A Plan For Alberta

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ENDING HOMELESSNESS
IN 10 YEARS

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Executive Summary

Alberta faces a growing challenge of homelessness. The reasons behind the increase in homelessness are many and complex, rooted in fiscal, social and policy decisions over many years.

Although available data can not perfectly define the scope of the challenge, we know that homelessness also has many faces. Each homeless individual and family faces unique circumstances that have contributed to their homelessness.

These fellow Albertans don't belong on the streets or in emergency shelters. Instead, they should be moved into housing and given support to address their challenges, restore stability, and attain greater self-reliance. Each of them deserves the opportunity to succeed.

Funding from governments and the hard work of many Albertans to address this challenge are to be commended; but despite these efforts, Alberta right now is simply working to manage homelessness. To successfully reduce and ultimately end homelessness, Alberta will need to take a fundamentally different approach.

The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness has created a Plan for Alberta, which articulates this new approach. The Plan is based on the goal of ending homelessness in Alberta by 2019.

The Plan recognizes and supports community-led action on homelessness, and aims to coordinate province-wide efforts. The Plan sets out a series of actions aimed at shifting the work of homeless-serving agencies, communities and governments away from simply managing homelessness, and towards ending homelessness through a housing **first philosophy.**

Under this housing first philosophy, investments are focused on three key areas:

- **Rapid re-housing** of homeless Albertans, moving them from streets and shelters into permanent housing.

- **Providing client-centered supports** to re-housed clients, helping them obtain the assistance they need to restore their stability and maintain their housing.

- **Preventing homelessness** through emergency assistance and by providing adequate and accessible government programs and services to Albertans.

The Plan for Alberta puts an emphasis on self-reliance. It also provides for a substantially lower-cost, long-term solution versus the status quo.

Most importantly, the Plan provides the opportunity to actually end homelessness in the Province. This will restore dignity for thousands of citizens, and inspire lasting pride in the hearts of all Albertans.

I.
Introduction

The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness

In late 2007, Premier Ed Stelmach and Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Yvonne Fritz announced that the Alberta government would embark on a 10-year initiative to address homelessness in the province. On January 23, 2008, the Government of Alberta announced the establishment of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness (the "Secretariat").

The Secretariat was given a mandate to develop a 10-year provincial strategic plan outlining "a comprehensive, co-ordinated and sustainable approach" to ending homelessness – including goals, timelines and financial requirements.

Rather than a task force or committee, the Secretariat was established as an agency of the Alberta government, intended to not only develop but also to lead implementation of the provincial plan. To this end, the Secretariat was instructed to develop and coordinate new initiatives to address homelessness, such as prevention strategies, research programs, and the creation of a homeless information management system.

The Secretariat was instructed to work with municipalities and communities throughout the province, and to support the development of community plans for action on homelessness.

Gathering input from communities

To inform the development of the plan, members of the Secretariat visited the seven major cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat.

Through these visits, the Secretariat learned about the unique challenges each community is facing in regards to homelessness.

The Secretariat spoke with Albertans working in homeless-serving systems, who described the roles they thought the Alberta government should play in supporting and coordinating action to address homelessness on a province-wide basis.

Secretariat members also met with representatives from municipal governments and community-based organizations who are involved in the development and implementation of community plans and initiatives to address homelessness.

The Secretariat reviewed existing action plans on homelessness that have been created by Alberta communities, those of other Canadian cities, and those of states and cities in the United States. It also reviewed research and literature regarding homelessness, including key elements that are common to successful plans to address homelessness.

Secretariat Membership

- Stephen G. Snyder (Chair)
- Jean Wilkinson (Vice-Chair)
- Linda Black, Q.C.
- Leonard Blumenthal
- Gary R. Keen
- Jane Manning
- Murray Prokosch
- Pam Ralston (CBO Representative)
- Dr. Gayla Rogers
- Dr. Pam Thompson, BA, MD, CCFP
- Chief Charles Weasel Head
- Robin Wigston (Ex-Officio Member)

II.
Alberta's Challenge

Homelessness has many faces

Homelessness can affect anyone. It has many faces…

The family with children whose household income can't afford rising bills…

The Albertan with a mental illness, addiction, or physical illness who needs treatment…

The victim of family violence or abuse, who can't go home…

The disabled adult with special needs and few resources…

Homelessness is a complex problem that results from a number of complicated issues. Each homeless individual or family has a unique set of circumstances that contributed to their homelessness.

Many homeless are able to obtain limited employment. Others are unable to work full-time due to mental illness, addiction or other issues. Some homeless are confronting multiple challenges that are creating instability in their lives.

They are all our fellow Albertans. Each of them should have a place to call home, and access to support that will help them keep that home.

The scope of the challenge

As Alberta has grown, so has the scope of homelessness. It didn't occur overnight.

A series of fiscal, social and policy decisions over many years contributed to today's homelessness challenge.

The exact numbers are hard to determine, but we know that each night thousands of Albertans sleep in shelters or on the streets.

Based on homeless and shelter counts undertaken in 2006, it's estimated there were 8,400 homeless in Alberta. We know this number is growing.

Each community has unique dynamics that impact the size and character of its homeless population, but we know the homeless population is diverse. For instance, recent studies provide a point-in-time snapshot of the homeless in Alberta:

- 14% of homeless are living on the street;

- 40% have some form of mental health problem;

- 50% have some history of substance abuse;

- 25% are employed;

- 10% are young adults;

- 11% are families with school age children;

There is also a large population of "hidden" homeless comprised largely of women, youth and families. These are homeless Albertans who avoid the homeless-serving system, often out of fear of authorities. Research will be needed to assess the impact this group has on the inflow of new homeless into the homeless-serving system.

In addition, many more Albertans are considered "at risk" of becoming homeless. That is, they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Some of these Albertans will fall into homelessness.

The health, safety and dignity of homeless Albertans are compromised every night; and every day, the cost to Albertans keeps rising.

Homelessness in Alberta is growing, despite the efforts of many hard-working individuals and the funding efforts of government. This is because Alberta is simply working to manage homelessness, instead of working to end it.

We need to fundamentally change the way we tackle the homelessness challenge if we are going to solve it. If we don't change the way we approach the issue, the number of homeless will continue to increase, and the costs of homelessness will skyrocket.

A fundamental shift in direction

Homelessness is a complex challenge, and there is no single solution – no silver bullet – that will solve the issue. Addressing homelessness requires integrated, cross-ministerial work, and efforts from a number of sectors and social organizations.

It will also require a fundamental change in thinking. This is the crux of the Plan for Alberta.

The Plan changes the way homelessness is addressed.

Rather than spending money on more shelter spaces to accommodate more homeless Albertans, the Plan shifts the system to focus on housing and moving the homeless to more self-reliance.

Spending is aimed at getting homeless Albertans into permanent housing, and connecting them with the supports they need to maintain that housing.

This double-barrelled approach is very important. Simply re-housing a homeless person isn't enough. The underlying factors that originally contributed to their homelessness must also be addressed; otherwise, the person is at a high risk to fall back into homelessness.

Different levels of support are required for different homeless Albertans. In general, someone is "homeless" if they do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they choose. For the purposes of this Plan, the major categories of homeless Albertans are defined as follows:

- **Chronic homeless** – A person or family is considered chronically homeless if they have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In order to be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter.

- **Transient homeless** – A person who is homeless for less than a year and has fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

- **Employable homeless** – Those who do not suffer from any major barriers to employment (such as serious psychiatric, medical, or substance abuse problems, criminal histories, limited education, or lack of work experience), but who require assistance to find permanent housing and move to self-reliance.

- **Homeless families** – Those who are homeless and are: parents with minor children; adults with legal custody of children; a couple in which one person is pregnant; multi-generational families. Many members of this group are women fleeing abusive domestic situations and struggling to re-establish independent homes for themselves and their children.

Ending homelessness makes sense

Bringing an end to homelessness is socially the right thing to do.

Our fellow citizens, their families and children, shouldn't be living on the streets or in emergency shelters. Instead, they should be given the opportunity they need to re-establish stability in their lives and to maintain permanent housing. Every Albertan deserves the opportunity to succeed.

