

LET'S TALK
ENDING
HOMELESSNESS

PRIORITIES + STRATEGIES REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	01
PRIORITIES AT A GLANCE	03
HOUSING PRIORITIES	05
1: INCREASE THE HOUSING SUPPLY	05
2: PROVIDE HOUSING SPECIFIC TO AT-RISK POPULATIONS	07
3: PROTECT + IMPROVE THE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK	10
PREVENTION + SUPPORT PRIORITIES	11
4: IMPROVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE + ELIGIBILITY	11
5: ENHANCE SUPPORT SERVICES	12
6: PROVIDE SUPPORT SERVICES SPECIFIC TO AT-RISK POPULATIONS	13
CAPACITY-BUILDING PRIORITIES	15
7: FACILITATE COLLABORATION	15
8: COORDINATE FUNDING	16
9: ENHANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS	17
CONCLUDING COMMENTS	19



INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This Priorities and Strategies Report is the second of two reports from the Let's Talk Ending Homelessness initiative, prepared for the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH), by CitySpaces Consulting. The strategies in this report build on the first report (Consultation Summary Report, 2013), which outlined the emerging strategies identified by community stakeholders through a series of consultation activities that occurred between October and November, 2013. This report is also informed by an online survey, through which community stakeholders were able to further validate the strategies and identify the top priorities for action in the region.

Based on input received from community stakeholders, as well as Advisory Committee members, this report outlines the recommended priorities and strategies for responding to homelessness in the Metro Vancouver region. These directions are intended to inform the new Regional Homelessness Plan and guide the allocation of federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding¹.

It is anticipated that the RSCH will prepare the draft Regional Homelessness Plan and Implementation Strategy by September, 2014. The final version of the Plan is expected to be completed by December, 2014, followed by community endorsement in June, 2015. Community stakeholders will be consulted on the draft Plan for further input and feedback.

FOCUS AREAS

Discussions from the consultation activities were centred around identifying strategies and priorities to end and prevent homelessness, and were focused on three issue areas: housing first, prevention, and capacity-building. The focus areas in this Priorities and Strategies Report have been adapted to better reflect the community context and participant feedback. As such, the updated focus areas are: Housing, Prevention + Support, and Capacity-Building.

Where a strategy was found to be well suited to more than one focus area, it was identified under only one of the focus areas.

Housing First is:

- Based on the idea that housing is a basic human right.
- An approach to providing access to permanent affordable housing.
- Involves access to community-based services designed to meet individual needs.

There is no requirement for people who are homeless to become "housing ready" before getting permanent housing. They do not need to move through the continuum of shelters and transitional housing, or be engaged in mental health or addictions treatment programs, prior to being housed. Housing First is based on the idea that issues that may have contributed to a person's homelessness, such as a lack of employment, addiction, poor mental or physical health, can be best addressed once a person has stable housing.

Housing First can be delivered in a number of ways, ranging from scattered site, self-contained units to dedicated buildings.

¹ The Regional Homelessness Plan will draw on additional information and consultation as part of the background review and preparation for the Plan.

HOUSING

For the purpose of this report, “Housing” refers to both the supply of new units as well as access to existing units. This may include increasing the number of non-market housing units; maintaining and improving existing non-market housing units; and increasing access and support to private market housing. This includes supporting “Housing First” approaches that involve giving people direct access to permanent housing, along with the services they need and want to maintain their housing.

PREVENTION + SUPPORT

“Prevention + Support” refers to programs or services aimed at helping to prevent people from becoming homeless. Or simply put: to prevent housing loss. The range of prevention activities is very broad, ranging from employment assistance, addictions treatment services, advocacy, early intervention, addressing family breakdown, and increasing access to affordable housing.

