



Moving
Forward . . .

Homelessness Policy Framework: Implementation Strategy

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Alberta
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT





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Summary

This *Homelessness Policy Framework: Implementation Strategy* outlines a three-year process and represents a move forward in the provincial government's commitment to address the needs of Alberta's homeless people and the underlying factors contributing to homelessness.

The homelessness policy framework, approved in January 2000, provides guiding principles and objectives. Its overall approach is to support community-based decision-making and solutions through local partnerships among stakeholders.

Three implementation strategies are outlined that will guide provincial government activities and support for community-based initiatives from 2000-03. They are:

1. HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Ensure that a continuum of housing facilities and support services exists to assist homeless people, consisting of emergency shelters, transitional housing, special purpose initiatives and safe, secure shelter.

Alberta Community Development has committed \$3 million in annual funding for three years to support homeless initiatives. This funding will be used to support partnership initiatives in seven major urban centres: Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. The centres will submit community plans that will serve as the basis for provincial and federal funding of homeless initiatives. Provincial guidelines for community plans are provided (Appendix 1).

The first priority is to address the immediate needs of the homeless which will be followed by a prevention strategy to address factors contributing to homelessness. Other provincial departments, such as Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, and Alberta Children's Services, will be involved in this process.



2. LOCAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Develop better ways to identify needs and referral capacity at the local level to ensure collaboration in the utilization of existing resources for the homeless.

The department supports the development of databases/inventories of relevant programs and services in each of the seven communities as well as needs assessment tools. Ultimately, these will help identify the reasons for homelessness in a given community and gaps or overlaps in programs and services. This process will also enhance collaboration among groups in the community that deliver the services.

3. GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

Facilitate and coordinate inter-departmental and inter-governmental forums to improve coordination of funding and service provision mechanisms, and resources for homeless people.

Federal/provincial/municipal working groups have been formed to share information, facilitate coordination and develop community-driven solutions.





I. Purpose of Homelessness Implementation Strategy

The homelessness policy framework (approved in January 2000) provided guidance and direction from a provincial government perspective for the development of initiatives to address the issue of homelessness. It outlined the principles and objectives that will be the cornerstone for all actions. This implementation strategy specifies approaches to guide provincial government activities and support for community-based initiatives over the next three years.

The implementation strategy supports the overall focus of the provincial government. In the Government of Alberta's Business Plan 2000-03, it states that the government's actions are focused on three core businesses: People, Prosperity and Preservation. Specific provincial goals addressed by the strategy are:

"PEOPLE . . .

helping people to be self-reliant, capable and caring through:

- a healthy society and accessible health care
- basic support and protection for those in need
- supportive families and compassionate communities

"Goal 4: Albertans will be independent.

"Goal 5: Albertans not expected to support themselves fully will receive help."

Alberta Community Development's 2000-2003 ministry business plan also provides support and direction through one of its core businesses – "to assist Albertans in need to access shelter in a safe and healthy environment" and by stating as an action:

"The ministry will take a lead role to develop a strategy on homelessness in conjunction with other ministries, municipal governments, local authorities, community groups and the private sector."



Moving Forward . . . the Homelessness Policy Framework: Implementation Strategy is the first step in meeting provincial and departmental goals as they relate to homelessness. It begins a process to address the needs of the homeless as well as the underlying factors contributing to homelessness.

Alberta Community Development has lead responsibility for implementing the strategy; other provincial departments, especially Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, and Alberta Children’s Services, will play significant roles.





II. Principles and Objectives

1. Definition

For the purposes of this document, homelessness is defined as people, including individuals, children, youth and families, who: 1) currently have no housing, or 2) are sheltered in emergency accommodations and will be “on the street” at the end of their stay.

2. Principles

The following principles provide the cornerstones of the homelessness policy framework:

- Solutions should be designed to provide safe, affordable shelter to people who are without housing and to address the causes of homelessness.
- Decision-making will be at the local level.
- Partnerships between management bodies, municipalities, corporations, community agencies, and the federal and provincial governments will be fostered through consultation and collaboration.
- Provincial assistance will be based on need and will encourage self-reliance.

