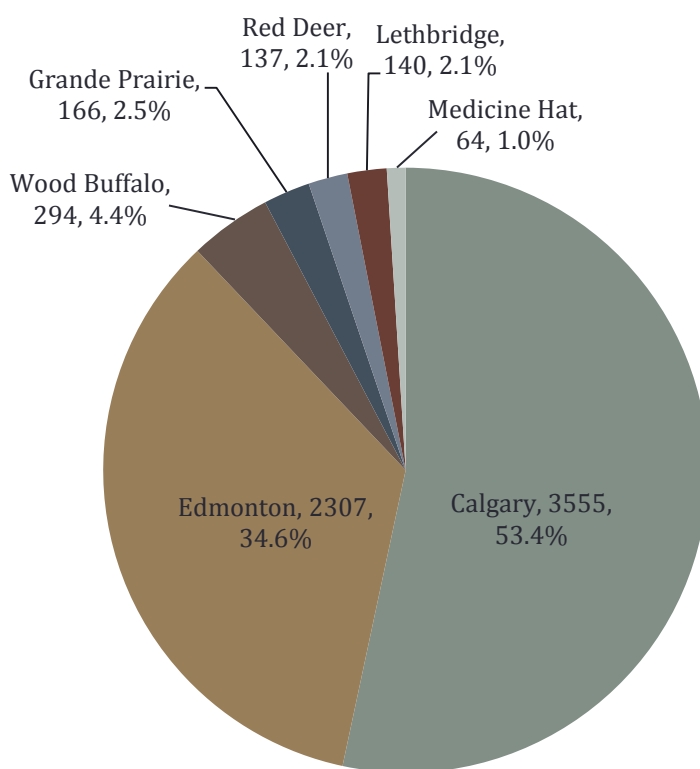- Lethbridge
- Medicine Hat
- Red Deer
- Wood Buffalo

The 2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count found 6,663 individuals experiencing homelessness in Alberta's seven largest cities.[3]

PIT counts are snapshots of a community's homelessness situation and an industry-accepted practice of determining how many people are homeless at a specific point in time. They also provide a means to track changes in the homeless population over time, and when coordinated provincially, they can reveal how and where homelessness is distributed across Alberta. They typically include a street survey that combines those findings with the number of people staying in emergency and short-term supportive housing.

PIT counts have limitations. Hidden forms of homelessness such as "couch surfing," for example, are difficult to measure. Consequently, some groups, such as youth, families fleeing violence, or multiple families sharing accommodation, may be under-reported in the findings.

The *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count* was the first coordinated, provincial homeless count undertaken in Canada.[4] Lessons from Alberta's experience are contributing to a national project to harmonize homeless counts across Canada, so the scope and nature of homelessness in Alberta can be understood in relation to the rest of Canada.[5]

Key findings from the *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count* [6]

- Just over half of the people experiencing homelessness were in Calgary. Over a third were in Edmonton. The remaining 12 per cent were distributed between the five smaller centres of Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and Wood Buffalo.

- 73 per cent of those counted were male, 26 per cent were female.[7]

- Several groups of people were overrepresented in the count, relative to the general population:

  - Aboriginal people were consistently over-represented relative to the general population, averaging 30.1 per cent. Aboriginal people make up between three and 11 per cent of the general population in those communities.

  - 11 per cent were immigrants.

  - 18 per cent had been in the community for less than one year.

  - Both youth (20 per cent) and seniors (four per cent) were under-represented relative to the general population.[8]

- About 6.7 per cent of respondents had children with them at the time of the count.

Rural Homelessness in Alberta

There has been limited knowledge about the nature of homelessness in Alberta's rural regions. In 2014, the Council, in partnership with the Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research, sponsored a study to help understand the dynamics of rural homelessness. As the *Rural Alberta Homelessness* (2014) report shows, and as many service providers in smaller communities can attest, homelessness exists is rural areas. And while there are similarities, rural homelessness is distinct from urban homelessness in several important ways.

Homelessness is a reality in both urban and rural communities in Alberta.

Characteristics of homelessness among rural Alberta communities (having populations under 25,000):[9]

- It is primarily hidden, (e.g. couch surfing, families staying in unsuitable or unaffordable housing).
- Localized economic conditions impact housing supply and affordability.
- There are typically very few or no affordable/social housing options.
- Women and families fleeing violence is a key cause of homelessness in rural communities.
- People leaving neighbouring Aboriginal communities in search of appropriate housing services has a significant impact on homelessness in smaller centres.
- Public awareness of homelessness, and resulting actions to address it, varies widely across communities.

The Rural Alberta Homelessness report examined homelessness in these communities:

Athabasca	Didsbury	Pincher Creek
Brooks	Fairview	Rocky Mountain House
Camrose	Fort Mackay	Slave Lake
Chestermere	High Level	St. Paul
Claresholm	Jasper	Viking
Coaldale	Lac La Biche	Wetaskiwin
Cochrane	Redwater	

While organizations such as the Alberta Rural Development Network are supporting rural communities to raise awareness and strengthen local homeless serving systems of care, smaller centres and rural communities generally have limited housing and homeless services. In turn, this leads people to migrate to larger centres. This is especially true for people with distinct needs, such as Aboriginal people, youth, and women fleeing violence, who are often forced to leave their community (and their support network) to find services they need to be stably housed.

Emergency Shelters

By providing short-term accommodations and emergency supports to address immediate housing crises, and opportunities to connect with housing and supports services, emergency shelters play an essential role in an integrated system. Some communities also have specialized shelters for youth, families, and women fleeing violence. The number of people accessing emergency shelters in Alberta changes depending on several factors, including economic conditions, provincial in-migration, and even the weather.

In 2014-15, use of Alberta Government funded temporary shelter spaces decreased by approximately six per cent, compared to 2008/09, (the year before Alberta's Homelessness Plan came into effect).[10] This is one indicator that Alberta's Homelessness Plan is having an impact. However, one in-depth Calgary study, described below, showed that while most shelter clients use those services infrequently, or for short periods of time, some stay for much longer.

Findings from *Who are the Homeless?*
***Numbers Trends and Characteristics of Those Without Homes in Calgary:*[11]**

- Nearly 33,000 individuals used emergency shelters over the study's five year period.
- The majority (86 per cent) of people who used emergency shelters in Calgary did so very infrequently and for only short periods of time, (transitional users, who stayed for an average of 15 days over five years.)
- Another 12 per cent of people used emergency shelters more frequently, (episodic users who stayed an average of 113 days over five years.)
- Just over one and a half per cent of all shelter users (chronic users) stayed for very long periods (an average of 928 days over five years) and occupied 36 per cent of shelter spaces.

Percentage of beds occupied by type of shelter user[12]
(From *Who are the Homeless? Numbers, Trends, and Characteristics of Those Without Homes in Calgary*)
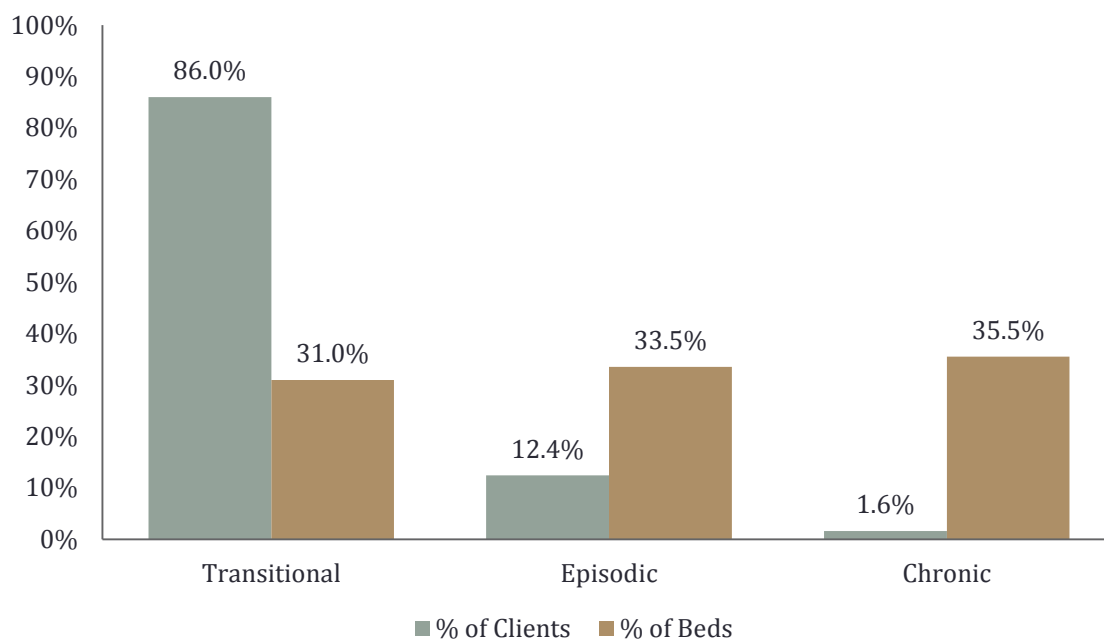
Emergency shelters are designed to accommodate short-term housing crises, but two-thirds of shelter beds in the study's timeframe were occupied by chronic and episodic homeless individuals. The study's authors conclude:

