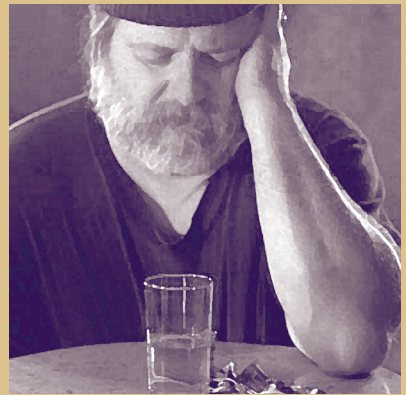




Addressing  
the needs  
of Calgary's  
Homeless



Calgary Homeless Foundation

# Housing Our Homeless

June 2004

# Taking Action Against Hardship

The word “homeless” instantly conjures images in the minds of Calgarians. Images of transients huddled in alleys against the cold are universal in our media-driven culture, yet leave much unsaid about the complete story of homelessness in our city.

In the 12 years since the City of Calgary began a census of the homeless in 1992, the population of those accounted for has grown at a rate ten times that of the growth rate for the city’s population as a whole. During the biennial count of homeless persons conducted in 2002, 1,737 men, women and children were counted in the city’s core, distributed among emergency shelters, transitional housing, and on our streets. This is equivalent to a town the size of Nanton, residing all-but-invisibly within Calgary city limits.

The actual number unaccounted for – either absolutely homeless or relatively homeless, boarding with friends or relatives – is impossible to estimate.

Fortunately, amidst the sometimes-disheartening statistics lie many stories of triumph, as local individuals and agencies work to craft lasting solutions based on solid research and experience.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation is one such success story. An established organization with a proven track record of success, the Foundation works with hundreds of agencies and individuals to stem the tide of homelessness. Through the Foundation-supported collaborative granting process – a model being adopted or examined by other Canadian communities – over \$60 million has been directed in the past six years to projects addressing homelessness in Calgary.

Calgary stands as a shining example of how progress can be made with a cohesive approach and the support of the community. A recent study conducted by the International Downtown Association concluded Calgary led most North American cities in its positive impact in the field. Their study reported that Calgary is poised to become a world leader in its approach to homelessness, offering recommendations to make our efforts even more effective in the coming five years.

*Housing our Homeless* describes practical targets based on research and consultation within and outside our community. This document promotes continued collaborative community action, encouraging ambitious, yet realistic, targets to address the housing needs of Calgary’s homeless, and the thousands more households at risk of becoming homeless.

# Homelessness: Costs and Consequences

One primary function of the Calgary Homeless Foundation is research into homelessness, from causes through statistics to potential solutions tailored specifically to this community.

What has become clear from our studies is that we can only estimate the true extent of the problem. To illustrate some of what we do know:

- Over 16,000 Calgary households are at risk of becoming homeless – only one paycheque away from disaster. By 2008, that number will have grown to 19,000 households.<sup>2,3</sup>
- On any given night, 40-50 families including 30 children under six years old will sleep in a homeless shelter.<sup>1</sup>
- Of those Calgarians considered absolutely homeless, more than half have a job.<sup>2</sup>
- Close to half of surveyed homeless persons suffer from some form of mental illness.<sup>2</sup>
- More than half of surveyed homeless persons suffer from or have suffered from some form of addiction.<sup>2</sup>
- Rising rents have placed low-income mature adults (aged 55+) at significant risk of becoming homeless. There is currently a waiting list of nearly 1,000 individuals over 55 in need of housing.<sup>1</sup>
- Calgary Housing Company (the City of Calgary's non-market housing provider) reported in July 2003 their waiting lists for affordable housing had risen to 2,546 – a one-hundred-per-cent increase from 2001, and the highest level ever.<sup>1</sup>
- Between the years 2000 – 2002, there was a 34% increase in the count of homeless persons in Calgary.<sup>1</sup>
- At current rates of growth, Calgary will need a minimum of 2,600 more spaces in emergency shelters and 19,000 additional affordable housing units within five years.<sup>2</sup>

With these statistics, and this rate of growth, the International Downtown Association homelessness study warns that existing care systems will collapse for lack of funds and resources long before the problem can be solved. It is clear more must be done in terms of prevention and cure initiatives to provide long-term relief. This approach is currently being studied by the implementation team building a five-year action plan for our city, with the help and support of the Calgary Homeless Foundation.