Ending homelessness also makes economic sense for Alberta taxpayers.

The savings expected from the Plan for Alberta, based on our current homeless population of 11,000 are outlined in Table 1.

If Alberta continues its current approach of simply *managing* our current homeless population, it's estimated that the Alberta government will incur costs of $6.65 billion over 10 years.

This is because managing homelessness is extremely costly to taxpayers.

The Alberta government incurs *direct* costs relating to homelessness, such as the emergency shelter system, services for homeless Albertans, and programming to homeless-serving agencies.

The government also incurs expenses through *indirect costs* – that is, spending in other government systems such as the health system, corrections system, and justice system. Homeless Albertans utilize these systems in multiple ways that result in higher costs to the taxpayer. For example, without a home of their own, homeless Albertans will visit an emergency room when they are ill; this adds indirect costs to the health system.

Costs to manage homelessness are also higher because it's less cost-effective to deliver programs and services to people without permanent homes. For instance, chronically homeless people – those facing the most challenges – cost taxpayers directly and indirectly over $100,000 a year per person.
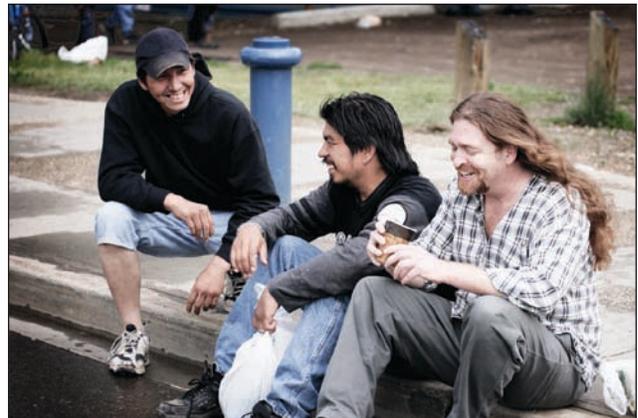
Cumulatively, these direct and indirect costs add up, and without reducing the total number of homeless people.

Changing Alberta's approach to homelessness – moving from managing homelessness to ending homelessness – will result in dramatic savings for Alberta taxpayers.

Implementing the Plan for Alberta will shift Alberta's work approach and expenditure focus to *ending* homelessness.

Investments will move homeless people off streets and out of shelters, and into permanent housing with supports. As homeless Albertans are moved into permanent housing, they will utilize services in more cost-effective ways, saving taxpayers money.

As shown in Table 1, moving 11,000 individuals and families out of homelessness will require investments of $3.316 billion. This is far lower than the cost of simply managing them ($6.65 billion). Over 10 years, this translates into savings of around $3.3 billion for taxpayers.

The savings are likely to be much higher. The cost savings described above relate to Alberta's *current* homeless population. However, if we don't shift our work approach by implementing the Plan for Alberta, the number of homeless Albertans will continue to grow over 10 years.

Modelling work commissioned by the Secretariat estimates that, under the status quo approach, homelessness in Alberta will grow at a conservative rate of 7% per year. By 2019, Alberta will be managing 21,222 homeless Albertans and families, and will have spent $13.6 billion on direct and indirect costs to manage them.[1]

By implementing the Plan for Alberta including targeted prevention services, homelessness will be reduced and ended over 10 years, rather than continue to grow. This will save Alberta taxpayers up to $7.1 billion, largely through indirect costs that would otherwise need to be spent.[2]

Although the Alberta government will face higher direct investment to re-house homeless Albertans, the government will realize substantial indirect cost savings over the term of the Plan.

Direct investments in the Plan for Alberta will be fully recovered by 2014, generating better value for taxpayers and achieving a valuable social goal.

[1, 2] Homeless Management Model, Alberta Case Analysis Results, conducted by Dynawise, September 2008.

The stories of the homeless…finding success through a housing first approach at the Pathways to Housing program in Calgary!

Dave is a 48 year old man with Schizoaffective Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and had a past heart attack. He was referred to Pathways with some concern, both from the referring agency and Pathways' Psychiatrist that he may not be able to live independently due to the severity of his mental illness.

Dave had been hospitalized 26 times due to suicidal thoughts, and has had problems adhering to his medication regimen. His failure to take his medication has contributed to his housing instability for the last two decades, and he had been living on the streets, in shelters, and in group homes for two years prior to his enrolment in Pathways.

When Dave was enrolled in Pathways in April, he had an extreme tooth grinding problem due to his anxiety. Staff immediately began working with Dave to manage his anxiety and, in June, Dave went to Ontario for a week to visit family he had not seen in 4 years. The trip went off without a hitch, and Dave's mother reported that without the help of the Pathways team the visit would not have been possible.

Since enrolment in Pathways, Dave has set a goal of returning to work, and has been washing windows for a number of clients. Dave's tooth grinding problem has significantly decreased, and he has been focusing on taking his medication in order to better manage his anxiety and ultimately his housing. Dave is now beginning to enjoy normal activities he likely would have been unable to participate in when he first came to the Pathways program.

Table 1: Comparative Cost of Managing versus Ending Homelessness

COST TO MANAGE

Groups of homeless	Number per group	Average annual cost per person or family	Total Cost to manage homeless over 10 years	Capital to build new units	Cost to MANAGE homelessness over the next 10 years
Chronic	3,000	$ 114,850	$ 3.45 billion	$0	
Transient	5,500	$ 39,680	$ 2.182 billion	$0	
Employable	1,500	$ 21,600	$ 324 million	$0	
Families	1,000	$ 69,600	$ 696 million	$0	
	11,000		**$ 6.65 billion**	**$0**	**$6.65 billion**

COST TO END

Groups of homeless	Number per group	Cost to provide housing and services	Total Cost to provide support program	Capital to build 8,000 new housing units for homeless	Investment to END homelessness over the next 10 years
Chronic	3,000	$ 34,000	$ 1.02 billion	$ 500 million	
Transient	5,500	$ 14,000	$ 770 million	$ 528 million	
Employable	1,500	$ 6,000	$ 90 million	$ 30 million	
Families	1,000	$ 17,800	$ 178 million	$ 200 million	
	11,000		**$ 2.058 billion**	**$1.258 billion**	**$3.316 billion**

Cost savings achieved by implementing 10 year plan to end homelessness based on today's homeless population	**$3.334 billion**

PROJECTED COST AND SAVINGS

Homeless Population	Homeless population in 2019	Projected cost to continue managing homelessness (status quo approach)	Total 10-year savings by implementing Plan for Alberta
Future*	**21,222**	**$13.6 billion**	**$7.1 billion**

*Estimates based on 7% annual growth in homeless population over 10 years.
 (Source: Homeless Management Model, prepared for the Secretariat.)

III.
Identifying The Barriers

Community plans to end homelessness have identified a number of economic, social and systemic issues which communities believe are acting as barriers to ending homelessness:

Incomes not keeping up with cost of living – The remarkable growth of Alberta's economy has fuelled increases in the costs of living. Although Alberta is enjoying healthy levels of employment, for some workers, incomes have not kept pace with rising costs. Many Albertans with marginal incomes struggle to pay their rent or utility bills and are at risk of homelessness. Many have difficulty saving sufficient funds to pay damage deposits or first and last month's rent, making it hard for them to secure housing if they must find a new place to live.

High rates of in-migration – Alberta's strong economy has also attracted thousands of inter-provincial and international migrants. In many cases, new Albertans have not arranged housing before they arrive. Some have lower incomes due to language barriers, credential recognition barriers, or other issues, and struggle to maintain housing. Some will fall into homelessness. In-migration also contributes to higher demand for available rental housing, putting upward pressure on rents.

There is a shortage of affordable housing – Home affordability is problematic in many parts of Alberta due to higher construction and land costs, gentrification, condominium conversions and other supply/demand factors. The Alberta government is taking action to expand the supply of affordable housing, however home ownership remains out of reach for many. This results in a higher demand for rental accommodation and a lack of available rental housing, creating a bottleneck for those trying to leave emergency shelters. Limited shelter space, in turn, is resulting in more unsheltered homeless.