3. Objectives

The following objectives promote community-based solutions to reduce homelessness in Alberta by:

- ensuring the homeless in Alberta have access to appropriate shelter and support services,
- ensuring programs and services are coordinated to maximize resources, and
- providing support services to encourage independence and self-reliance.







III. Implementation Strategies

Three strategies will guide the provincial government's actions and support for homelessness from 2000 to 2003.

1. HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Ensure that a continuum of housing facilities and support services exists to assist homeless people, consisting of such facilities as emergency shelters, transitional housing, special needs initiatives and safe, secure shelter.

Current situation

The requirement for housing facilities and support services to serve the homeless is significant throughout Alberta. The new housing and services required, along with the associated costs, varies by community. As studies on homelessness in Alberta have demonstrated, the extent and nature of the problem differs from community to community.

Anticipated outcomes

The outcomes will occur in two stages:

- a) Each community will be responsible for developing a community plan and implementing the plan in collaboration with other stakeholders, based on its own needs and priorities and according to the principles outlined in the *Homelessness Policy Framework: Implementation Strategy*. See Appendix I for guidelines.
- b) The community plan will serve as a basis for the development of a continuum of housing and support services, involving federal, provincial and municipal governments, and private and non-profit groups. Some examples on this continuum are (see Appendix II for more detailed descriptions):
 - emergency shelters (first stage),
 - transitional housing (second and third stage),
 - special purpose initiatives, and
 - safe, secure shelter.

Action to date

The provincial government allocated \$3 million annually for three years to Alberta Community Development to implement the homelessness policy framework. The funding will be aimed at addressing both immediate and preventive needs.



Immediate needs: Initially, this funding will be used to support partnership initiatives that address the immediate needs of the homeless in seven of the province's major urban centres:

- Calgary
- Edmonton
- Lethbridge
- Medicine Hat
- Red Deer
- Grande Prairie
- Fort McMurray

Examples of immediate needs include the absolute homeless and people leaving violent family situations. Initially, funding from Alberta Community Development will be directed toward these immediate needs, such as through development of emergency shelters. Once these needs are met, initiatives will then be focused on ensuring a further continuum of services/facilities. Participation of other provincial departments, such as Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, and Alberta Children's Services is critical to the success of this process.

Prevention: From an ongoing prevention perspective, studies indicate that early intervention is less costly than waiting until a crisis situation occurs. Within the overall range of publicly funded services for the homeless, relatively few resources are directed to prevention.

Alberta Community Development will actively work with the other provincial ministries involved with homelessness to develop a strategy regarding prevention initiatives. Such prevention projects will begin after immediate needs have been addressed.

Role of the provincial government

The Interdepartmental Working Group on Homelessness, chaired by Alberta Community Development, will review community plans which will describe their housing and support services requirements and priorities, and will ensure they meet the objectives of the homelessness policy framework. Funding and involvement by provincial departments will be coordinated to ensure that barriers are removed and supports are in place where required.



2. LOCAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Develop better ways to identify needs and referral capacity at the local level to ensure collaboration in the utilization of existing resources for the homeless.

Current situation

The causes of homelessness vary widely thus requiring a wide range of solutions. An awareness of and access to a broad range of services is essential. In addition to housing, homeless people face many challenges including unemployment, lack of life skills, poverty, family breakdown, mental illness and substance abuse. Although agencies make their best efforts to meet the needs of their clients, individuals entering shelters are not always referred for further assistance. There are many reasons for this including a lack of readily accessible information on what programs and services are available or potentially beneficial. In addition, due to resource limitations, assessment of individuals to determine service requirements may not be a priority at some agencies.

Anticipated outcomes

Alberta Community Development believes it is essential that agencies have access to the following to improve their capacity for basic assessment and referral:

- a) A searchable database/inventory containing information on programs and services available throughout the community that provide housing and support services for the homeless.
- b) A process to ensure that front-line staff have the resources necessary to determine the immediate needs of homeless individuals so they can be referred to the most appropriate service provider.