At the centre of the many intersecting issues are the men, women and children directly affected by homelessness, for whom the essential challenge is simply, *to endure another day*.

**Sources:** <sup>1</sup> Denotes City of Calgary, 2002-2003  
<sup>2</sup> Denotes Calgary Homelessness Study, 2002-2003  
<sup>3</sup> Denotes Calgary Community Plan 2004-2008

## Why do we Need Community Help?

As society becomes more complex, more informed, and more vocal in identifying priorities, communities become more willing and more eager to participate in developing and enacting solutions to social problems. While governments will remain the major funders of social programs, they cannot, acting on their own, take full responsibility to solve issues of social welfare, infrastructure, health care, education, and the many other priorities in need of attention. Government, business, social agencies, and citizens must collaborate to effectively address pressing issues.

Experience shows that as Calgarians become aware of a problem, they take on the responsibility for action. *Housing our Homeless* is designed to illustrate where we need to concentrate our attentions to develop solutions for Calgary's homeless.

## The Outcomes of Positive Action

The benefits of substantial reduction in the numbers of homeless in Calgary can be seen from many angles.

Humanitarians might take the perspective of human potential regained, of the many children whose lives would be enriched by the ability to assume a positive role in society, of the men and women whose pride and sense of worth would be healed, and the subsequent gain to every system in our society.

Those with a more business-oriented outlook might focus on the economic benefits of strengthening our workforce to compete in an increasingly challenging global marketplace, and of the long-term benefits in reduced social care costs and an increased tax base and healthier marketplace.

Surely the obvious advantage of reducing the \$1.4 billion spent every year in Canada on treating the symptoms of homelessness is argument enough to continue and intensify measures to resist any further growth of the problem.

## Process and Approach

The process leading to *Housing our Homeless* began with intensive research and consultation within the community. Studies such as the *Calgary Homelessness Study* (Oct. 2002 & Sept. 2003); the *International Downtown Association Homelessness Study* (June 2003); the *Addictions and Homelessness Study* (May 2003); and the City of Calgary's updated affordable housing "*Fast Facts*" (July 2003) made it possible to develop the *Calgary Community Plan 2004-2008*, released in late 2003. In itself a far-reaching plan to address homelessness issues, the Community Plan makes it possible to set realistic, yet ambitious, targets for the activities of the Calgary Homeless Foundation over the coming five years.

***The housing targets noted below for each sector are uniquely those of the Calgary Homeless Foundation, derived both from the research and from experience with the Foundation's Collaborative Granting Process.***

Targets share several key characteristics:

- All are for capital projects. The Foundation does not, at present, make funding available for services or support systems as such.
- As outlined below, all targets are strictly for transitional housing.
- Targets are itemized by sector to provide a quick reference in terms that will be easily recognized by community stakeholders and potential funders/donors with interests in a particular sector.

A description of the sectors follows.

The Foundation’s primary focus for the coming five years is transitional housing, coupled with continued awareness of the need to maintain an appropriate level of emergency shelter for those in need. The funding needs of emergency shelters must not be overlooked as the community works to address the shortage of transitional and affordable housing.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation expects the coming five years will see exciting changes in the way our city addresses homelessness, as we adopt new responsibilities related to affordable, or non-market housing in Calgary as the next step beyond transitional housing. The Foundation will continue consultations with local service organizations, governments, the community, and committed corporate leaders to define how best to carry out these efforts.

## The Eight Sectors of Homelessness

In order to better understand the causes and characteristics of a complex problem, the Calgary Homeless Foundation partitions homeless populations into eight sectors. Specific working groups under the guidance of the Community Action Committee research and identify the needs of each sector. The recommendations incorporated in *Housing our Homeless* are structured to reflect this classification for ease of reference.