Societal attitudes are creating housing challenges – Societal attitudes may create barriers to ending homelessness. Public opposition to the creation of affordable housing may make it difficult for some communities to increase the amount of housing stock. Some communities are concerned that the current market can create the risk of discriminatory rental practices, especially towards disadvantaged groups.

Homeless-serving agencies are under strain – Alberta's social system relies on not-for-profit agencies to deliver many services and supports to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Many not-for-profit agencies are struggling to meet higher demand for their services as they deal with higher operating costs, labour pressures, and administrative burdens. Immediate needs and pressures are compromising the ability of agencies to provide effective, long-term responses for clients, especially those with complex situations. Their staff needs more training and professional development to more effectively deal with the complex needs of the homeless.

Lack of coordination in mainstream systems – Mainstream systems are not coordinating their efforts to effectively address homelessness. Other provincial systems may be discharging people into homelessness. Homeless-serving agencies may not be sufficiently collaborating. Case management may not be as widely utilized as required. Alberta government programs and services may be difficult to navigate for many Albertans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Overall, the provincial government, municipal governments, and not-for-profit agencies need to deliver services in more seamless, integrated ways.

Groups with special situations are requiring particular attention – Many Albertans facing homelessness are facing other serious challenges as well. Those from specialized groups – such as those with mental illness, those with addictions, victims of violence, seniors, those with disabilities, and homeless youth – are dealing with particularly challenging issues, and require special support to help address their unique situations. Targeted responses are required to effectively re-house homeless people from these specialized groups.

Regulatory complexity and inefficiency – Inefficiencies and regulatory complexities are resulting in slower responses from the public and private sectors in addressing homelessness. Private sector developers of affordable housing options face delays in approval processes. Regulatory barriers make it harder for homeless-serving agencies to share information or deliver services. Delays created by red tape add additional cost and create inefficiencies.

Community plans are working to overcome these barriers. The Plan for Alberta identifies province-wide actions that will also assist in this regard.

IV.
Setting The Vision

Adopting a bold vision

Homelessness is unacceptable in a province as prosperous as Alberta. No Albertan should be forced to live on the streets or remain in a shelter for an extended period of time. Albertans have the resources, the creativity and the compassion to effectively address homelessness in their communities. For a province built on great achievements and innovation, and a people who don't shy away from big challenges, the Secretariat has set a bold vision for its Plan:

Homelessness is ended in Alberta by 2019

This will mean that even though there may still be emergency shelters available for those who become homeless, those who become homeless will be re-housed into permanent homes within 21 days.

A principle-based plan

The Secretariat established a set of principles that underpin its Plan and which illustrate what this bold vision means for Alberta.

- **Everyone has access to safe, affordable, permanent housing.**

  Every Albertan has a permanent place to live – a place that is secure and stable, and where necessary, barrier-free. A permanent place they can call a home.

- **Addressing root causes of homelessness is essential to ending homelessness.**

  The challenges that contribute to homelessness – be it poverty, mental illness, physical illness, addiction, or others – are effectively addressed to help Albertans achieve stability and to prevent homelessness from occurring.

- **Preventing and ending homelessness is a shared responsibility of all orders of government, the community, the corporate sector, service providers, and citizens.**

  Homelessness isn't ended through Alberta government action alone. An ongoing spirit of partnership among governments and communities – including businesses, not-for-profit agencies, and private citizens – helps prevent and end homelessness in Alberta communities.

- **Programs and services are evidence-informed in their planning, and demonstrate measurable outcomes.**

  Effective programs and services prevent further homelessness from occurring, and help those who are homeless return to housing stability. Good information and research data about homelessness ensures that programs and services are efficient in their operation and effective at achieving their objectives. Staff of homeless serving agencies need training and professional development to build capacity to deliver on these objectives.

- **Current essential services and supports are maintained during the transition to permanent housing.**

  Homeless Albertans are re-housed and are provided with the opportunity to access services and supports that are contemporary, adequate, and effective in helping them achieve stability and maintain housing.

- **Goals and initiatives are client-centered and community-driven.**

  Each community faces unique challenges. Each needs flexibility to address those challenges in ways that work best for that community, and are most effective for its homeless and at-risk residents. Action on homelessness must be community-led.

- **Funding is long-term, predictable, and aligned with a community plan to end homelessness.**

  Community plans to end homelessness are supported with predictable funding that helps municipalities and community-based organizations implement outcome-driven programs, services and initiatives that prevent and end homelessness.

V.
A Plan For Alberta

OVERVIEW

It seems like a daunting challenge: ending homeless by 2019. It certainly won't be easy. It will take strong commitment, continued investment, and shared vision on the part of governments, communities and citizens. But it can be done.

Many other jurisdictions and cities in North America have developed and implemented plans to end homelessness in their communities, with encouraging results. The ideas, approaches and lessons in those plans have helped inform the development of the Plan for Alberta.

The Plan for Alberta is also based on the considerable work done by Alberta's communities to end homelessness, and it is a plan that **supports their efforts.**

Due to the nature of the challenge, the diversity of local conditions, and the need for creativity and innovation on the front lines of service, **action on homelessness must be led at the community level.**

The Secretariat believes the role of the province is not to second-guess or eclipse community plans, but instead, to undertake integrated province-wide actions that will help communities achieve success in their efforts. The province can do this both directly, by coordinating appropriate funding and resources; and indirectly, by ensuring government policies and practices do not contribute to further homelessness.

A HOUSING FIRST PHILOSOPHY

The heart of the Plan for Alberta is based on a *housing first* philosophy – a philosophy that has proven successful across North America.

Adopting a housing first philosophy will require a wholesale shift in thinking among governments, communities and homeless-serving agencies. This is because it involves a fundamental change in the way homeless citizens are served and assisted.

As noted earlier, homelessness is often accompanied by other challenges, such as mental illness, addiction, a lack of financial resources or under-developed life skills. Once an individual or family has fallen into homelessness, these and other challenges cumulatively act as barriers to re-housing:

- Without a stable home, accessing financial assistance and other supports is difficult; but without assistance, it is difficult to secure a stable home.

- The lack of a home can exacerbate problematic conditions and cause further deterioration in physical and mental health.

- Treatment and supports are less effective.

- Personal security can be compromised.

- Although available as an option, supportive housing facilities sometimes stipulate conditions for admission; those who are unable to meet the conditions face another barrier to housing.

Ultimately, a homeless individual or family can end up trapped in a system that causes them to become chronically homeless.

The housing first philosophy breaks this cycle of homelessness. The overall goal is to move a homeless client quickly into permanent housing with supports and move them to greater self-reliance.

Top priority is given to **rapid re-housing** of homeless Albertans into permanent housing. Permanent housing doesn't mean a shelter. It means a secure home using a housing option that's appropriate for the circumstances of the individual or family.

This doesn't mean that Alberta's emergency shelters will completely disappear. These and other emergency services will still be needed for families or individuals who fall into crisis. However, under a housing first philosophy, the role of emergency services and shelters will be to facilitate a rapid exit out of homelessness and into permanent housing.

As a homeless individual or family is re-housed, **client-centered supports** are made readily available to them. These supports provide the individual or family with the opportunity to secure the means to maintain their housing and restore their stability. This helps prevent them from falling back into homelessness.

The level of support will vary. Some individuals and families may need only a little support to help them stabilize in their new housing. Some may require modest levels of support from time to time. Others will need robust, ongoing support in order to remain stable in their housing and avoid becoming homeless again.

Skilled case management plays an important part in providing these supports. Case management involves working with a homeless client to identify the challenges they face. Once these are identified, case management is made available to the client to connect them with appropriate supports that can help them achieve housing stability. This can include employment or assistance benefits, mental health treatment, addictions treatment, counselling, financial assistance, skills training, or other services and resources. Case management recognizes that each homeless individual or family is unique and requires personal attention. It is critical that case managers need to be specifically educated and trained for this role.

The Plan for Alberta envisions that Alberta communities will include and employ a housing first philosophy in their plans to end homelessness. The Plan calls for province-wide initiatives that will coordinate and fund homeless-serving systems based on this approach. It sets new expectations for governments, communities and agencies, requiring all partners to re-tool their operations and goal-setting. And it focuses on achieving outcomes that will shift provincial thinking from managing homelessness to *ending* homelessness.