Ultimately, these tools may also help communities and governments to identify reasons for homelessness in particular communities, as well as gaps or duplication in programs and services.

See Appendix III for a visual representation of the Homelessness Response Model.

The intent is to ensure that agencies have access to a database/inventory of all services and facilities in their particular city/town/region that may be required by homeless people including health, housing and



other support services. Agencies also require an efficient means of assessing the basic needs of each homeless individual. Alberta Community Development will work with each of the seven communities to determine their information needs and to support and facilitate their capacity to refer clients to needed services. Access to an inventory of local information and in turn, effective utilization of that information, will be evaluated on an on-going basis.

The goal of this strategy is to re-align existing resources to ensure any new resources are directed to areas of highest need.

Action to date

Several initiatives are already underway to develop databases and inventories of existing services and facilities. For example, the Calgary Homeless Foundation and the City of Calgary are developing databases of facilities and services in Calgary. In addition, the City of Calgary is piloting the CMHC Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) in emergency shelters.

Role of provincial government

Alberta Community Development will work with communities and other levels of government to further promote the development and implementation of this initiative. The department will strive to ensure that there is no duplication and to enhance coordination of efforts. In keeping with the policy framework's principles, local decision-making and action will be encouraged.



3. GOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

Facilitate and coordinate inter-departmental and inter-governmental forums to improve coordination of funding and service provision mechanisms and resources for homeless people.

Current situation

Approximately 11 provincial and 21 federal departments have some involvement with homelessness. Many of these departments have funding, programs and services that are intended to assist with and address homelessness. In addition, municipalities also play a key role. These various stakeholders frequently develop initiatives/processes/policies based on their own unique requirements and may not consider other approaches being developed or already under way. This lack of coordination often results in service duplication, inefficient use of multi-level funding and service gaps.

Anticipated outcomes

All levels of government and the community must work together to coordinate funding and services. Ensuring that homeless people do not “fall through the cracks” in the system will help support them through a transition to appropriate safe, secure housing.

Action to date

The following working groups have been established:

- a) Federal/provincial/municipal working groups at the community level to share information, facilitate coordination and develop community-driven solutions to Alberta’s homelessness issues. Representatives from federal, provincial and municipal levels of government are being appointed to coordinate activities in the major urban centres.
- b) The provincial Interdepartmental Working Group on Homelessness, chaired by Alberta Community Development, has been formed to share information, facilitate coordination, and to change/develop policies and practices as required, so that program and service gaps can be addressed.

Role of provincial government

Provincial government representatives will work together, and with other levels of government and the community, to facilitate the development of solutions to homelessness.







APPENDIX I

Guidelines for Development of Community Plans

Funding will be provided to address homelessness needs in seven urban centres: Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. Each community will develop a community plan that will serve as the basis for provincial and federal funding of homeless initiatives. Based on project outcomes in each community in the first year and any changing circumstances, the provincial allocation to each community will be revisited year-to-year.

Funds will be provided to a community-based organization (CBO), such as the municipality or other recognized body, as identified in the community plan. CBOs will have many responsibilities including:

- developing strategies and coordinating their implementation to address homeless priorities in their communities;
- complementing the activities being done by other organizations who work with the homeless;
- undertaking fund raising; and
- promoting public understanding of the diverse nature of the homeless problem in their communities.

The composition of the CBO will vary from community to community.

Provincial Guidelines for Community Plans

General guidelines of what should be part of a community plan include (but are not limited to):

- A statistical assessment of need such as homeless counts, affordability measures, etc.
- An inventory of existing programs and services in the community such as number of shelter spaces, target groups, etc.
- An analysis of the gaps between projected need and current resources.
- A list of priority initiatives including relevant details such as number of units, client type and identification of any support services required.
- Estimation of costs.
- An implementation plan.
- Performance measures.



To qualify for provincial funding, community plans must adhere to the guiding principles and objectives of the homelessness policy framework. Plans should also conform to the requirements of other stakeholders.