> ...finding stable, supportive housing for just 1.6% of those experiencing homelessness - a total of about 900 individuals in Calgary - would free-up one-third of beds in emergency shelters. Providing supportive housing for episodic users as well would free-up another one-third of beds and so enable shelter providers to focus on their main function as providers of emergency housing.[13]

Understanding Homelessness in Order to End Homelessness in Alberta

These recent studies have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of who is at risk and currently experiencing homelessness in Alberta. This knowledge contributes to building the appropriate policies, service delivery approaches, and investment strategies that will ensure Alberta's Homelessness Plan is successful.

HOMELESSNESS IN ALBERTA: HIGHLIGHTS

- Implementation of Alberta's Homelessness Plan has focused on urban regions, where homelessness is concentrated. Rural homelessness also exists and is impacting smaller communities.

- Aboriginal people are experiencing homelessness at a greater rate than non-Aboriginal populations in each of Alberta's seven major centres. They are also overrepresented in rural areas, especially in those areas with close proximity to Aboriginal reserves.

- Several groups are experiencing homelessness and need targeted interventions tailored to their particular circumstances, (e.g. youth, Aboriginal people, and women and families fleeing violence).

- Some chronically homeless Albertans' housing and support needs are not being met by existing systems, which means they are staying in emergency shelters for long periods of time.

- Homelessness is different in every community, which supports the need for an approach based on local planning and delivery, guided by overarching provincial policy.

"I'll go as far as saying I believe it saved my life. 'Cause when I was in the hospital I was fully prepared to go out and do it again, try and commit suicide again. I saw no hope, I saw no future. I didn't think anybody cared, and I didn't care, you know. But ARCH came along and they kind of proved to me that somebody did care and showed an interest in me, had a vested interest in me getting better. And it worked."

"I think it's really significantly impacted patient care … I could tell you countless patients that I've connected to ARCH and they are far better off than when they first walked into the hospital. They got ID, they got housing, they got money coming in, they don't feel the stigma, they don't feel judged. They feel like when they came in, we actually addressed their reason for coming to the hospital."

A patient and staff member with the Inner City Health and Wellness Program at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton. The program provides patient-centred and holistic care for in-patients and ER patients that are socially vulnerable and/or dealing with substance abuse issues.

What Does Ending Homelessness Mean?

Ending homelessness means changing the societal response to homelessness that has historically focused on managing the problem by providing emergency housing and supports. This type of crisis-management approach makes it difficult to support a person or family because it does not consider the personal factors that contributed to their homelessness, or how to move them out of homelessness based on their particular strengths and needs.

Homelessness is ended when fewer paths lead to homelessness, and there is an immediate path out for everyone who experiences homelessness. It is ended when a person's homelessness experience lasts days instead of weeks, months, or years.

Alberta's Homelessness Plan guides communities' and governments' collective efforts to shift programs and policies away from continually managing homelessness and towards ending homelessness. The Plan presents strategies aimed at preventing homelessness, providing access to housing and supports, and ensuring policy and service systems are integrated.

Ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever become homeless again. There will always be a need for emergency services, including shelters. Ending homelessness means eliminating a broad social problem that traps people in an ongoing state of homelessness. In Alberta, ending homelessness has been defined to mean that no one should be without access to the right kind of housing and supports for more than 21 days.

Homelessness is usually the result of a combination of factors. Structural factors such as not enough safe, affordable housing, poverty, discrimination, and gaps in our systems of supports and services are some contributing causes. These issues, combined with personal circumstances such as addictions, family breakdown, domestic violence, insufficient income, unemployment, or mental health issues might lead to homelessness. But homelessness is a preventable and solvable situation at the policy level and the personal level.

EXAMPLES OF HOW A HOUSING AND SUPPORTS SYSTEM WORKS TO END HOMELESSNESS:

- People experiencing homelessness have immediate access to individualized housing and supports.
- People at imminent risk of homelessness have access to supports that will help them stay in their current housing, including adequate financial supports that cover housing costs.
- Addictions treatment services are available when people need them.
- There is sufficient permanent supportive housing capacity across the province for those who require higher levels of support.
- People who are leaving public systems or facilities are connected to community-based housing and support services, and not discharged into homelessness.
- Seniors have options for aging in place.
- Early intervention in the form of family reunification or rapid re-housing is available for youth, before they become entrenched in homelessness.
- Immigrants to Alberta have access to supports that foster their social and economic inclusion.
- Safe, transitional housing for women fleeing violence and specialized supports for their children, who often experience negative social and emotional impacts from their homelessness experience, are available.
- Aboriginal people are full participants in building solutions that acknowledge the historical and unique factors that have contributed to an overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in Alberta's homeless population.
- Albertans in rural areas have access to supports they need to stay housed or obtain appropriate housing.

There is no single path into or out of homelessness. Everybody's experience is different. The common factor is the need for affordable, appropriate, and permanent housing and timely access to the individualized supports people need to stay housed.

The Need for Affordable Housing in Alberta

Alberta's insufficient supply of non-market affordable housing puts more people at risk of homelessness, and prevents people who are insecurely housed or experiencing homelessness from becoming stably housed.

Private Market Rental Housing in Alberta

The private rental market in Alberta is an entry point into the housing market for many families and individuals, but remains out of reach for many low-income Albertans. Rental rates have steadily increased over the past several years, while vacancy rates have declined. As private market rental housing becomes inaccessible to more and more low-income Albertans, pressures on government non-market housing programs increase.

Average Rent in Alberta[14]
(2 bedroom apartments)
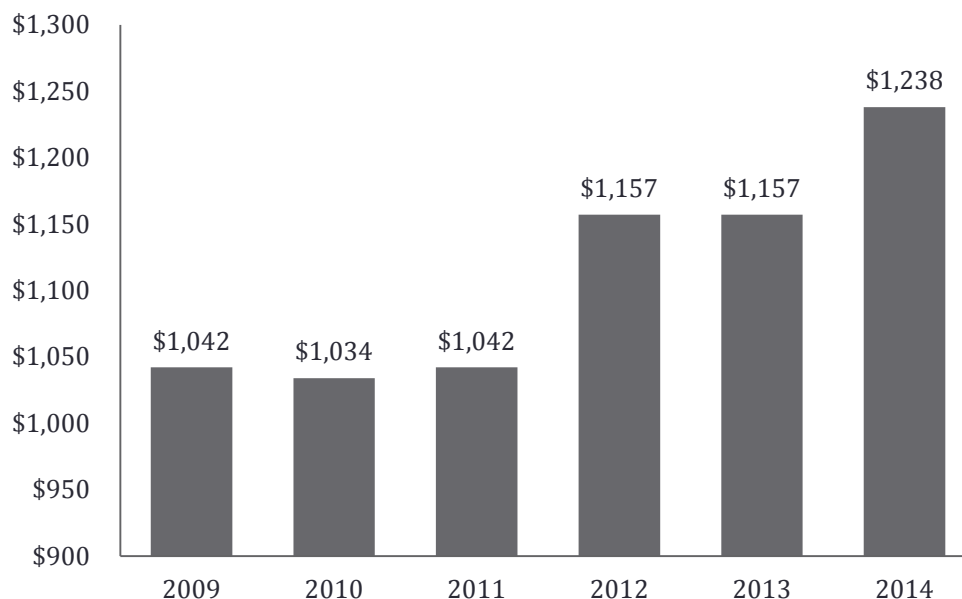
Since 2009, the provincial average for rent for a two-bedroom apartment rose 19 per cent. Over the same period, vacancy rates have declined and continue to be among the lowest in the country.