The elements of the Plan are centered on 5 priority areas for action:

- **Better information** – Collecting, researching and sharing essential information that focuses on outcomes.

- **Aggressive assistance** – Making sure Albertans have the resources they need to secure and keep stable homes.

- **Coordinated systems** – Ensuring governments, agencies, and communities work together in an integrated, efficient way towards shared objectives.

- **More housing options** – Increasing the quantity and variety of housing options so that every Albertan has a home.

- **Effective policies** – Implementing government policies that bring down barriers to re-housing and actively promote the goal of ending homelessness.

Better information

Effectively taking action to end homelessness starts with reliable, meaningful information about the homeless. Better data yields better results. It helps us answer key questions such as:

- How many Albertans are homeless and where are they?

- How have people come into the homeless-serving system?

- What factors are contributing to homelessness?

- Which strategies are most effective in assisting which type of homeless?

- Are investments and initiatives achieving the desired outcomes?

- How can resources be most efficiently allocated?

Information also helps homeless-serving agencies provide more effective support to Alberta's homeless. Data is gathered on the front lines when homeless Albertans come into contact with the homeless system, such as at an emergency shelter.

In order for data to be useful it needs to be collected in consistent ways and analyzed using defensible, reliable methods. By employing appropriate data standards and allocating resources to research, better information about homelessness will identify solutions and best practices; better inform planning efforts; and help Alberta measure progress and success as it works towards ending homelessness.

STRATEGY #1:

Develop standards for data collection about homelessness, including the use of common definitions, methods and counting.

There is a need to develop common standards regarding data collection and reporting on homelessness in Alberta. Presently no Alberta-wide standards exist. Definitions and terms used in measuring homelessness differ between agencies, making data comparisons imprecise. Counting methods vary widely among communities, making it impossible to obtain an accurate tally of the number of homeless Albertans. Data gathering approaches are also inconsistent, sometimes resulting in gaps of information.

Similarly, homeless-serving, municipal and local agencies are faced with data reporting requirements from the federal, provincial governments that are complex, onerous, inconsistent, redundant, and frequently of questionable use. An agency will often receive funding from multiple sources. This can include multiple ministries of the same government, which each later demand separate and different reporting from the agency. Although there have been efforts to streamline reporting, much work still needs to be done.

In tandem with the development of a new information system (see Strategy #2), the Alberta government will work with communities and homeless-serving agencies to develop common standards for data collection and reporting. This will include standard definitions and counting methods regarding homelessness. It will also include a determination of *what* data needs to be collected, *whether* certain data collection is meaningful, and *how* data should be shared in order to protect a client's privacy while improving the effectiveness of services.

Work will also be undertaken to streamline reporting standards so that agencies need only submit one consistent set of reports to the Alberta government. This will be done with a view to the reporting requirements of other governments (i.e. federal, municipal) in order to minimize the burden placed on homeless-serving agencies.

STRATEGY #2:

Establish a provincial electronic information management system and provide funding for its deployment.

Alberta needs to implement a homelessness information management system. Currently a number of different data systems are in use, making reporting and data gathering less efficient. A central system will facilitate more consistent information collection, and will make sharing and analyzing information easier.

Since a province-wide information management system is an immediate priority, the Secretariat believes that a web-based IT solution should be adopted, rather than the creation of a mandated software system. A web-based approach would enable agencies to easily input data to a central, provincial-level system, no matter where they are located or what computer software system they currently use. There are several software products in use across North America and these will be evaluated for their adaptability and suitability based on Alberta's requirements.

Alberta's provincial data collection system needs to be robust and flexible, allowing for changes down the road. It must have the ability to track case management and identify how clients are entering the homeless system. It should allow for import and export of data in a meaningful way. It must have a user-friendly interface so that it is simple to use and understand. It must also be inherently easy to learn. Social service providers are already facing high demands on their time and labour, and must not be burdened with complex training requirements for a new system.

The provincial data collection system must also be affordable. The Alberta government will fund the system's development, implementation and training, and will engage communities in this process.

STRATEGY #3:

Establish a research arm to inform policy development and share best practices.

There is a need to increase research capacity regarding homelessness, including research on the factors that contribute to homelessness; best practices in addressing homelessness; and analysis about the state of the homeless in Alberta. Building and sharing knowledge will be essential in order to improve and adjust policies, programs and approaches aimed at ending homelessness. This includes education and training of current staff and the future workforce in homeless-serving organizations.

The creation of a research arm will aid Alberta's efforts to end homelessness through:

- analyzing homelessness data gathered within Alberta and evaluating progress and program effectiveness;

- conducting coordinated research among associated research partners;

- reviewing national and international research and providing evidence-based advice to governments, agencies and communities;

- sharing best practices and evidence-informed strategies;

- contributing to ongoing planning and policy development;

An appropriate model and structure for the research arm will be developed – this may be as part of the Secretariat, a new independent institute, or a new program at an existing research institution. Funding will be identified for the research arm as part of the Plan's implementation.

STRATEGY #4:

Measure outcomes and track progress on a regular, ongoing basis.

The Plan for Alberta is outcome-focused. Alberta needs to establish evidence-based, measurable outcomes if it hopes to achieve success in reducing and ultimately ending homelessness in the province.

Regularly measuring outcomes will help the Alberta government, municipal governments, community-based organizations, and homeless-serving agencies understand whether Alberta is realizing progress in its efforts. It will help inform ways in which the Plan should be adjusted, and will identify areas that require extra work.

Outcome measures are also important for remaining accountable to Albertans. Albertans deserve to know how their tax dollars are being spent and whether those dollars are buying change. Albertans also benefit from regular reporting that helps them understand how investments are translating into success.

As part of implementing this Plan, the Secretariat will establish evidence-based outcome measures that will be regularly examined and reported to Albertans. The Secretariat will use these measures in reviewing and assessing the Plan for Alberta each year, to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

Aggressive assistance

Alberta needs to ensure it offers aggressive supports that:

- help **prevent homelessness** from occurring;

- provide **emergency response** services to individuals and families who fall into homelessness, and;

- help re-housed clients **achieve housing stability.**

Effective preventive programs are important for stabilizing those who are at risk of homelessness. Short-term income gaps or unaffordable rents can push an

individual or family into homelessness. A range of other challenges, such as addictions issues, mental health issues, or family violence, can also place an individual or family at great risk of becoming homeless. If Albertans can secure the assistance they need quickly and readily, they can avoid falling into homelessness.

For those who fall into homelessness, emergency response efforts need to work aggressively in providing relief. This includes moving people rapidly out of homelessness and into permanent housing. Once a homeless individual or family is re-housed, effective supports need to be available for them to readily access.

Provincial programs and services play a major role in preventing, responding to, and ending homelessness. Programs and services must be *available* to those in need and must be *adequate* to meet their needs. They must respond to increases in Alberta's cost of living and account for unique local market conditions, such as those in the Fort McMurray region. They must also be *accessible,* with complementary eligibility criteria that avoid trapping a client between services.

Most importantly, Alberta government programs and services need to be aligned so that they operate in a coordinated fashion, working together towards a shared goal of ensuring Albertans can obtain adequate resources to secure and keep a home.

STRATEGY #5:

Continue employing emergency assistance programs in order to prevent homelessness.

A critical component of ending homelessness is making sure that more individuals and families do not slip into homelessness when they are at high risk of doing so. When an individual or family hits a financial crisis, the risk of losing the home is heightened. Rental shortfalls or utility arrears can quickly push an individual or family into homelessness.

The Alberta government currently offers a number of assistance programs aimed at helping Albertans who are at risk of losing their homes. Recently, in response to the recommendations of the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force, two additional programs have been established:

> *Homeless and Eviction Prevention Fund* – This program provides a range of short-term assistance to any Alberta individual or family at risk of losing their rental home, including: payment of rental arrears, utility arrears, and rent shortfalls.