The provincial government also recognizes that the needs and environment in each community are different. Communities are encouraged to be innovative and creative in their development of solutions.

Accountability

Funds provided by Alberta Community Development under the homelessness policy framework will be made available to community-based organizations through a funding agreement to ensure accountability to taxpayers.

The following key points form the basis of an accountability framework designed to ensure resources targeted to the homeless have the most impact:

- The basis for funding provided under the homelessness policy framework will be in accordance with: 1) the priorities identified in the community plan; and 2) the principles and objectives identified in the policy framework. Funds will be provided by Alberta Community Development to the CBO representing each centre, under a conditional funding agreement. The CBO will, in turn, provide funds to non-profit groups and other partners to implement specific projects in the community plan.
- The CBO must ensure that funded projects reach the target population to maximize the resources.
- Initiatives must either directly help shelter homeless individuals and families and/or address underlying causes of homelessness including preventive measures.
- The CBO will submit financial statements (including information on specific expenditures) and a report on performance measures and outcomes to Alberta Community Development on an annual basis.



- The CBO will establish the terms and conditions of project funding as well as the mechanism for project review and selection.

Funding Parameters

Both capital and operating (including administration) expenditures will be considered upon completion and submission of the community plan. Where operational/administrative funding is requested, the CBO must demonstrate sources of on-going (after the initial three-year commitment) funds.







Appendix II

Continuum of Housing Facilities and Support Services

Due to the complex and wide range of needs of the homeless, a continuum of housing and support service models is needed, involving the federal, provincial and municipal governments and community agencies. This continuum includes four main types of accommodation:

Emergency Shelters

The existing emergency shelter (first stage) system in Alberta needs to be reviewed to ensure (1) there is an adequate supply of spaces to meet the demand, especially during the winter months, and (2) appropriate assessment and referral services are available to direct people to more appropriate housing and support services. In the long term, the goal should be to reduce the number of emergency shelter spaces by providing more appropriate forms of housing that promote a healthy, stable environment.

Transitional Housing

While most emergency shelters have limits on the amount of time that people are allowed to stay (28 days is common), many shelters have long term “tenants” that call the shelter home. This is because there are a limited number of permanent housing units that will accept this type of clientele. Most homeless people who do not use the shelter system on a regular basis live in illegal suites, slum rooming houses and other forms of substandard housing.

There is a overwhelming need to develop transitional housing models that will provide people with the necessary support services and employment training opportunities to allow them to move toward a more independent lifestyle, with the ultimate goal of becoming self sufficient. Support services include counselling, psychiatric care, substance misuse rehabilitation programs, and life skills training. Employment training services include job training programs.

Two common transitional housing models have been successful:

- a) **Second stage** which has single rooms with communal bathrooms and eating facilities. Support services are provided in-house, usually involving a fairly rigorous program with set rules. Employment opportunities are a key component of this housing.



- b) **Third stage** provides a transition into self-contained units. Support services are available, usually on an outreach basis from the agency that supports the housing.

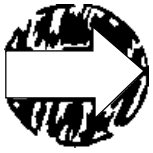
Special Purpose Initiatives

Many of the people who frequent homeless shelters suffer from some form of mental illness and/or substance abuse. In most instances, the transitional housing model may not be appropriate for them because they require housing with support services on an ongoing basis. Supportive housing models range from shared living (two people renting a self-contained unit with outreach support services) to group homes (24 hour, live-in aids) to larger facilities, such as a large rooming house or converted hotel (in-house support services). A range of models is required to address the diverse needs of this clientele.

Safe, Secure Shelter

Affordable housing options are required for (1) people who are ready to move from a second stage transitional housing facility into a completely independent living environment, and (2) people who do not require support services and are not appropriate for transitional housing. In the first situation, self-contained one-bedroom apartments are required. These people are working and fully independent. In the second situation, these people are characterized as older (45 - 65 years old) and single with few life skills and no employability. These people need a clean safe environment such as a renovated rooming house, operated by a non-profit society.





Appendix III

Homelessness Response Model