Alberta Rental Vacancy Rate[15]
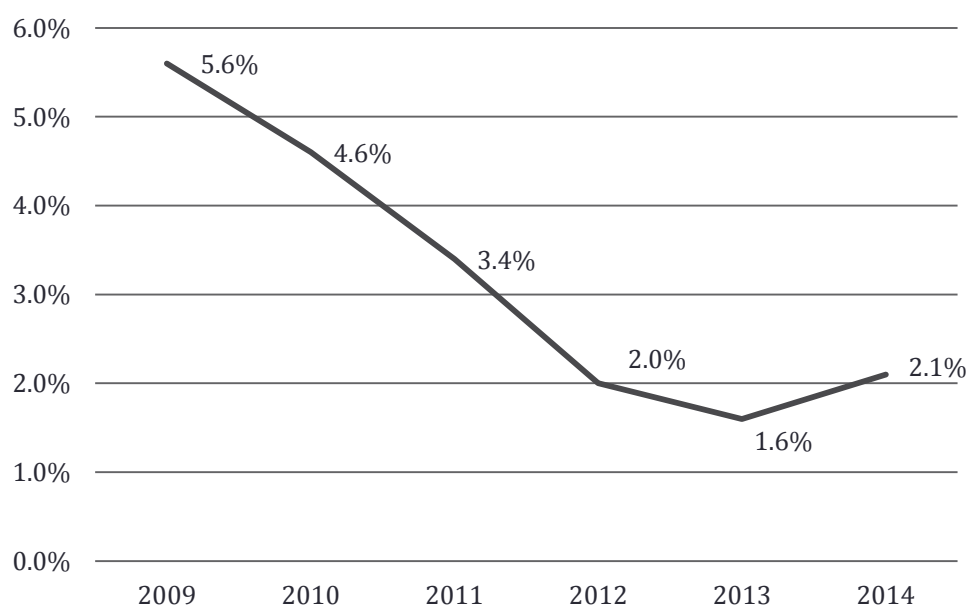
Core Housing Need

Within the private housing market many Albertans are at risk of losing their housing. Core housing need is a critical measurement of the number of households in private market housing that does not meet minimum national standards of adequacy, suitability, and/or affordability.

Per cent of households in Core Housing Need in Alberta among key populations (2011)[16] Overall population: 10.7% (137,485)	
Renters:	23.2% (75,960)
Aboriginal households (renting):	31.5% (9,595)
Lone parent families led by women (renting):	45.3% (14,185)
Seniors living alone (renting):	54.5% (13,715)

- Among renters in Alberta, over one in five households were in core housing need in 2011, the most recent year for which statistics are available.
- Renters in Alberta tend to be more precariously housed and more susceptible to changing housing market conditions than homeowners.
- Aboriginal households, single seniors, and lone-parent households headed by women have the highest incidences of core housing need.

Demand for Non-Market Housing

Declining affordability and availability of private rental housing puts more Albertans at risk of housing loss. This increases pressure on government programs designed to help those facing financial barriers to safe and permanent housing.

Many Albertans also face additional barriers to market housing. The following section explains how demand exceeds supply for Alberta Government-funded non-market housing, particularly for those who require a higher level of supports and specialized housing.

The Council has adopted a Housing and Supports Spectrum that spans the range of non-market housing circumstances. Movement from one part of the spectrum to another is not a linear progression. People's needs change over time, and some people may be appropriately housed in one type of housing over their lifetime. The goal of Alberta's Homelessness Plan is to ensure there is affordable and appropriate housing for all.

Housing and Supports Spectrum – Adapted by the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness[17]

	Homeless[18]				Housed				
Housing situation	**Un-sheltered**	**Emergency Sheltered**	**Provisionally Accommodated**	**At-Risk of Homelessness**	**Supportive Housing**	**Supported Housing**	**Social Housing**	**Housing Subsidization**	**Market Housing**
Description	Living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation	Shelters for people who are homeless, and women's shelters	Accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure; includes transitional facilities and people accessing private, temporary accommodation	Sheltered individuals whose current economic and/or housing situation is dangerously precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards	Combines accommodation with on-site supports and care. May be congregate or independent living units	Accommodations with supports arranged off-site	Units are owned and operated by government or non-profits	Accommodations with subsidies	Market Housing
Access to Supports	Outreach services that connect with people where they are	On-site essential services; facilitated access to supports	Where accommodations are provided by government/ agencies, on-site access to supports may be available	Typically required to be initiated by the individual	On-site staff provide or co-ordinate supports of varying intensities to residents	A range of supports services customized to client needs to increase/ maintain housing stability	Supports accessed through mainstream services accessible to all Albertans	Housing-specific financial support	Supports and services accessible to all Albertans
Housing Examples	- Public spaces - Squatting in private spaces - Vehicles, attics, garages - Makeshift shelters	- Emergency Shelters - Women's Shelters - Youth Shelters - Respite - Community Crisis beds (Health Services)	- Penal institutions - Physical/mental health institutions - Residential treatment facilities - Foster care/group homes - Refugee accomm. - Transitional - Second stage - "Couch surfing" - Hostels, rooming houses, motels - First Nations temporary housing - Disaster relief	- Sudden unemployment, precarious employment - Imminent eviction - Housing with transitional supports to be discontinued - Severe/persistent mental illness, active addictions, substance use, behavioural issues - Family breakdown - Living in direct fear of violence/abuse	- Residential living – group homes and harm-reduction housing - Seniors lodges - Assisted and enhanced assisted living facilities - Rent supplements	- Housing First (e.g. Intensive Case Management/ Assertive Community Treatment) - Home care for seniors and those with physical/ developmental disabilities - Rent supplements	- Seniors Self Contained Accommodations - Community housing managed by Housing Management Bodies - Co-op/co-housing - Rent supplements	- Rent supplements - Habitat for Humanity - Co-op/Co-Housing - Employer-supported housing - First time home buyers programs - Affordable housing - Private sector housing	Market Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing

Alberta's Homelessness Plan prioritizes those who are chronically homeless – those who have been continually homeless for long periods of time, often years. Those who are chronically homeless are more vulnerable to poor health and quality of life outcomes. Their challenges are often more severe, and although they account for a small proportion of the overall homeless population in urban centres, they tend to "consume more than half the resources in the homelessness system, including emergency shelter beds and day programs."[19]

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), which lead local coordination and implementation of Alberta's Homelessness Plan and local plans to end homelessness, report that the lack of permanent supportive housing (PSH) in their communities is affecting progress in meeting the objectives of the Plan.

CBOs have closely examined local capacity and have advised government that more than 4,500 permanent supportive housing units are needed to adequately support people who are chronically homeless and have complex needs. Priorities within each city vary, but all communities have gaps in serving:

- People being discharged from health facilities who require on-site care coordination and more intensive clinical supports from health providers;
- The most frequent users of emergency services;
- People with intensive needs, particularly those with significant cognitive impairments or developmental disabilities (like Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) in combination with mental health and addictions issues; and
- Families, through a harm reduction model for those dealing with mental health and addictions issues.

Housing First (Supported Housing)

Through Housing First, over 11,000 people received housing and the supports needed to stay housed between April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2015. Housing First is a successful approach to address homelessness. When adopted on a mass scale, such as Alberta is doing, it can reduce homelessness. Housing First helps people move out of homelessness by giving them permanent housing and access to the individual supports they need to maintain their housing. When clients have achieved housing stability, they leave the Housing First program, but may still continue to access government programs and services, just as any Albertan would.

Using Housing First as a tool to end homelessness across the province is limited by the availability and accessibility of affordable, appropriate housing. CBOs administering Housing

First funding report they are now investing 25 per cent of their total budgets - at least $20 million annually across Alberta - in rent supplement programs, and that this amount is increasing. But because other housing assistance programs available to low-income Albertans, (e.g. social housing or rental assistance), are often full and have long waitlists, Housing First program dollars are being used to subsidize client rent on an on-going basis. While this helps formerly homeless individuals retain their housing, investing such a substantive portion of Housing First funding in rent supplements prevents new clients who are experiencing homelessness from accessing Housing First programs, and prolongs efforts to end homelessness in Alberta.