The sectors used by the Foundation in its planning and funding models, in no particular order of priority, are:

- Absolute Homeless (*previously termed “Singles”*)
- Addictions
- Seniors
- Women Fleeing Violence
- Mental Health
- Youth
- Aboriginal
- Families

For accuracy of tracking, the “Absolute Homeless” sector does not include youth, Aboriginals, seniors, women fleeing violence, or persons suffering from addictions or mental illness.

## The Targets

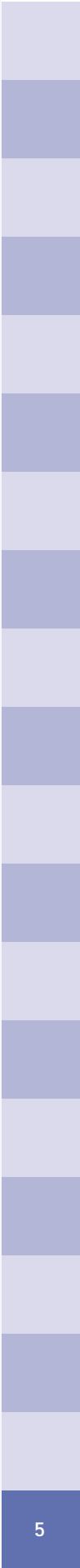
The Foundation has set a target of 200 transitional housing units to be either directly funded or facilitated annually. This is based on experience with the Collaborative Granting Process, assuming traditional levels of funding will apply.

The targets quoted do not fully address the need in any sector. They are ambitious targets, but are realistically achievable with the involvement and commitment of governments and the community.

“Units” are defined differently from case to case. The term may refer to anything from supervised dormitory-like homes providing multiple beds for those overcoming addictions, to more independent, efficiency-type apartment housing with on-site support for seniors facing health issues.

The targets below for “Absolutely Homeless” and for “Families” do not include individuals who may be single or members of families who have already been counted within another sector, for instance the “Mental Health” sector.

Transitional units available within each sector, as quoted within the description for each, do not include 6,800 units of housing available through the Calgary Housing Company and the Private Landlord Rent Supplement Program, as these units are not specifically aimed at any one sector.





## SECTOR 1 Absolute Homeless *(formerly termed Single Men and Women)*



### Who are they?

The bulk of those using homeless shelters are single men and women over the age of 18. Many of these are employed, though at low-paying or part-time work, making them “working poor”. Those confronting homelessness as a result of economic factors, rather than addictions etc., represent 15 per cent of the total

homeless population. Just over 16 per cent of homeless singles are women.

It is important to note that targets for housing quoted under this sector include only those defined as the “economic” homeless, with targets for those falling within other sectors such as “Addictions” or “Mental Health” contained under the relevant sector.

### Unique challenges and needs:

- Accessibility of health services
- Transportation
- Transitional housing units currently available for the Absolute Homeless sector: **585**

### Targets to address the Absolute Homeless need:

- 20 new transitional units per year;
- 100 units total over five years

## SECTOR 2 Mental Health



### Who are they?

Survey research may seriously underestimate the prevalence of mental illness in the homeless population. In-depth interviews reveal close to half of the homeless population suffers some form of mental illness.

Based on the last City of Calgary homeless count, this could mean 900 men and women suffering some form of mental illness currently attempting to cope with life on the streets, living on limited or no income, unable or unwilling to find the help they desperately need.

It must be noted that this sector will always require some form of support services linked with their housing; therefore in this instance “transitional” generally implies a support component.

### Unique challenges and needs:

- Prevention: Most serious mental illnesses are acquired in middle to late adolescence.
- Accessibility of treatment: Both diagnosis and treatment require greater community support and simpler access to help
- Ongoing (rather than short-term) housing assistance
- Transitional housing units currently available for the Mental Health sector: **93**

### Targets to address the Mental Health need:

- 30 new transitional units per year;
- 150 units total over five years

## SECTOR 3 Addictions



### Who are they?

The majority of the homeless suffer from some form of addiction (73 per cent of “absolutely homeless” surveyed; 55 per cent of “relatively homeless” surveyed). Lack of affordable, supported spaces contributes to a high rate of relapse among the addicted; that is, they begin treatment, reach the end of available programs, and

return to environments that encouraged the addiction in the first place. Addicted individuals facing mental health issues (“dual diagnosis”) have difficulty finding housing because their condition makes focused action difficult, and because of the scarcity of treatment programs and supported transitional housing for this group. Individuals with addictions have the highest rates of incarceration among the homeless population - much higher than Canadian and Alberta norms.