Direct to Tenant Rent Supplement – This subsidy is paid directly to an eligible tenant to assist with rental costs, and is delivered by local housing management bodies. The rent supplement covers the shortfall between the negotiated market rate and 30% of a household's adjusted income.

The Alberta government will annually review homeless prevention programs in order to ensure they are meeting their objectives as Alberta's economy continues to grow. Where necessary, these programs will be reinforced so that they continue to effectively prevent further homelessness from occurring. The eligibility requirements of these programs will also be reviewed as part of the comprehensive review of Alberta government assistance programs (see Strategy #6).

STRATEGY #6:

Reformulate Alberta government assistance programs to ensure they achieve the coordinated objective of providing Albertans with housing stability.

An array of Alberta government assistance programs and services are offered to Albertans. Under a housing first philosophy, these programs and services play critical roles in ending homelessness.

First, they help prevent further homelessness from occurring by providing assistance to Albertans in need. Second, they provide support to homeless individuals and families as they are rapidly re-housed, helping the individual or family re-establish stability. Albertans who face homelessness often require supports such as:

- Income support programs
- Employment and training services
- Child and family support services
- Disability support services
- Settlement services and language-training
- Addiction treatment and support
- Mental health treatment and support
- Credit counselling

However, there is a concern that the eligibility criteria of these programs are not aligned in ways that allow them to work together. Too often an Albertan who is in need of assistance faces a maze of qualifying thresholds and requirements which can be incompatible, result in claw-backs, or create gaps into which the person falls. In some cases a person becomes "double-binded" in the system, where accepting assistance from one program disqualifies them from getting much-needed help from another.

Alberta government assistance programs should all be aligned so that they work towards a common goal of ensuring a person can secure the assistance needed to maintain housing stability.

A comprehensive review of the Alberta government's assistance programs will be undertaken to assess their availability, adequacy, and interaction, with a view to:

- Adjusting eligibility requirements so that Albertans needing help can get the assistance they require;

- Eliminating gaps in coverage so that Albertans in need are not lost in the system;

- Ensuring support levels are appropriate and effective;

- Simplifying application procedures so that programs are easier to access; and

- Reformulating programs so that clients are not placed in "catch 22" situations when they seek assistance.

The stories of the homeless…finding success through a housing first approach offered by Jasper Place Health & Wellness Center in Edmonton!

Barb has spent the last three years living on the streets of Edmonton.

Barb is 32 years old has a severe crack addiction and suffers from serious mental health issues.

Barb was sexually abused by her father from an early age.

She cannot work and can barely function in society and has a deep distrust of the "system".

Barb started using the new rapid housing services of the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Center in September 2006. She has never been assessed for her mental illness and after many months of encouragement the workers there were able to have Barb begin the process of being assessed.

After many sessions Barb received a letter from a psychiatrist saying she was unable to work. An appointment with Alberta Employment and Immigration was booked. On the day of her appointment she met with her assigned worker and they put Barb on a temporary medical. (This medical pays for all of her medical needs, her first months rent and $320 a month to live on).

She was also able to access the Homeless Eviction Prevention Fund. That same day the rapid housing worker made an appointment to view an apartment for rent. They took Barb to the appointment to meet the landlord and he agreed to accept Barb as a tenant. Two days later she moved into her first permanent home after 3 years on the streets.

Coordinated systems

Moving to a housing first philosophy across Alberta necessitates a fundamental shift in the way mainstream systems operate. It requires that Alberta government departments, institutions, and homeless-serving agencies change the focus of their business goals from *managing* homelessness to *ending* homelessness. No matter where homeless clients come into contact with these systems, they must be rapidly moved to permanent housing and efficiently connected with appropriate supports.

This requires a higher degree of coordination between systems at the provincial and local levels.

- There must be alignment between provincial and community plans to end homelessness.
- Community plans need to include housing first philosophies and key practices such as case management.

- Service must be client-centered, with government departments and agencies working collaboratively to easily connect clients with appropriate assistance.

- Provincial institutions such as hospitals and corrections facilities must work with local homeless-serving agencies to ensure no one leaves their care into homelessness or remains trapped in homelessness.

The work of homeless-serving not-for-profit agencies will also need to be coordinated, since these agencies play a large role in the homeless system. Agencies will need to work towards achieving Alberta's objectives in ways that are consistent with the Plan for Alberta. To achieve this coordination, funding to homeless-serving agencies will need to be outcome-driven, while providing adequate and appropriate resources to help agencies address the challenges and pressures they face.

STRATEGY #7:

Make it easier for clients to connect with Alberta government programs and services.

An Albertan requiring assistance faces a dizzying array of programs and services from various ministries with separate application forms and different intake points. The system is difficult to navigate. Many Albertans are uncertain what government services are available and how to access them. For Albertans dealing with poverty, mental illness, chronic addiction, crisis or other challenges, and for many youth and seniors, accessing services can be a particularly daunting process.

Clients often find themselves directed to numerous service delivery agents at various locations. At each intake point, they must repeat and re-describe their circumstances and histories to a new service agent in order to access a particular service. The client's journey to secure assistance involves commencing a number of separate, disconnected processes as if each was their first encounter with the Alberta government. This is inefficient, cumbersome and exhausting for clients, and not cost-effective for taxpayers.

In keeping with a housing first philosophy, programs and services will need to become client-centred. In a client-centred approach, the individual client's needs are identified and assessed; a determination is then made regarding how assistance can best be provided, taking into account the client's circumstances and history. The client-centred approach works like a partnership, with both the client and the service agent working together to ensure the client receives appropriate assistance.

The service agent serves as a system navigator, connecting the client with appropriate programs, services and supports. This integrated approach eliminates the need for the client to commence distinct, disconnected processes. Though not necessarily government employees, system navigators should be armed with knowledge about Alberta government programs and services, helping to make accessing assistance an easier process.

An assessment will be undertaken across relevant ministries to identify the key points of service interaction with Albertans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. (These include but may not be limited to: Aboriginal Relations, Children and Youth Services; Education; Employment and Immigration; Health and Wellness; Housing and Urban Affairs; Justice and Attorney General; Seniors and Community Supports; Service Alberta; and Solicitor General and Public Security.)

As part of implementing the Plan, ways of integrating these key interaction points to achieve client-centered system navigation will be examined. Different models and approaches of system navigation will be examined and considered.

STRATEGY #8:

Review and revise funding and administrative arrangements with homeless-serving agencies.

Not-for-profit social service agencies play a key role in the homeless-serving system. Many not-for-profit agencies are currently under strain, facing increased demand for their services as they struggle with higher operating costs. Costs such as rent, utilities and insurance continue to increase, impacting agency budgets. Salaries, benefits and working conditions are largely uncompetitive in the not-for-profit sector, making it difficult for agencies to recruit staff.

Supporting agencies in their work is an important role for the Alberta government. However, support needs to be provided in ways that encourage agencies to shift their programming to a housing first philosophy.

Homeless-serving agencies too often focus their operations on managing homelessness rather than working to end homelessness. This is largely due to the urgent nature of the problem – faced with high demand and limited resources, agencies spend most of their time in "triage" situations.

However, it is also due in part to the nature of funding arrangements. Contracts often provide funding to agencies based on inputs – such as the number of shelter beds, or the number of persons received into the homelessness system – rather than on outcomes and objectives.

As Alberta adopts a housing first philosophy, all partners in the homeless-serving system will have to adjust their work focus accordingly. Agencies will need to focus on rapidly moving clients into permanent housing, and making supports available to clients that will help them achieve housing stability. Effective case management will need to be provided and employed. Greater inter-agency collaboration will need to be fostered.

Funding from the Alberta government will need to support those agencies that help homeless Albertans transition to and remain in stable housing. In keeping with the principle that action on homelessness must be led at the community level, the Alberta government will ideally provide funding to community-based organizations. Community-based organizations will then have responsibility for deploying resources in ways that coordinate the homeless systems in their communities and achieve outcomes.

In implementing the Plan for Alberta, new funding models will be examined. Consistent with the outcome-driven nature of the Plan, funding models will be based on measuring outcomes rather than inputs. They will also be designed to encourage and reward work approaches that are consistent with a housing first philosophy.