Social Housing and Seniors Lodges

Social housing programs offer people with low incomes access to permanent housing. Housing Management Bodies, non-profit organizations, manage and operate 36,000 social housing and seniors lodge units on behalf of the Alberta Government.

Demand for social housing far exceeds supply: approximately 15,000 households are currently waiting for social housing and changing population demographics are expected to put further pressure on the limited supply. Alberta's seniors and Aboriginal populations are growing at a faster rate than other population groups, and are typically over-represented in social housing programs. Compounding this is the inadequate supply of on-reserve housing; a situation that often drives people to migrate to other towns or cities, where they also face challenges in securing housing due to affordability and discrimination.

There is growing demand for social housing and the loss of current social housing stock is a significant threat due to expiring cost-sharing agreements with the federal government. The Alberta Government's approach to social housing has not evolved significantly over the past 60 years, and has become unsustainable. The result is that more Albertans are at risk of housing loss, or unable to access housing.

Investment Gaps in Non-Market Housing

Current levels of investment, combined with projected loss of non-market housing units due to expiring partnership agreements with the federal government, means that Alberta's non-market housing system is unable to meet the current or the future demand for affordable housing.

Alberta's Homelessness Plan Investment Targets Remain Unfulfilled

- Funding projections within Alberta's Homelessness Plan estimated nearly $1.2 billion in capital funding would be necessary to achieve Plan goals by 2019.
- The Alberta Government has committed $168.5 million in capital funding to build housing for those experiencing homelessness since the Plan began.
- No new investments or commitments to invest in non-market housing have been made by the provincial government since 2011/12.
- There is an approximate $1 billion shortfall in capital housing investments required to achieve the goals of Alberta's Homelessness Plan.

Agreements to Support Social Housing are Expiring

- Cost sharing agreements with the federal government covering approximately 26,000 social housing units in Alberta will expire by 2034.
- This is expected to result in a loss of over $150 million in annual funding to Alberta within 20 years. It does not include costs to replace units in a timely manner as they reach the end of their useful life.
- Twenty-year grant funding agreements that restrict access and rent on 17,000 designated non-government owned housing units will begin to expire in 2017 and fully mature in 2031.
- This situation is not unique to Alberta: federal investments in housing through operating agreements will decline from $1.6 billion in 2015 to $0 in 2040, according the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.[20] And while the 2015 federal budget included $1.7 billion over the next four years for on- and off-reserve social housing, it is unclear where and how these funds will be targeted.

Aging Infrastructure

- 36,000 Alberta Government owned and supported seniors lodge units (10,000) and social housing units (26,000) were developed between 1960 and 1990. The current funding is insufficient to address maintenance, renewal, and replacement. An assessment of the entire portfolio identified over $1 billion in needed capital improvements and replacements, as of March 31, 2013.

The cumulative effects of Canada's changing housing market conditions are driving supply down and rents up. These trends contribute to more people in core housing need and increase the need for affordable housing options, including government housing assistance.

This is at a time when the social housing supply is dropping because of expiring federal operating agreements and deferred maintenance.

The Link Between the Lack of Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Market housing is beyond reach for many low income Albertans. Those unable to afford market rental housing may try to access government housing assistance programs, which are fully subscribed and have long waitlists. Alberta's network of non-market housing is under pressure to meet the growing demand. The current supply is also at risk due to expiring cost sharing agreements and deferred maintenance on aging properties. These factors contribute to a lack of adequate affordable housing, which puts vulnerable Albertans at risk of homelessness.

"Homelessness may not be only a housing problem, but it is always a housing problem; housing is necessary, although sometimes not sufficient, to solve the problem of homelessness." [21]

For those who are experiencing homelessness, programs like Housing First offer housing and supports that people need to stay housed. These programs are usually at full capacity, and the lack of affordable housing prevents more people from accessing them. And as *"Who are the Homeless? Numbers, Trends, and Characteristics of Those Without Homes in Calgary"* showed, some people are remaining homeless and reliant on emergency shelters for months and years. An adequate supply of permanent supportive housing is urgently needed in all of Alberta's major centres.

Another area of concern is the inadequacy of on- and off-reserve housing for Aboriginal people, which is a direct cause of homelessness.[22] In Alberta, people are leaving Aboriginal communities in search of appropriate housing, which puts pressure on housing stock and services in neighbouring rural and urban communities.[23]

> **A lack of affordable and appropriate housing contributes to an ongoing flow of people into homelessness, putting the success of Alberta's Homelessness Plan at risk.**

Rose, 52 years old, struggled with depression, substance use, gambling, and unattended health issues. When she arrived at George Spady, her rent was in arrears, she felt hopeless and had very low self-worth. Her family was very important to her, but some of those relationships were also contributing to some of her difficulties in staying housed. Rose was very interested in getting back to her traditional ways and working from a holistic Aboriginal perspective. After several false starts, Rose was ready to begin working with an elder, and a psychiatrist, and wanted to attend an Aboriginal treatment center. When she finished treatment, staff worked with her to maintain meaningful daily activities, including sage picking and smudging. Staff helped her find funding for and enrol in traditional language classes. She has been clean and sober for a year and half. She has been recognized in her community as a mentor and continues to attend university classes to finish her Native studies degree. She was making her rent payments and was being paid to support others interested in learning traditional cultural ways.

Provided by a staff member with George Spady Society's Clinical Access Team (CAT) in Edmonton. CAT is a multi-disciplinary outreach team that provides individualized support services to chronically homeless individuals and families who have been housed and require intensive clinical support to maintain their housing.

Impacts of Alberta's Homelessness Plan: What has Been Done to Reduce and Prevent Homelessness?

The insufficient supply of affordable housing across the housing and supports spectrum raises concerns about the long-term success of Alberta's Homelessness Plan. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of the Plan to date, which have been significant.

Alberta is a national leader in its response to homelessness. The shift Alberta has made to ending homelessness and using Housing First as a central principle in its approach is being replicated across Canada. The federal government has mandated Housing First in its program funding, thanks in part to the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi project, which concluded Housing First is a best practice for ending chronic homelessness in a Canadian context.

A brief summary of progress made on the 17 strategies within Alberta's Homelessness Plan follows. Many of these strategies have been implemented; some are still underway. The Plan continues to be a living document: adjustments to the continued implementation of the Plan are made in response to changing conditions and new knowledge about successful practices that contribute to ending homelessness.

Key Outcomes of Alberta's Homelessness Plan

- The *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count* shows a decrease in homelessness in Alberta's seven major centres by about 15% since 2008, the year before Alberta's Homelessness Plan began.[24] This decrease occurred when populations in six out of the seven cities that conducted the counts grew by an average of 10%.

- In 2014-15, use of Alberta Government funded temporary shelter spaces decreased provincially by 6.2%, compared to 2008/09.[25]

- Housing First is ending individual experiences with homelessness; over 11,000 people received housing and supports needed to stay housed.

- Since becoming housed, Housing First clients have reported dramatic reductions in their use of health and justice systems, indicating they are living much more stable lives.