### Unique challenges and needs:

- Prevention: Studies show that most addictions are acquired in middle adolescence.
- Accessibility of treatment
- Transitional housing units currently available for the Addictions sector: **292**

### Targets to address the Addictions need:

- **55 new transitional units per year;**
- **275 units total over five years**

## SECTOR 4 Youth



### Who are they?

Youth homelessness is a complex mix of cause and effect, with elements of family violence, lack of employment, child poverty, and conflicting programs and policies that sometimes make it difficult for professionals to help.

About one in seven users of shelters across Canada is a child.

Compared to children with permanent homes, homeless children suffer more from lack of educational opportunities, infection, obesity, anemia, injuries, burns, developmental delays and incomplete immunization. They suffer more injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health problems, and pregnancies. Many homeless youth are living in shelters or bunking with friends (couch-surfing), making the true extent of the problem difficult to assess.

### Unique challenges and needs:

- Prevention: As most mental illness and addictions are acquired in middle to late adolescence, youth at risk of leaving school early should be identified as a high-risk group.
- Outreach services
- Housing assistance
- “Non-status” youth: More effective supports are required for youth who are under the age of 18 but not connected to Child Welfare (i.e., non-status youth).
- Transitional housing units currently available for the Youth sector: **36**

### Targets to address the Youth need:

- **10 new transitional units per year;**
- **50 units total over five years**

## SECTOR 5 Seniors



### Who are they?

Many seniors and mature adults (aged 55+) are unable to work. Many more have fixed income sources, leaving them particularly vulnerable to increases in taxes, utilities, and rent levels. Seniors and mature adults may also find it impossibly complex to find resources and entitlements to assist them, both financially and in health care.

### Unique challenges and needs:

- Long-term supported housing and/or subsidized housing
- Transportation: Transportation to access health care and other social services is an important issue for homeless seniors.
- Dual-diagnosis housing
- Employment: This sector typically experiences very low income levels. A “seniors-friendly” job bank that reflects employment options particular to this age group would fill the gap for those who want to or must work to supplement seniors’ benefits.
- Transitional housing units currently available for the Seniors sector: **0\***

*NOTE: this number may be misleading, as there are many housing units suitable for seniors or mature adults included in general housing developments. As such they are not counted specifically as “seniors” housing. Some beds set aside as emergency resources for homeless seniors may also be used for transitional purposes when necessary.*

### Targets to address the Seniors need:

- 15 new transitional units per year;
- 75 units total over five years

## SECTOR 6 Aboriginal



### Who are they?

The challenges facing Aboriginal people as they leave established family and social units to take up residence in our city are substantial. They face unfamiliar systems and expectations, and often have trouble navigating complex structures to locate appropriate services.

Add to this relatively high levels of addictions (75 per cent) and mental health issues (26 per cent), and the obstacles may seem insurmountable.

This population requires methods and tools that recognize and accommodate individual backgrounds and cultural needs.

### Unique challenges and needs:

- Addictions and mental health outreach
- Prevention: For many Aboriginal homeless persons, addiction and mental health problems begin very early and are rooted in both historical and current social contexts.
- Transitional housing units currently available for the Aboriginal sector: **20**

### Targets to address the Aboriginal need:

- 40 new transitional units per year;
- 200 units total over five years



## SECTOR 7 Women Fleeing Violence (WFV)



### Who are they?

The tragic circumstances faced by this sector present unique challenges when it comes to recovering their independence and self-esteem. Victims of family violence are often less educated, with repeated instances of disability or other health issues. They have usually been homeless for shorter periods than the norm, but have a high frequency of homelessness related to repeated episodes of violence.

On top of the many trials faced by other homeless persons, this group often has one or more children to care for. This adds another level of complexity, requiring them to care for more needs than simply their own: schooling, health care, counseling, and the necessities such as food and clothing. Due to typically low income levels, even subsidized housing may not leave sufficient money to purchase the necessities of life, particularly if that includes child care.

Shelters serving this sector are already over-burdened with referrals, with many women being turned away.