As Alberta transitions to a housing first philosophy, not-for-profit homeless-serving agencies will continue to be supported. Ways will be identified to help agencies address the challenges they face. This may include:

- providing resources to help agencies address specific pressures;
- providing resources to increase skill levels and training of agency staff; or
- alleviating agencies of onerous administrative and financial burdens to help their resources go further.

STRATEGY #9:

Develop approaches to prevent provincial systems from discharging clients into homelessness.

Many Albertans enter the homeless system from other public institutions and systems. These include the corrections system, foster care, and health facilities. This is not because other provincial systems are doing a poor job but their mandate ends with the particular services they provide and housing for the homeless is outside that mandate.

The situation is best regarded as a by-product of the lack of integration between provincial systems and institutions. Each system is mandated to perform specific functions and provide specific services. Once a system has fulfilled its function for a particular individual, the individual is discharged from that system. In some cases, the discharged individual does not have a support network or stable home to which they can return. Instead, they enter the homeless system and can become chronically homeless. Some people will end up returning to the provincial system from which they were recently discharged.

Considering a person's housing when planning his or her discharge is necessary to help prevent homelessness. It also has benefits for provincial systems. Studies have shown that providing housing to those who are discharged from hospitals reduces health care use. Similarly, ensuring housing for those discharged from corrections facilities results in decreased recidivism.

Alberta must work to prevent homelessness by ensuring that people in the care of other provincial systems are not being discharged into homelessness.

As part of implementing the Plan, ways will be identified of improving the connections between the homeless-serving system and other provincial systems. Approaches will be developed to help these systems work together in planning discharges and preventing discharges of Albertans into homelessness.

STRATEGY #10:

Support community plans to end homelessness.

The Plan for Alberta is intended to provide province-wide direction and to support community-based plans to end homelessness. Although the province has a strong role to play in coordinating actions and funding initiatives, action on ending homelessness must be led at the community level.

Many community plans have been developed across Alberta. Some efforts have been led by municipal governments, while others have been led by community-based organizations. The nature and extent of homelessness varies from community to community. Consequently, not all plans utilize a 10-year time horizon, nor do they all include identical strategies and priorities.

A mandate of the Secretariat's planning work is to provide a framework to support the efforts of Alberta's municipalities and community-based organizations to address homelessness. The Secretariat believes this is best accomplished by articulating broad provincial direction to help inform municipalities and community-based organizations, and by taking actions at the provincial level that encourage alignment with this direction.

The Plan for Alberta sets a new direction for the province, towards a housing first philosophy. The Secretariat wishes to encourage this approach in local efforts to end homelessness.

To this end, implementation of the Plan will make provision for the support of community plans that include a housing first philosophy and which meet established criteria. These criteria will be developed by the Secretariat, and will be based on best practices that are effective at ending homelessness and which are consistent with a housing first philosophy. Such criteria may include:

- Using outcome-based contracting with homeless-serving agencies and shelters;

- Employing effective case management;

- Placing a focus on rapid re-housing and identifying appropriate local strategies;

- Ensuring adequate supports for specialized groups.

Once developed, criteria will be made publicly available in order to inform municipalities, community-based organizations and agencies in their planning efforts.

The stories of the homeless…finding success through a housing first approach offered by the Buffalo Hotel in Red Deer!

The Buffalo Hotel Housing (a 100 year old former hotel) provides Housing First services to 40 individuals with the greatest need who are currently living on the street. The individuals living on the streets, many struggling with mental illness and/or addictions, often fail to meet the established criteria needed to access available housing and support programs that often have a set of stringent rules that must be followed.

The Buffalo Hotel Housing First service provides the place for chronically homeless individuals to live with a sense of belonging and respect.

"Mary" is a tenant of the Buffalo Hotel Housing First and likes to show her bachelor "apartment" (a former corner room of the hotel) to anyone who is interested. Mary is close to being a senior; is slightly built and showing the difficult life she has lived. Mary enjoys making muffins as she said the other tenants of the Buffalo come to visit her to talk about life and she likes to have muffins for them to show them what 'home' can be like. She loves to show off her unit that she has decorated with items bought at thrift stores to stay within her budget.

Mary stresses how important the support of the staff and their acceptance of each person as an individual worthy of time and attention, with no demands to change is critical to the success of the Buffalo Hotel.

She talks about how she appreciates living independently and being able to have outside friends visit as one might in any "normal" housing. Mary's smile is huge and her pride and sense of home matches that smile.

MORE HOUSING OPTIONS

In order to end homelessness, every Albertan needs to have a home. Under a housing first philosophy, this means that every homeless individual and family requires **permanent housing with supports.**

The degree of support will vary. Chronically homeless clients may need robust, ongoing supports to help them address serious challenges and achieve stability. Others may need intermittent support, such as occasional financial assistance, to maintain their stability. Some will stabilize immediately in a home and require very little support.

Every client, however, will require permanent housing that is appropriate for their needs and circumstances. A range of different housing options will be required, such as:

- Greater availability of existing rental units;
- Construction of new rental units;
- Single room occupancy buildings;
- Room-and-board arrangements;
- Affordable housing.

While housing developments are proposed and approved at the municipal level, the province has a strong role to play in determining province-wide housing needs and facilitating their creation. The Alberta government can use its financial and policy levers to develop strategies and incentives that will increase the number of housing options through various means.

Alberta can also work with the federal government and municipal governments to identify actions those governments could take to encourage the creation of more housing options in Alberta.

STRATEGY #11:

Increase the availability of permanent housing with supports.

A greater number of housing options must be made available in order to facilitate rapid re-housing of homeless Albertans and prevent further homelessness from occurring.

Rental housing is an important component of the housing mix. With purchase affordability in Alberta currently low, the number of Albertans demanding rental accommodation has increased. The current market conditions give landlords the ability to select preferred tenants for their buildings. This makes it difficult for homeless and at-risk Albertans to secure rental accommodation, especially those from specialized groups.

Most landlords will be prepared to rent to Albertans facing special challenges, provided the landlords are guaranteed that rents will be paid and that tenants will be adequately supported. The development of incentive programs can build productive relationships with landlords and encourage landlords to make more existing rental accommodation available.

Developers also play an important role in creating more housing options, including affordable housing, new rental units, and other housing options for specialized groups such as seniors, youth, those with addictions, or those with mental illness or physical illness. The use of financial incentives, tax measures, or other strategies may be needed to encourage developers to create a mix of housing options.

As part of implementing the Plan, the Secretariat will study the range of housing options required in Alberta, and examine possible strategies the Alberta government could employ to encourage their development and availability.

STRATEGY #12:

Work with other levels of government to create additional housing options.

There may also be ways in which the federal governments and municipal governments could encourage landlords and developers to create additional housing options.

Municipal governments have considerable tools at their disposal, since most housing developments are approved at the municipal level. Changes to municipal bylaws, zoning and building codes, for example, could:

- facilitate the creation of more secondary suites in homes, bringing more rental accommodation to market;

- allow for higher-density developments, enabling better economies of scale and making homes for rent and purchase more affordable;

- free up land for the development of more affordable housing stock; and

- provide property tax incentives.

The federal government could also play a role in encouraging greater availability of housing options. Its most effective tool is the *Income Tax Act,* which could be used to provide tax incentives to developers and landlords.

As part of implementing the Plan, the Secretariat will examine possible ways that the federal government and Alberta municipal governments could encourage the creation of more housing options in Alberta.

EFFECTIVE POLICIES

Government policies have an impact on the success of efforts to fight and end homelessness.

Rules that function very well for most Albertans can be major barriers for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Innovative solutions need to be found so that government policies accomplish their objectives without hindering those in need of help.

Regulatory barriers can also exacerbate homelessness by making it difficult to develop more affordable housing options. Inefficient approval processes, process delays, and red tape result in frustration for developers and landlords, and contribute to higher housing costs. Policies must be reviewed in conjunction with other governments, the private sector and the not-for-profit sector, with a view to eliminating these kinds of barriers.