- Pilot projects led by a multi-partner Provincial Discharge Planning Committee have laid the foundation for integrating systems and removing systemic barriers that have contributed to homelessness when people are transitioning between government and community-based systems of care. Government social policy and information sharing initiatives have also contributed by aligning policy objectives across government departments.
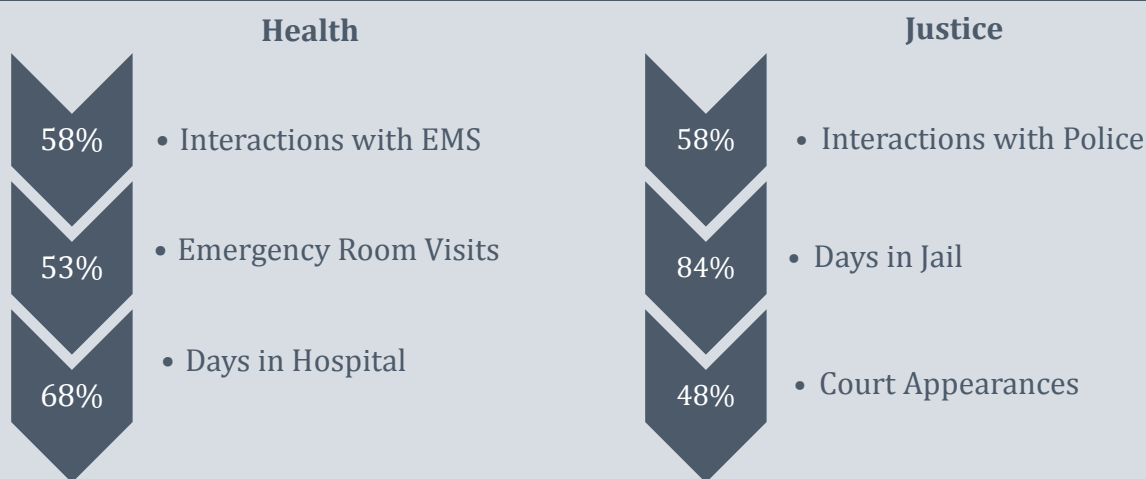
#	Alberta's Homelessness Plan Strategy	Status
1	Develop standards for data collection about homelessness, including the use of common definitions, methods, and counting.	Completed
2	Establish a provincial electronic information management system and provide funding for its deployment.	Completed
3	Establish a research arm to inform policy development and share best practices.	Completed
4	Measure outcomes and track progress on a regular, ongoing basis.	Completed
5	Continue employing emergency assistance programs in order to prevent homelessness.	On-going
6	Reformulate Alberta government assistance programs to ensure they achieve the coordinated objective of providing Albertans with housing stability.	On-going
7	Make it easier for clients to connect with Alberta government programs and services	On-going
8	Review and revise funding and administrative arrangements with homeless-serving agencies.	On-going
9	Develop approaches to prevent provincial systems from discharging clients into homelessness.	On-going
10	Support community plans to end homelessness.	Completed
11	Increase the availability of permanent housing with supports.	On-going
12	Work with other levels of government to create additional housing options.	On-going
13	Shift expectations and develop outcome measures for emergency shelters in Alberta.	On-going
14	Develop approaches for homeless-serving agencies to share client information.	On-going
15	Simplify personal identification requirements for accessing programs and services.	Completed
16	Examine ways of reducing poverty to help prevent homelessness.	On-going
17	Identify legislative and regulatory changes to advance the objectives and elements of Alberta's Homelessness Plan.	On-going

HOUSING FIRST: KEY OUTCOMES

Unless otherwise noted, data is for April 1, 2009 – March 31, 2015. All data provided by Human Services, Alberta Government.

- **11,332** homeless Albertans received housing and the supports to help them stay housed.

- **3,837** people graduated from Housing First programs, meaning they are able to maintain their housing.

- Approximately **91%** of Housing First clients have remained housed in 2014/15.

- Approximately **73%** have remained housed since 2008/09.

Reductions in the Use of Public Systems Reported by Housing First Clients:

Health

- 58% • Interactions with EMS
- 53% • Emergency Room Visits
- 68% • Days in Hospital

Justice

- 58% • Interactions with Police
- 84% • Days in Jail
- 48% • Court Appearances

Housing First Client Information

- Men represent 57% (6,434) of the total number of people housed, and women represent 43% (4,863).

- 14% (1,532) of those housed are youth, (under 25).

- 34% (3,819) of those housed are Aboriginal people.

- 48% (5,488) of those housed were considered to be chronically homeless, meaning they have been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

- Clients reporting underlying issues at the time of entry to Housing First:

  o Mental health issues: 45% (5,129)

  o Substance abuse issues: 48% (5,466)

  o Physical health issues: 46% (5,180)

- Of the 3,125 women housed between April 1, 2011 and March 31, 2015, 50% reported being exposed to or fleeing from a family violence situation.

How Have Housing First Outcomes Been Achieved?

✓ **Alberta's Homelessness Plan compels collective action around a shared vision.**
A provincial plan and seven community plans to guide the local response has been instrumental in provoking change across the province.

✓ **The Alberta Government has invested significantly in Housing First.**
In 2014/15, the Alberta Government provided approximately $77.8 million to the province's seven major centres to support Housing First programming. This is an increase of 25 per cent from 2013/14, in a time of fiscal restraint.

✓ **Community-wide homeless system planning and integration is effective.**
CBOs play a leadership role to align funding, target priority areas, measure progress, and course correct as needed. They also engage stakeholders to identify community needs and develop collaborative problem-solving approaches to address them.

✓ **Communities have replaced disconnected and fragmented service delivery with coordinated intake, assessment, and case management.**
The collective action required to reconfigure a community-wide network of supports that involves many agencies cannot be understated. It is essential to ending homelessness.

✓ **Standardized data collection through a provincial Housing Management Information System (HMIS) is providing evidence on successful strategies and how resources should be targeted.**
Fulsome data is contributing to a better understanding about how to prevent and end people's homeless experiences at agency, community, and provincial levels.

✓ **Committed and sustained partnerships are advancing the Plan.** The Council, the Alberta Government, municipal governments, the federal government, and community organizations all have an essential role to play in moving Alberta closer to the goal of ending homelessness. They are intentionally collaborating to achieve success.

Kari arrived at the Youth Health Centre (YHC) in June 2011 at the age of 19. She had been involved with Child and Family Services for most of her life and had lived in care for the majority of her teen years. Kari had dropped out of school, and drugs, alcohol use, petty crime and homelessness became the only life Kari knew. To support herself and her addictions, she turned to prostitution and became entrenched in a world of sexual exploitation. At 15, Kari found herself pregnant and alone. When the baby was born, he was immediately apprehended by Child and Family Services.
It was during this time that Kari realized this wasn't the life she wanted. It was then that she turned to The Alex.

Kari's transformation from a troubled and exploited teen to a responsible young woman has been incredible to watch. There were setbacks and challenges along the way but she faced them head on, knowing that people believed in her and her potential. She is now living a safe, stable and sober life, surrounded by people who support and care for her. Just before she turned 20, she became pregnant with her second child and made plans to parent with her boyfriend. She consistently attended the Parenting Support Group at the YHC and made her pregnancy her priority.

Her daughter just turned one, and the family is succeeding in safe and stable housing. Kari has become a youth leader and advocate for street-connected kids and has acquired her high school equivalence. She was elated to find out that she secured a spot in an employment program at a local post-secondary institution which will allow her to build a solid life for herself and her daughter.

The Alex Youth Health Centre (YHC) in Calgary provides a safe and supportive space for youth to address their needs with the help of our caring and trust-inspiring team of interdisciplinary professionals. YHC provides a number of supports and services to guide youth in the process of reclaiming their lives, working through challenges, and cultivating healthy and successful futures. Re-printed with permission from http://www.giftingchange.ca/breaking-the-cycle/

Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness

The Council provides strategic advice to the Alberta Government on policy shifts needed to achieve the objectives of Alberta's Homelessness Plan. Its members collectively assessed the challenges to the Plan's success, and have identified policy solutions to move Alberta closer to ending homelessness. The Council's recommendations to the Alberta Government are summarized in *What Must Still be Done to End Homelessness in Alberta?*

The Council augments its strategic advice with initiatives to support government in its continued efforts to implement Alberta's Homelessness Plan. In 2014/15, the Council developed and provided to government:

- The Diversion Framework that demonstrates homelessness-diversion concepts in Alberta. Diversion from homelessness is an essential component of homelessness prevention.
- An Integrated Housing and Supports Framework report to guide integration of housing and homelessness planning, investments, service delivery, and monitoring at government and community levels.
- Principles to guide government-led stakeholder engagement activities, which should acknowledge existing capacities and operational commitments, while stimulating movement towards a collective vision.
- A housing and homelessness lens on significant government-wide policy initiatives such as the Municipal Government Act Review, the Early Childhood Development Strategy, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- Guidance on the prioritization of *A Housing and Homelessness Research Strategy for Alberta* implementation efforts, and the completion of the *Alberta Rural Homelessness Report*.

A HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH STRATEGY FOR ALBERTA (2014)

Alberta is recognized as a centre of innovation in housing and homelessness. The provincial research strategy guides research efforts to support the necessary shifts in housing and homelessness policy and delivery. Research priorities include:

- Homelessness prevention and intervention
- Effectiveness of interventions
- Continuum of housing and homelessness supports

The unique needs and special circumstances of vulnerable populations and Aboriginal people will be studied in relation to each priority.

The Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research is partnering with the Council to coordinate and facilitate research activities in support of the strategy.