### Unique challenges and needs:

- Employment: Education and supported employment opportunities, provided in conjunction with safe, reliable, affordable daycare, and long-term transitional housing will be necessary to move towards independent, stable living.
- Simple, convenient access to support services.
- Transitional housing units currently available for the Women Fleeing Violence sector: 49

### Targets to address the WFV need:

- 10 new transitional units per year;
- 50 units total over five years

## SECTOR 8 Families



### Who are they?

The Family sector is predominantly made up of female-headed single-parent households. The parents are often better educated than the overall homeless group, and are less likely to have addictions and/or serious mental health challenges. With appropriate supports, they are more likely than others to be stably housed and employed. The working poor often

end up living in crowded housing as they are unable to afford a decent place to live while feeding and clothing their children.

A process to identify cases more able to move swiftly toward independence (e.g. first-time homeless, better educated, no current addiction, absence or lower-severity of mental health problem) through programs of largely instrumental, short-term transitional support could substantially decrease a backlog of families in need.

### Unique challenges and needs:

- Comprehensive intervention programs providing stable daycare, education and housing for children and parents
- Prevention: The children in these families constitute a high-risk group for future mental health obstacles, addictions, and homelessness.
- Employment: Childcare, transportation, work clothes, and dental and medical care are essential services to free parents who are capable of working to do so.
- Transitional housing units currently available for the Families sector: 10

### Targets to address the Families need:

- 20 new transitional units per year;
- 100 units total over five years

## Summary: Sectors and targets

Sector	Yearly Target	5-Year Target
Absolute Homeless	20	100
Mental Health	30	150
Addictions	55	275
Youth	10	50
Seniors	15	75
Aboriginal	40	200
Women Fleeing Violence	10	50
Families	20	100

## Broadening the role of the Calgary Homeless Foundation

*Housing our Homeless* details the plans of the Calgary Homeless Foundation in meeting community needs for transitional housing. The need for affordable (“non-market”) housing, however, remains a pressing challenge for thousands of Calgarians who seek to maintain or regain an independent, productive role in society.

*The Calgary Community Plan 2004-2008* describes the need for affordable housing in depth. This need is recognized by the one hundred-plus local stakeholders contributing to the Plan. The Calgary Homeless Foundation, in collaboration with Calgary Mayor Bronconnier’s Round Tables on Affordable Housing, identified a need early this year for an Affordable Housing Advisor. The Foundation is pleased to act as host for this position, beginning this year.

The Foundation is excited to begin exploring new ways to capitalize on the many collaborative relationships already established within and beyond our city, to help shape the future of affordable housing in Calgary. The roles and responsibilities related to this new role are currently being defined, but our effectiveness is ultimately dependent on significant community and corporate participation in the task ahead.

# Conclusion: How You Can Help

**Homelessness.** None of us who hasn't experienced the condition first-hand can imagine how it might feel to have nowhere to call "home".

Homelessness touches every segment of our society: children and seniors, educated and uninformed, architects and clerks. Springing from one disastrous decision, one brush with ill health, one family crisis, it achieves its own life: a cycle of poverty, hopelessness, illness, and shame. Once afflicted, the simple things in life we take for granted – decent jobs, the comfort of a safe home – become harder to reclaim. Most cannot reclaim them without help, as they try to endure a condition they may not understand.

As an individual, you can help in many ways: with volunteer hours, donation of food, clothing, furnishings, or cash; by organizing neighbourhood, school or church fundraisers; or simply by understanding and supporting solutions to homelessness.

As a corporation or social organization, your significant donation to a project, whether to general funding or aimed at a sector such as Seniors or Families, earns you more than simply the knowledge you've helped others. Your company name on the front of a care facility demonstrates your commitment to all the citizens of our community.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

To find out more about how you can help,  
contact the Calgary Homeless Foundation

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Fax 403.262.2924

e-mail [chf@calgaryhomeless.com](mailto:chf@calgaryhomeless.com)

The authors thank those responsible for the following research documents for the use of data and/or text introduced therein.

Full texts of these studies and others are available at

[www.calgaryhomeless.com](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com)

- **The Calgary Homelessness Study (2002)**
- **Calgary Community Plan 2004-2008**
- **City of Calgary Affordable Housing Fast Facts (2003)**



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## Housing our Homeless 2004

### **Design and Production**

Dianne Mitchell, Mitchell Design Group

### **Printing**

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### **Staff Writer**

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### **Funded by**

Government of Canada, National Homelessness Initiative