Policy-setting is also one of two major tools the Alberta government can utilize to bring about a coordinated province-wide housing first philosophy. (The other major tool is funding arrangements.) Legislative and regulatory changes can influence the behaviour of homeless-serving systems, helping to foster the operational changes needed to shift our thinking from managing homelessness to ending it.

STRATEGY #13:

Shift expectations and develop outcome measures for emergency shelters in Alberta.

Adopting a housing first philosophy across the province will necessitate a shift in mandate for emergency shelters in Alberta. Shelters can no longer be regarded as a housing option where Albertans stay for long periods of time. The focus of shelters will need to be firmly placed on re-housing people, not warehousing them. Shelters will continue to play an important role in emergency response, but they will need to shift their operations so that they working to rapidly re-house homeless Albertans.

Accordingly, standards for Alberta emergency shelters will be adjusted to reflect Alberta's move to a housing first philosophy. These standards will be implemented over time and will help shelters evolve their operations. Standards are likely to include provisions that:

- stipulate a maximum length of stay in shelters;
- require that case management be provided in shelters (though not necessarily by the shelter itself);
- expect shelters to move people through to rapid re-housing.

As homelessness is ended in Alberta, there will be a reduced need for shelter spaces. Where feasible, shelter infrastructure will find new life as other housing options.

STRATEGY #14:

Develop approaches for homeless-serving agencies to share client information.

A cornerstone of a housing first philosophy is the use of effective case management to connect homeless Albertans with the supports needed to help re-house them and help them achieve stability. Inter-agency collaboration is an important aspect of this approach as is education and training of the staff.

Homeless-serving agencies and program providers need to share information so that supports are integrated, and are delivered efficiently and effectively. However, the province's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* can make sharing information a difficult exercise. While the protection of privacy of individuals and families must be preserved, it is important that privacy regulations do not act as a barrier to getting Albertans the assistance they need.

As part of implementing the Plan, ways of enabling efficient sharing of client information will be examined while continuing to protect the privacy of clients.
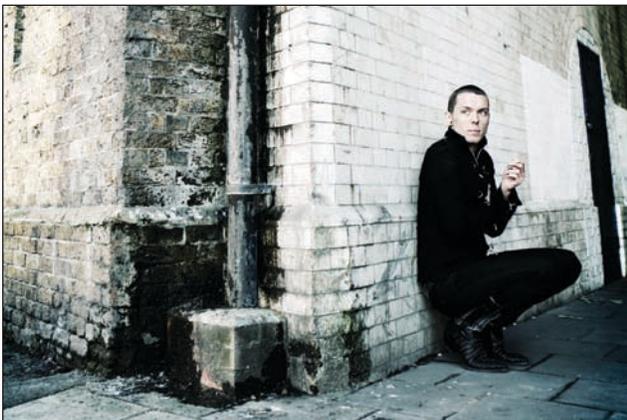
STRATEGY #15:

Simplify personal identification requirements for accessing programs and services.

A major problem that confronts many homeless Albertans is personal identification requirements. Personal identification barriers can cumulatively create a domino effect that makes it harder for a homeless Albertan to secure resources for a home.

Without official identification, a homeless person can not open a bank account at a major financial institution. This forces them to cash assistance cheques at alternative lending institutions which charge higher fees, thereby reducing their resources and compromising the effectiveness of the assistance. Identification is also required to access a range of other privately and publicly delivered services.

Some government services require proof of Alberta residency for a minimum period of time, usually in the form of an addressed piece of mail or utility bill. This can prevent homeless Albertans from obtaining the services they need to achieve stability.

The Secretariat will consult with community-based organizations and social service agencies to identify personal identification barriers, and examine possible ways of working around or eliminating these barriers.

STRATEGY #16:

Examine ways of reducing poverty to help prevent homelessness.

Poverty is often a factor in cases of homelessness, albeit to varying degrees. Policy approaches to reduce poverty can help reduce instances of homelessness.

It is important to note that reducing poverty is not simply about more "handouts" and larger subsidy cheques. It is about helping Albertans earn and retain greater income, through supportive programs and other efforts, so they can keep up with rising costs of living and afford to keep a home. Many Albertans who face homelessness are participants in the labour force; for these Albertans, a minor illness or a single missed paycheque can trigger an episode of homelessness. Lifting more Albertans out of poverty will make a difference in preventing and ending homelessness.

All governments have a hand in reducing poverty, through tax reduction, program assistance, and other measures.

As part of implementing the Plan, the Secretariat will examine ways in which poverty impacts homelessness, and will encourage further study by the Alberta government to determine ways of reducing these impacts.

STRATEGY #17:

Identify legislative and regulatory changes to advance the objectives and elements of the Plan for Alberta.

In addition to those already identified, there may be other legislative and regulatory issues that present barriers or challenges to addressing and ending homelessness.

Issues could include:

- Lowering market barriers that stand in the way of creating more housing options;

- Simplifying application processes for Alberta programs and services;

- Streamlining approval processes in order to minimize costly delays in projects;

- Providing protection or financial recourse for homeless-serving agencies that engage in subletting arrangements;

As part of implementing the Plan for Alberta, the Secretariat will examine ways in which legislation and regulation changes could advance the Plan's objectives and strategies.

VI.
Staying On Track

The Plan for Alberta is a bold plan to end homelessness in Alberta. It won't be accomplished overnight. The Plan is a strategic road map for 10 years of action, and detailed work will take place over the entire length of the Plan.

The strategic elements of the Plan have been prioritized for action. As funding commitments are established, the Secretariat will identify specific activities and timelines for each area of work.

Work on some elements will begin immediately, over the first year of the Plan. This includes the implementation of an information management system; new data collection standards; and the establishment of a research arm, in order to inform future work with better data about homelessness.

Increasing the availability of housing options will be an immediate priority, as will supporting community plans to end homelessness. Work will also commence at making Alberta government programs and services more easily accessible to Albertans.

During the first 12 months the Secretariat will also undertake detailed review of operating and capital funding requirements of the Plan for Alberta (see Section 7, "An Affordable Plan").

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES – THE FIRST 12 MONTHS

Strategy #1: Develop standards for data collection about homelessness, including the use of common definitions, methods and counting.

Strategy #2: Establish a common electronic information management system and provide funding for its deployment.

Strategy #3: Establish a research arm to inform policy development and share best practices.

Strategy #7: Make it easier for clients to connect with Alberta government programs and services.

Strategy #10: Support community plans to end homelessness.

Strategy #11: Increase the availability of permanent housing with supports.

Strategy #15: Simplify personal identification requirements for accessing programs and services.

In the short term, as better data collection is implemented, the Secretariat will develop outcome measures based on evidence. These outcomes will be measured regularly to track progress on the Plan and will be reported to Albertans.

Data and evidence will also inform the Secretariat's work on other strategic elements of the Plan. These include reviewing emergency assistance programs; revising funding arrangements with agencies; and developing approaches to prevent system discharges into homelessness.

Over the longer-term implementation of the Plan, the availability of housing options will continue to be increased. The operational focus of emergency shelters will be shifted over time to adopt a housing first philosophy. Ongoing identification and removal of legislative and regulatory barriers will also occur over the life of the Plan.

SHORTER-TERM PRIORITIES – THE NEXT 24 MONTHS

Strategy #4: Measure outcomes and track progress on a regular, ongoing basis.

Strategy #5: Continue employing emergency assistance programs in order to prevent homelessness.

Strategy #6: Reformulate Alberta government assistance programs to ensure they achieve the coordinated objective of providing Albertans with housing stability.

Strategy #8: Review and revise funding and administrative arrangements with homeless-serving agencies.

Strategy #9: Develop approaches to prevent provincial systems from discharging clients into homelessness.

Strategy #14: Develop approaches for homeless-serving agencies to share client information.

LONGER-TERM PRIORITIES – ONGOING EFFORTS

Strategy #12: Work with other levels of government to create additional housing options.

Strategy #13: Shift expectations and develop outcome measures for emergency shelters in Alberta.

Strategy #16: Examine ways of reducing poverty to help prevent homelessness.

Strategy #17: Identify legislative and regulatory changes to advance the objectives and elements of the Plan for Alberta.