The Council will continue to pursue its priorities and has committed to providing the following to government:

- Input into the on-going development of a provincial housing strategy, including how prevention strategies and targeted services for specialized populations should be incorporated.
- A report on sustainable resourcing strategies to support innovative approaches for financing Alberta's long-term affordable housing needs.
- Continued implementation of the Housing and Homelessness Research Strategy for Alberta, led by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research, to support evidence-based decision making.
- Contribute a housing and homelessness lens to government initiatives that invoke policy shifts to address complex issues intended to support and enable vulnerable Albertans.
- Recommendations for modifications to the Council's governance structure that will strengthen its effectiveness.

Alberta Government

Emergency Shelter Investments

Emergency shelters provide short-term housing and emergency supports to meet people's basic needs. Shelters serve as an entry way into local homeless-serving systems, and play an important role in connecting people to appropriate permanent housing and supports programs. Shelters for women fleeing violence and youth provide specialized housing and supports for those populations.

Alberta Government Investments in Homeless Shelters (millions)						
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Adult Homeless Shelters	$42.3	$40.9	$39.1	$39.0	$39.9	$39.9
Women's Shelters	$25.1	$26.2	$26.4	$27.7	$28.8	$33.1
Youth Shelters	$4.2	$4.3	$4.3	$5.2	$5.2	$5.8

Housing First Investments

Since 2009, Housing First has been a pillar of the Alberta Government's response to homelessness. Government has invested in Housing First programming in Alberta's seven largest communities. CBOs administer and direct provincial funding to where it is most needed, in alignment with local plans to end homelessness.

Alberta Government Investments in Housing First (millions)					
2009/10	**2010/11**	**2011/12**	**2012/13**	**2013/14**	**2014/15**
$31.6	$41.2	$50.0	$62.3	$62.3	$77.8

Funding for Housing First programs increased 25 per cent between 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Affordable Housing Investments

Since the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force Report was released in 2007, the Alberta Government has approved funding to develop over 12,000 affordable housing units. As of March 31, 2015, 7,900 units have been built and another 2,100 units are expected to be completed by March 31, 2016. The remaining units are in various stages of development.

Since 2009/10, this investment has included a commitment of $168.5 million to build non-market housing units specifically intended for those who have experienced homelessness.

Progress to date on the development of 1,779 non-market housing units for those experiencing homelessness:[26]	
Completed Units: 1,338 (75%)	Units To Be Completed: 441 (25%)

Commitment to Develop a Provincial Housing Strategy

In 2014, the Alberta Government committed to developing a provincial housing strategy, including an assessment of government property and assets. The Ministry of Seniors is leading this work.

Commitment to Evidence-Based Decision Making

Strategies are in place that are providing data and research to inform policy and investment decisions related to housing and homelessness.

- All Alberta Government funded agencies that offer Housing First programming use an HMIS, which provides critical data that reveals community and provincial trends that can be used to target resources and improve service delivery.
- The HMIS is being rolled out to Alberta Government funded emergency and youth shelters.

Integration Across Government

Like Alberta's Homelessness Plan, government's social policy initiatives emphasize a person-centred approach in how social services are developed and delivered to vulnerable Albertans. Examples of collaboration across government include:

- Human Services' integrated service delivery approach, which will deliver Alberta's social programs in a more coordinated, seamless manner that is tailored clients' diverse needs and abilities.

- A Provincial Transition Planning cross-ministry team is leading changes to policies and practices so those leaving publicly-managed systems of care and facilities, such as hospitals and correctional facilities, are connected with community-based housing programs upon their release.

Supporting Specialized Populations

- _Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness_ was released in February 2015 to address the unique needs of youth, and is the first targeted homelessness strategy for a specialized population.
- The Youth Plan emphasizes strengthening families first and ensuring youth experience healthy transitions across the system of care. The prevention of youth homelessness and reunifying families when possible is a top priority.
- CBOs have received funding to support the implementation of the Youth Plan, as well as five smaller centres, (Peace River, Lloydminster, Camrose, Cochrane, and Brooks).
- _Family Violence Hurts Everyone: A Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta_ was released in 2013 with a prevention focus. Funding was invested in several priority initiatives in 2014/15, including $10 million in Family and Community Safety Program grants to 76 community agencies, and increased funding to women's emergency shelters to provide safe accommodation and services for women and their children fleeing family violence.

Overview of _Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness_[27]
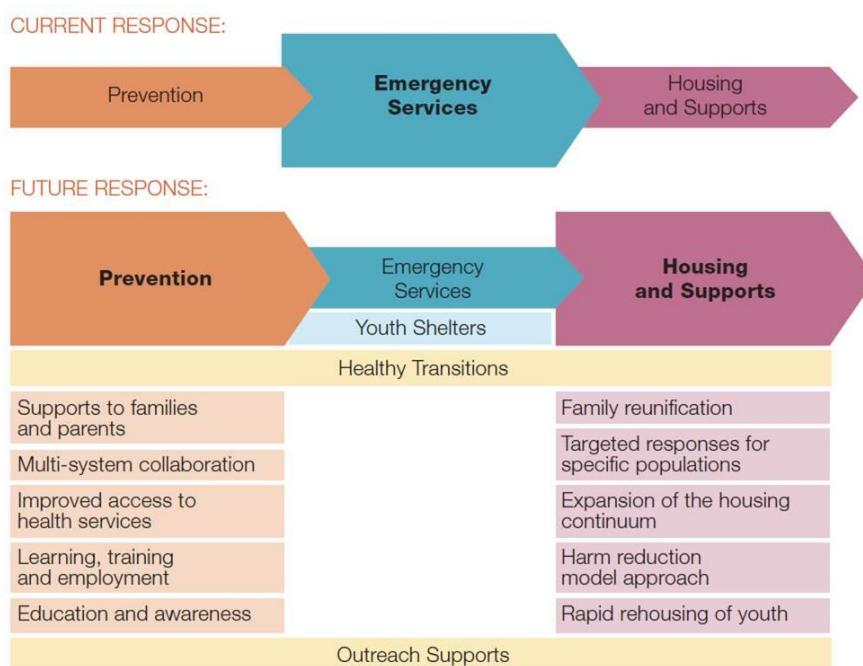
After physical ailments forced him out of the workforce in his early 40s, Denton encountered insurmountable financial strife, his relationship with his wife failed, he lost custody of his child and was denied contact—sending him on a downward spiral into alcoholism and apathy.

For 10 years he lived on and off the streets. The closest he would come to having a stable roof over his head was living in what he refers to as "slum housing"—rundown, dingy, over-populated, low-income housing often retained for short periods of time before his inability to produce a paycheque would render him homeless once again. But that all changed when he was approached with the unique and progressive opportunity to live in a home where his needs would be met on all levels.

As part of the Housing First initiative, established through the City of Lethbridge's Bringing Lethbridge Home plan to end homelessness, Brassard House was developed to house the aging population of individuals experiencing homelessness. Upon receiving a referral from Homebase, a centralized intake service for individuals experiencing homelessness, Denton was invited, not forced, into the House. The program is strictly voluntary. Clients may come and go as they wish, and they are provided private, fully furnished rooms with accompanying bathrooms.

"I'm glad I'm here," adds Denton. "It's just great to be here. It's a godsend for me."

From Krajewski, Paul. "Brassard House," lethbridgeliving.com, 19 January 2015:
http://lethbridgeliving.com/previous-articles/item/brassard-house-a-place-to-call-their-own

Community Initiatives

Over the last six years, Alberta's seven largest communities have reoriented local homeless-serving systems to end homelessness. Local leadership organizations and partnering agencies continue to build sustainable approaches that address the remaining challenges to that goal. They are focusing on increasing housing options, diverting people away from homelessness, and strengthening service planning, delivery, and monitoring for success.

In 2014/15, community initiatives and partnerships continued to advance the goal of ending homelessness in Alberta.

Alberta cities with multi-year plans to end homelessness:

- Calgary
- Edmonton
- Grande Prairie
- Lethbridge
- Medicine Hat
- Red Deer
- Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

A Community-Wide Response

Centralized client intake, assessment, and case management are key features of a homeless-serving system that is based on a Housing First approach. It is through this systems-focused approach that communities have successfully housed over 11,000 homeless Albertans since 2009. In 2014, these community-wide processes continued to mature to improve client outcomes. The Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) is used in several Alberta communities to ensure homeless clients with the highest need receive service access, no matter what agency they visit. Local HMISs collect consistent Housing First client outcome data that support system-wide program planning and outcomes monitoring, so resources are directed where they are needed most.

