

Strong Communities

March 16, 2009

Alberta endorses 10-year provincial plan to end homelessness

Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness delivers Canada's first provincial strategy

Edmonton... The Government of Alberta has approved an ambitious 10-year plan aimed at ending homelessness in Alberta by 2019.

The plan, developed by the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, identifies specific actions and immediate priorities to support the creation of permanent, safe housing for the homeless and outlines the associated services needed to break the cycle of homelessness. The provincial 10-year plan aligns with, and supports, municipal plans to end homelessness.

"I want to thank the members of the Alberta Secretariat for developing this outstanding plan," said Yvonne Fritz Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. "They have addressed the complex and often interconnected issues related to homelessness and highlighted the need to provide homeless people with a safe, permanent place to live."

The plan adopts a 'Housing First' approach of providing immediate housing along with client-centred support services such as mental health services, addictions counseling, employment training and other tailored supports as needed. Other jurisdictions in North America such as Portland and New York City have found the approach to be successful and sustainable over the long term.

"This plan, combined with the support of the provincial government and our communities, means we can ultimately end homelessness in our province," said Steve Snyder, Chair, Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. "In preparing our plan, the Secretariat has received the support of many organizations and individuals. Their tireless efforts have been instrumental in ensuring Alberta leads Canada on this key social issue."

Premier Ed Stelmach established the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness in January 2008. The 12-member group worked closely with municipalities and non-profit organizations to explore the best practices and successful programs from across North America. The Secretariat and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs will work with municipalities and communities to implement this plan.

Additional details on implementing and funding this 10-year strategy to end homelessness will be outlined next month as part of Budget 2009.

Along with developing a 10-year provincial plan to end homelessness, the Alberta government has a plan to create 11,000 affordable housing units by 2012. To date, Alberta has supported the development of 5,600 affordable housing units.

-30-

Backgrounder: an overview of the 10-year plan is attached

Media inquiries may be directed to:

Barbra Korol
Director
Communications
Housing and Urban Affairs
780-644-6838
barbra.korol@gov.ab.ca

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

March 16, 2009

A Plan for Alberta - Ending Homelessness in 10 Years

A Plan for Alberta was developed by the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. Established in January 2008 by Premier Ed Stelmach, Secretariat members include: Stephen G. Snyder (Chair), Jean Wilkinson (Vice-Chair), Linda Black, Q.C., Leonard Blumenthal, Gary R. Keen, Jane Manning, Murray Prokosch, Pam Rolston, Dr. Gayla Rogers, Dr. Pam Thompson, Chief Charles Weasel Head and Robin Wigston (Ex-Officio). The Secretariat worked with municipalities and agencies serving the homeless and conducted extensive research on successful initiatives in other North American jurisdictions. The result is a 10-year strategic plan to end homelessness in Alberta by 2019.

Defining the challenge

A Plan for Alberta recognizes that there is no single reason for the growing number of homeless. Every homeless individual or family can point to a unique set of circumstances that contributed to their homelessness. The plan is based on the belief that continuing to manage homelessness through the current mix of emergency shelters and social programs will never result in an end to homelessness.

Shift in direction

A Plan for Alberta changes the way homelessness is addressed. It focuses on providing permanent housing and moving the homeless to more self-reliance by connecting them with the supports they need to restore stability in their lives, rather than providing more emergency shelter.

Housing First

A Plan for Alberta is based on the 'Housing First' approach which is being used across North America to break the cycle of homelessness. The overall goal is to move a homeless client quickly into permanent housing and provide them with supports tailored to their needs. Using this approach, the plan focuses on three key areas.

- **Rapid re-housing** of homeless Albertans into permanent housing. The role of shelters becomes one of facilitating a rapid exit from homelessness into permanent housing.
- **Providing client-centred supports** to re-housed clients to give them the assistance they need to restore stability in their lives and maintain their housing.
- **Preventing homelessness** through emergency assistance and providing adequate and accessible government programs and services to Albertans.

The plan

The plan outlines the need to undertake integrated province-wide actions that will help communities achieve success in their efforts to end homelessness. The province can do this directly by coordinating appropriate funding and resources and indirectly by ensuring government policies and practices do not contribute to further homelessness.

The plan calls for province-wide initiatives that will coordinate and fund homeless-serving systems based on the 'Housing First' approach. It sets out new expectations for governments, communities and agencies, requiring all partners to re-tool their operations and goal setting. It also focuses on achieving outcomes that will shift thinking from managing homelessness to ending homelessness.

Overall it establishes a roadmap that sets out five priority areas for action and 17 specific strategies and timelines.

Five Priority Areas for Action	Strategies for Success	Secretariat's Timeline
<p>Better Information <i>Taking action to end homelessness starts with reliable, meaningful information</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop standards for data collection about homelessness, including the use of common definitions, methods and counting 2. Establish a provincial electronic information management system and provide funding for its deployment 3. Establish a research arm to inform policy development and share best practices 4. Measure outcomes and track progress on a regular, ongoing basis 	<p>Immediate Immediate Immediate Shorter-term</p>
<p>Aggressive Assistance <i>Making sure Albertans have the support and resources they need to achieve housing stability</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Continue employing emergency assistance programs in order to prevent homelessness 6. Reformulate Alberta government assistance programs to ensure they achieve coordinated objective of providing Albertans with housing stability 	<p>Shorter-term Shorter-term</p>
<p>Coordinated Systems <i>Ensuring governments, agencies and communities work together towards ending homelessness</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Make it easier for clients to connect with Alberta government programs and services 8. Review and revise funding and administrative arrangements with homeless-serving agencies 9. Develop approaches to prevent provincial systems from discharging clients into homelessness 10. Support community plans to end homelessness 	<p>Immediate Shorter-term Shorter-term Immediate</p>
<p>More Housing Options <i>Increasing the quantity and variety of housing options so every Albertan has a home</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Increase the availability of permanent housing with supports 12. Work with other levels of government to create additional housing options 	<p>Immediate Longer-term</p>
<p>Effective Policies <i>Implement government policies that bring down barriers to re-housing and actively promote the goal of ending homelessness</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Shift expectations and develop outcome measures for emergency shelters in Alberta 14. Develop approaches for homeless-serving agencies to share client information 15. Simplify personal identification requirements for accessing programs and services 	<p>Longer-term Shorter-term Immediate Longer-term Longer-term</p>

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none">16. Examine ways of reducing poverty to help prevent homelessness17. Identify legislative and regulatory changes to advance the objectives and elements of the plan | |
|--|--|--|

-30-

Media inquiries may be directed to:

Barbra Korol
Director
Communications
Housing and Urban Affairs
780-644-6838
barbra.korol@gov.ab.ca

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.