VII.
An Affordable Plan

Ending homelessness in Alberta will require ongoing financial commitment from the Alberta government, but at a level that is affordable and fair for taxpayers.

The Secretariat has attempted to estimate the operating and capital costs of the Plan for Alberta based on research and data that is currently available

The Plan for Alberta requires a wholesale shift in the approach to homelessness. Instead of spending money on managing the homeless, dollars will be invested to rapidly re-house homeless clients and deliver effective support to these clients to help them achieve stability. New funding will be used to bring about this philosophical change in the homeless-serving system.

Existing funding relating to homelessness will also need to continue. Funding for emergency assistance, such as rent supplements, will play an ongoing role in preventing homelessness. These programs may require incremental funding adjustments to ensure they continue meeting their objectives. New dollars may also be needed to augment other social programs across the Alberta government, in order to help prevent homelessness from occurring in the future.

Re-housing the homeless

In order to facilitate the rapid re-housing of homeless clients, substantial capital investment will be required. Table 2 outlines estimated capital costs of the Plan.

Although much existing housing stock (such as existing apartment buildings) will be used to increase the availability of housing options, there will be a need to create additional spaces.

For costing purposes, it is estimated that 8,000 new units will need to be created. This will require capital investments of $1.258 billion over the 10-year life of the Plan.

The actual total number of new units required over the 10-year Plan will depend on the availability of appropriate market housing and the effectiveness of prevention programs. During the first 12 months of implementing the Plan, the Secretariat will undertake detailed review of capital funding requirements and the development of a new homeless information data collection system.

Estimated unit costs vary depending on the category of homeless client. The higher cost of housing chronic homeless reflects the fact that these clients are often difficult to house due to other attendant challenges they face. Transient and employable homeless clients, by contrast, are often easier to house.

Table 2: New Capital Funding by Category

Category	Estimated number	Spaces required	Unit cost	Total 10-Year Capital Investment
Chronic homeless	3,000	2,500	$200,000	$500 million
Transient homeless	5,500	4,400	$120,000	$528 million
Employable homeless	1,500	300	$100,000	$30 million
Homeless families	1,000	800	$250,000	$200 million
Total capital costs				**$1.258 billion**

SUPPORTS TO MAINTAIN HOUSING STABILITY

The Plan contemplates that communities will take the lead in action on homelessness. As such, annual operating funding will support evidence-informed, community-led support programs that are compatible with the housing first philosophy. Table 3 outlines estimated operating funding requirements of the Plan.

Successful outcomes are being demonstrated by a number of initiatives that some Alberta communities are currently piloting. These programs employ housing first philosophies and serve as a basis for province-wide action:

- **Pathways to Housing** is a low-barrier program that targets chronic homeless individuals, and homeless individuals who face multiple barriers to housing. Clients are provided with permanent housing and wrap-around support by an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team of professionals on a 24/7 basis.

- **Rapid Exit** seeks to reduce the amount of time that individuals and families spend in homelessness by re-housing single individuals or families in rental accommodations and providing on-going support. Landlords are recruited and supported by the service agency.

- **Streets to Homes** provides intensive case management to homeless individuals, locates permanent housing and provides on-going support through a network of partner agencies.

These support programs are demonstrated best practices that align with Alberta's 10-year Plan. The per-client cost estimates from these community-led pilot projects have been used to estimate the operating costs of the 10-year Plan, based on the estimated province-wide number of homeless clients in each category. The variance in per-client costs between categories reflects the different levels of support that each category of client requires. Chronic homeless clients require robust supports in order to maintain housing stability, while employable clients typically require modest supports to stabilize once re-housed.

The Plans operating budget over the 10-year Plan also includes initiatives such as: new research staffing and training support for homeless-serving providers. These elements will be essential for augmenting the capacity of community-based service providers to administer re-housing and support programs; and for gathering and analyzing homeless data in order to track progress and measure outcomes.

Table 3: *New Operating Funding by Category*

Category	Estimated number	Initiatives	Annual cost per client	Total 10-Year Operating Cost
Chronic homeless	3,000	Pathways to Housing	$ 34,000	$ 1.02 billion
Transient homeless	5,500	Rapid Exit (singles) Streets to Homes	$ 14,000	$ 770 million
Employable homeless	1,500	Employment readiness Affordable rental	$ 6,000	$ 90 million
Homeless families	1,000	Rapid Exit (families)	$ 17,800	$ 178 million
Subtotal operating costs for supports				**$ 2.058 billion**

Total Direct Funding for 10-Year Plan

The total **direct investment** required to implement the Plan for Alberta over 10 years is estimated at $3.316 billion. Total direct investments are outlined in Table 4.

Direct investments will include $3.316 billion in capital and operating support to re-house homeless Albertans.

This direct investment will achieve the following outcomes:

- Build 8,000 new units to re-house homeless Albertans.

- Re-house 11,000 homeless Albertans.

- Provide support to re-housed Albertans to restore their stability and prevent them from becoming homeless again.

- Build a province wide data collection and reporting system to measure the successful implementation of the plan

Table 4: *Total Direct Investments Required*

	Total 10-Year Investment
Capital costs to build housing units for homeless	$ 1.258 billion
Operating costs for supports to homeless	$ 2.058 billion
Total costs to re-house and support homeless	**$ 3.316 billion**

Preventing future homelessness

To effectively end homelessness in Alberta, the Alberta government will also need to engage in robust efforts to prevent future homelessness from occurring. Therefore, additional costs may accrue to other government programs, outside the Plan for Alberta. For example, existing income assistance programs delivered by Alberta Employment and Immigration may require incremental new funding to provide a higher level of assistance to those Albertans who are at risk of homelessness.

Investing appropriate dollars in prevention efforts will have an impact on the success of the overall Plan for Alberta. By helping Albertans avoid falling into homelessness, prevention efforts will reduce the number of new clients entering the homeless system. This will translate into an overall reduction in the number of additional housing spaces that must be created.

As part of shorter-term work on implementing the Plan (see Section 6, "Staying on Track"), the adequacy and availability of Alberta government assistance programs will be reviewed. This work will help identify potential investments to augment prevention programming.

BETTER DATA YIELDS BETTER RESULTS

The Secretariat's cost estimates are based on data that is currently available from comparable programs and initiatives within Alberta and across Canada. The estimates therefore come with assumptions and caveats, including:

- The success of various programs may reduce the need for transient housing; data gathering will help determine changes in the transient homeless population.

- Prevention efforts are expected to produce a quick drop in new homeless entering the system. More data is needed to verify this expectation.

- Ramp-up rates in programming will be influenced by the labour market in Alberta; this may present a constraint.

- Modelling numbers assume great success in reducing shelter populations.

- Per-client costs of referenced support programs may be higher in certain communities than in those that are piloting the programs.

- Capital cost estimates are based on an average of 650 square feet per unit at a cost of $230 per square foot, including some of the cost for land. This estimate assumes that supports for inexpensive land will be secured through sources such as municipal contributions, community donations, or tax credits.

- Capital costs assume partnership and leveraging public dollars to resource support from various levels of government and local fund-raising initiatives.

As the Plan for Alberta is implemented, a great deal of work will be undertaken to test the validity of these assumptions. The development and deployment of standardized, province-wide data collection and analysis will help the Secretariat verify figures over time. As better data is gathered and understood, costs will be better refined, and opportunities for cost savings will be identified.

VIII.
Concluding Comments

Ending homelessness won't happen overnight. It will take hard work and commitment on the part of governments, communities, homeless-serving agencies and the private sector. It will also require continuous monitoring and improvement to refine best practices, information and investments.

The work will be difficult, but the benefits will be lasting.

Albertans take pride in their innovation, their courage and their collective community spirit. We're inspired by great challenges and relish great triumphs. Albertans believe in the power of the individual and the right of every Albertan to have the opportunity to realize and maximize their potential.

We also believe in the responsibility of society to help when needed. For a people as proud as ours, the continuation of homelessness is simply not an option.

Homelessness should be ended in this province. It is simply the right thing to do.

The Plan for Alberta, backed by solid investment, will accomplish this bold objective, and will build a stronger, better, prouder Alberta.

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