Solutions for Specific Populations

A client-centred approach is a key principle for ending homelessness. Communities are tailoring housing services to address strengths and needs of specific populations, for example:

- Supporting homeless youth in short-term supportive housing projects, with the aim of preventing a return to homelessness.
- Offering culturally safe and appropriate services to address the disproportionally high numbers of homeless Aboriginal people.
- Providing shelter services to women and families fleeing violence in a safe, home-like environment from where they can build a plan to access permanent housing.

Edmonton's Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness and **Red Deer's Youth Homelessness Strategy Group** are community-based solutions that align with Alberta's Youth Plan – a unique approach in Canada. They both engage local system and community stakeholders to provide collective leadership. They inspire innovation, shared principles, and ways forward for strategic cross-systems and integrated planning.

The Youth HUB in Lethbridge is a client-centred assessment, triage, resource and referral service for youth. The HUB assists youth to access resources to secure housing, navigate and connect to community systems and provide supports and advocacy that allow youth to fully participate in community life. It follows a Housing First approach that is specifically tailored to address the needs of vulnerable youth.

Partnerships for Affordable Housing

Communities are using many strategies to build a portfolio of housing options to address the needs of individuals and families in need of housing assistance.

- Housing First service providers build partnerships with landlords to access private market rental housing, and provide on-going landlord liaison services to support client success.
- With support from all levels of government, community organizations partner to build and renovate affordable housing projects. These projects are targeted to address the critical housing needs in a community, such as permanent supportive housing, or housing for Aboriginal people, youth, and families.

Calgary's RESOLVE Campaign
Like elsewhere in Alberta, Calgary is faced with an affordable housing shortage that makes it difficult to move people out of homelessness and into appropriate housing. Nine Calgary social service agencies have partnered in the RESOLVE Campaign to raise private sector funds to build affordable rental housing for 3,000 vulnerable and homeless Calgarians. This coordinated effort will ensure funds are invested in the types of housing that will move Calgary closer to its goal of ending homelessness.

Preventing Homelessness

Prevention strategies must include long-term approaches that address the root causes of homelessness. Alberta Government commitments to reduce poverty and strengthen early childhood development are part of this solution. Communities are also having an impact through pro-active, client-focused interventions that assist people who are facing imminent homelessness to remain housed. Providing immediate rental assistance and connecting people being discharged from health and correctional facilities with housing services are diverting people away from homelessness.

Federal Government

The federal government's Housing Partnering Strategy (HPS) has shifted its focus to Housing First. The seven largest Alberta communities receiving HPS funding will be required to direct a significant proportion to Housing First programming. The Aboriginal Funding Streams addresses the specific needs of the off-reserve homeless Aboriginal population by supporting an integrated service delivery system that is culturally appropriate and community-driven.

HPS funding is also directed to several rural Alberta communities, through the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN).[28] This funding will help small, rural, and remote communities provide their citizens with increased access to housing services. They are encouraged to adopt a Housing First approach. The report *Rural Alberta Homelessness* noted that "the full impact of these efforts is yet to be fully understood, though [a] national study showed HPS support to have significant positive impact on rural community capacity to develop local homeless-serving systems of care and social planning infrastructure."[29]

Provincial investments since 2009 have contributed to Housing First becoming well-established in Alberta's largest communities. The federal direction aligns with provincial objectives and supports smaller centres to shift to a Housing First approach.

Federal Government Homelessness Partnering Strategy Funding to Alberta		
	Designated Funding	Aboriginal Funding
Calgary	$5,781,929	$561,609
Edmonton	$5,570,029	$908,391
Grande Prairie	$170,056	$102,277
Lethbridge	$291,785	$102,276
Medicine Hat	$254,779	$63,186
Red Deer	$299,576	$121,952
Wood Buffalo	$201,096	$200,567
Totals	$12,569,250	$2,060,258
+ Rural and Remote Homelessness: $2,022,820		

An 18 year-old male began staying at Rotary House's Mat Room, which is available for emergency accommodation. He did not speak to anyone and would not allow support workers to approach him. That summer he stopped coming to Rotary House, but returned in the fall. Staff again tried to engage him since they wanted to help him to improve his situation. It took another year, but finally he trusted staff enough to agree to come into the Dorm Room, which offers short term supportive housing. Alberta Health Services Outreach Services worked closely with him to access health assessments and treatments. He began receiving an income and moved into permanent housing. He was happy, often coming back to Rotary House after a day out on a skateboard, with a smile on his face. He re-connected with out-of-town relatives, and eventually moved in with them in Spring, 2015.

Provided by a staff member at Rotary House of Grande Prairie. Rotary House offers 24/7/365 accommodation to a wide range of clients. Primary services include single-night emergency beds and mats, short term housing, and permanent supportive bachelor suites. Rotary House partners local agencies to assist clients with accessing a range of services, including Housing First assessment programs.

Interagency Council Recommendations to the Alberta Government

The Council has provided strategic advice in many areas that will build on successes and move Alberta closer to achieving the objectives of Alberta's Homelessness Plan. These recommendations recognize the relationship between housing and homelessness issues, and require the participation of multiple government departments to be successful. The following summarizes the Council's policy advice to government.

Develop Provincial Housing and Supports Strategies

A comprehensive strategy to address long-term housing and supports needs across the spectrum of housing situations, (page 14), is critical to the success of Alberta's Homelessness Plan. The Council recommends government:

- Fulfill its commitment to develop and implement a provincial housing strategy.

- Prioritize permanent supportive housing to address the gap in housing for those with complex challenges, such as addictions and physical or mental health issues.
- Build an integrated provincial supports strategy to strengthen coordinated access to client-centred housing supports and services.
- Integrate targeted housing and supports responses for specialized populations are at higher risk of housing instability.
- Leverage existing community-led housing planning activities to ensure alignment with provincial initiatives.
- Seek partnerships with industry and the Federal government in the strategy's funding and implementation.
- Facilitate comprehensive stakeholder engagement in the strategy's implementation, and incorporate client engagement.
- Move forward with the proposed Housing First Quality Improvement Project, which will include a comprehensive analysis of how client participation in Housing First impacted their interactions with health and justice system services.

"Every $10 spent on housing and supports for chronically homeless individuals results in $21.72 in savings related to health care, social supports, housing, and involvement in the justice system."[30]

Make New Investments in Housing and Supports

Government investment in housing capital and supports has not kept up with projected targets in Alberta's Homelessness Plan. While changing economic conditions have led to higher vacancy rates in some market rental housing, market-driven solutions alone will not solve Alberta's affordable housing crisis. The Council recommends government:

- Develop a multi-year funding framework for the provincial housing and supports strategies that combines government investments with innovative, sustainable financing strategies.
- Explore new resourcing strategies to finance Alberta's long-term housing and supports needs that supplement, not replace, government investments in building, maintaining, and providing non-market housing.
- Immediately fulfill the Council's 2013 recommendation to invest $400 million in non-market housing projects to address urgent pressures. As part of this investment, include allocations for project development funding in the first year, and funding for capital projects meeting criteria in the following year.

- Consolidate and strengthen the multi-departmental housing/homelessness capital and supports funding processes, including implementing the Council's recommended funding framework to strengthen accountability and improve housing for the homeless capital project outcomes.
- Support federal re-investment in social housing through a national housing strategy.

Integrate Housing and Homelessness Systems

There is a critical need to reduce the systemic service and policy gaps between non-market housing and homelessness systems. Although each aims to provide stable housing to those who are at-risk or are experiencing homelessness, they have different points of entry and eligibility requirements. The Council recommends government:

- Implement an integrated housing and supports system to address the needs of vulnerable Albertans.
- Ensure the system:
  - guides the integration of systems that support Albertans experiencing a range of challenges, but who share the need for assistance to obtain or maintain safe, secure, affordable, permanent housing;
  - stimulates the integration of housing and homelessness-related planning, funding, delivering, and monitoring across multiple government departments and within communities, and;

> **INTEGRATION OF SYSTEMS TO PROVIDE CLIENT-CENTRED SERVICES**
> - Council promotes the "integration" of systems while respecting the diversity of people and of communities.
> - The Council defines "integration," in this context, as the interdependence between partners, who may have different mandates, to create a seamless system where all partners share responsibility and accountability in achieving agreed upon outcomes.

  - extends the reach of Alberta's Homelessness Plan to rural regions by developing regional and systematic approaches to address housing instability outside major urban centres.
- Acknowledge and build upon existing expertise that is highly specialized, locally relevant, and which continually informs practice for improved outcomes.
- Continue to expand data systems to capture client data from across the homeless-serving system, and emergency shelters in particular.

Strengthen Homelessness Prevention

Prevention strategies range from long-term efforts to reduce the risk of homelessness among the general population, to interventions that prevent immediate loss of housing. All are essential to ending homelessness. Each time someone comes into contact with a public system it is an opportunity to steer them away from homelessness. The Council recommends government:

- Create a diversion fund to support prevention-focused interventions.
- Improve systemic responses to keep people in their current housing, including supporting prevention-focused services and enabling data-sharing.
- Conduct a systemic analysis of pathways into homelessness that includes a focus on specialized populations.
- Expand community inclusion frameworks to address barriers to housing among vulnerable and specialized populations.
- Implement the findings of the Provincial Transition Planning team that identified strategies to connect people leaving provincial systems of care and facilities with community-based housing and supports.

Strengthen the Focus on Specialized Populations

The *Alberta 2014 Point-in-Time Homeless Count* and housing trend data reveal that particular populations experience homelessness at a higher rate and are at greater risk of homelessness than others. Alberta's Youth Plan is an important step towards addressing the specific barriers to housing faced by one such vulnerable population. It demonstrates that a specialized response can be developed, but also underscores that building such a response requires collaboration and the engagement of multiple partners and members of the specific population. The Council recommends government:

- Strengthen access to specialized housing and supports that are informed by evidence and tailored to specific needs and strengths of youth, Aboriginal people, women and families fleeing violence, newcomers to Canada and Alberta, seniors, and persons with disabilities.
- Specifically consider appropriate housing and homelessness solutions to support women fleeing violence and their children, for whom safety is a priority concern.

2014/15 Interagency Council Members

Member	Organization	Sector of representation
Franco Savoia, Co-Chair (Community representative)		
Sandra Jansen*, Co-Chair (MLA representative)		
Aaron Barner	Métis Nation of Alberta	First Nations, Métis, and Inuit organizations
Nelson Mayer	Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association	
Diana Krecsy*	Calgary Homeless Foundation	7 Cities Group on Housing and Homelessness
Susan McGee	Edmonton Homeward Trust	
Roxana Nielsen Stewart	City of Red Deer, Social Planning	
Jaime Rogers	Medicine Hat Community Housing Society	
Denis Beesley*	Bethany Group	Housing Management Bodies
Greg Dewling*	Capital Region Housing Authority	
Richard Farrell*	Calgary Housing Company	
Alfred Nikolai	Habitat for Humanity Edmonton	Habitat for Humanity
Keith McMullen	Calgary Residential Rental Association	Apartment and Residential Rental Associations
Brent Davies*	Edmonton Apartment Association	
Kathy Christiansen	Calgary Alpha House Society	Housing First Providers
Lorette Garrick	George Spady Society	
Jan Reimer	Alberta Council of Women's Shelters	Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
Debbie Newman	Calgary Drop-in and Rehab Centre	Emergency Shelter Operators
Bruce Reith	Hope Mission	
Roger Morgadinho	Inn from the Cold	Member at Large
Christopher Thiessen*	City of Grande Prairie, City Council	Alberta Association of Urban Municipalities
Gail Sokolan*	City of Calgary, Land Servicing and Housing	City of Calgary
Jay Freeman	City of Edmonton, Housing and Homelessness	City of Edmonton
Diane Randell	City of Lethbridge, Community and Social Development Group	Family and Community Support Services
Rod Knecht	Edmonton Police Service	Alberta Chiefs of Police Association
Jane Manning	Member at Large	Former Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness

David O'Brien	Alberta Health Services, Community, Seniors, Addiction and Mental Health	Alberta Health Services
Ruby Brown	Alberta Health	Alberta Government
Curtis Clarke*	Justice and Solicitor General	
Mike Leathwood	Seniors	
Susan Taylor	Human Services	

*Served for a portion of 2014/15

References

1   Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness "that centers on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional supports and services as needed." Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. *Housing First.* Retrieved from http://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/housing-first

2   In this report, "affordable housing" is a broad term that encompasses housing provided by the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, and is not made in reference to a specific government program. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Company (CMHC) housing is considered to be affordable when a household spends less than 30% of its pre-tax income on adequate shelter.

3   Turner, Alina. (2015). *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count: Provincial Report.* 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness, page 3. Retrieved from http://media.wix.com/ugd/ff2744_82ee4dec83f24f60a821cee54bec8990.pdf

4   *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count*, page 7.

5   *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count*, page 6.

6   *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count*, page 3, 5-6.

7   Less than 1% identified as LGBTQ, although it is known that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, which was underrepresented in this study.

8   Youth (<24) make up between 31% to 37% of the general population in the cities surveyed, while the general population of seniors (>65) ranges from 2% in Wood Buffalo to 15% in Medicine Hat.

9   Waegemakers Schiff, Jeanette. and Turner, Alina. (2014). *Rural Alberta Homelessness*. Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research and Ministry of Human Services, Alberta Government.. Retrieved from http://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/rural-alberta-homelessness

10   Emergency Shelter data provided by Human Services, Alberta Government.

11   Kneebone Ron; Bell, Meaghan; Jackson, Nicole and Jadidzadeh, Ali. (2015). *Who are the Homeless? Numbers, Trends, and Characteristics of Those Without Homes in Calgary.* University of Calgary: The School of Public Policy, title page. Retrieved from http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/who-are-homeless-kneebone-bell-jackson-jadidzadeh.pdf. The study examined patterns of shelter use among 33,000 individuals over a five year period at Calgary's largest emergency shelter, the Calgary Drop-in and Rehab Society, which accounts for 60% of emergency shelter spaces in Calgary. Data analysis from other shelters showed similar results.

12   *Who are the Homeless? Numbers, Trends, and Characteristics of Those Without Homes in Calgary,* page 10.

[13] *Who are the Homeless? Numbers, Trends, and Characteristics of Those Without Homes in Calgary*, title page.

[14] Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation. *Average Rent for Two-Bedroom Apartments, Canada, Provinces, and Metropolitan Areas, 1992 – 2014 ($).* Retrieved from http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/hoficlincl/homain/stda/data/data_004.cfm

[15] Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation. *Rental Vacancy Rate, Canada, Provinces, and Metropolitan Areas, 1992 – 2014 (%).* Retrieved from http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/hoficlincl/homain/stda/data/data_004.cfm

[16] Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2011). *Characteristics of Households in Core Housing Need, Alberta*. Retrieved from http://www.cmhc.ca/en/hoficlincl/homain/stda/data/data_024.cfm

[17] The Housing and Supports Spectrum developed by the Council was adapted from: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. *Canadian Definition of Homelessness.* (2012). Retrieved from http://homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition and *Edmonton & Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports 2011-2015.* Retrieved from http://www.homewardtrust.ca/images/resources/2012-03-14-22-45Edmonton%20Area%20Community%20Plan%202011-2015.pdf, Housing and Supports Framework, page 35.

[18] Individuals and families residing in these locations are considered to be homeless, in that they are "without stable, permanent, appropriate housing or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it." Canadian Homeless Research Network. (2012). "*Canadian Definition of Homelessness."* Retrieved from http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf

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[21] Dolbeare, Cushing N. (1996). "*Housing Policy: A general Consideration*," In Baumohl, J. (ed.), Homelessness in America. Phoenix: Oryx Press.

[22] Gaetz, Stephen; Gulliver, Tanya, and Richter, Tim. (2014). *The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2014*. The Homeless Hub Press, page 34. Retrieved from http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/SOHC2014.pdf

[23] *Rural Alberta Homelessness*, page 5.

[24] *2014 Alberta Point-in-Time Homeless Count*, page 4.

[25] Data provided by Human Services, Alberta Government.

[26] Data provided by Seniors, Alberta Government.

[27] Alberta Government. (2015). *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness*, page 6. Retrieved from http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/plan-to-prevent-and-reduce-youth-homelessness.pdf

[28] For more information on Rural and Remote Homelessness projects funded by the federal government and administered by ARDN: http://www.ardn.ca/programs/rural-remote-homelessness-2014/

[29] *Rural Alberta Homelessness*, page 6.

[30] *The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2014,* page 8.