The most cost effective way to end homelessness is to stop it before it begins with effective prevention. Existing programs, services and systems need to be designed to identify the signs and factors of being at-risk of homelessness and be able to connect households with appropriate services. Within this context, communities need a thoughtful and structured prevention strategy that includes:

- Early detection and intervention.
- Emergency assistance.
- Policy and practice reforms to systems and programs.
- Coordination of services.
- Housing and support services and access to regular income.
- Access to mental health and addiction services.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

“Capacity-Building” is an ongoing process to strengthen the ability of individuals, agencies, networks and the broader community to develop a meaningful and sustainable response to homelessness. Initiatives under this focus area should aim to:

- Enhance, or more effectively utilize, skills and abilities and resources.
- Strengthen understandings and relationships.
- Address issues of values, attitudes, motivations and conditions in order to support activities in a sustainable manner.

Capacity-Building gives people the skills, ability and confidence to take a leading role in the development of their community, and provides them with the information, understanding and training that enable them to perform effectively in bringing about desired change.



PRIORITIES AT A GLANCE

In December, 2013, community stakeholders were invited to participate in an online survey to prioritize strategies for the upcoming Regional Homelessness Plan. Based on their input, the infographic below illustrates the top priorities for this report.

HOUSING



Increase the Housing Supply



Provide Housing Specific to At-Risk Populations



Protect + Improve the Existing Housing Stock

PREVENTION + SUPPORT



Improve Financial Assistance + Eligibility



Enhance Support Services



Provide Support Services Specific to At-Risk Populations

CAPACITY-BUILDING



Facilitate Collaboration



Coordinate Funding



Enhance our Understanding
of Homelessness





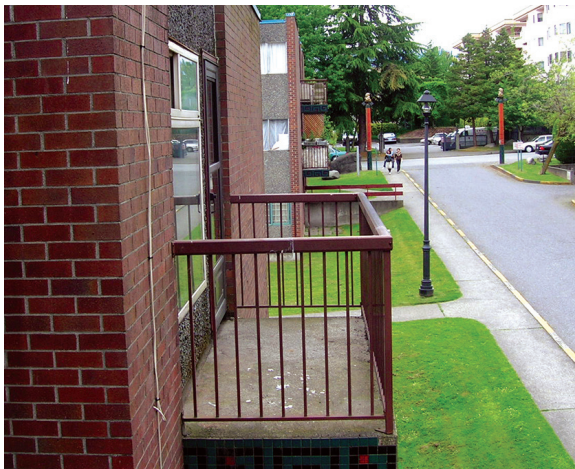
HOUSING PRIORITIES

This section outlines the recommended priorities and key strategies for responding to homelessness in the Metro Vancouver region. The priorities and strategies have not been presented in any particular order and it is suggested that they be considered of equal or similar importance in future plans and policies.

PRIORITY #1: INCREASE THE HOUSING SUPPLY

STRATEGY:

Provide more housing in the region to persons who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness through a combination of purpose-built, dedicated-buildings and scattered site units. This includes providing a range of affordable housing options along the housing spectrum, from shelters to independent living options.



DISCUSSION:

Increasing the number of affordable housing units in the region was identified as essential to eliminating and preventing homelessness in the region. This would be contingent on providing a variety of housing forms and services to address the complex needs of different sub-groups (youth, women, etc.). The goal in this regard is to facilitate the development of affordable housing for persons who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness. This may include supportive or transitional housing units for those who would benefit from this type of housing for a short or longer period of time. The key is the availability of a variety of housing options, creating choice for service providers and agencies working with individuals and families in need.

There is continued demand for non-market housing in the form of dedicated buildings and low-income housing (with or without support). Current wait-lists for non-market housing are lengthy, and many people are staying in housing that is not well suited to them because they are unable to find alternatives. Increasing the supply of non-market housing units is, therefore, a priority.

In addition to non-market housing, the availability of housing is a concern. Lower end of market units are in short supply and at-risk groups face difficulty accessing existing units. The region can play a role in facilitating improved access to existing rental housing.

New non-market housing needs to be thoughtfully planned with respect to location and design. It is important for new buildings to be located within close proximity/reasonable walking distance to amenities, services and programs.

Increasing the housing supply could be further supported by increasing access to units in the private market. Sometimes, households find it difficult to access private market housing because of existing stigmas or challenges communicating with private landlords. Households may also have limited knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as a tenant and, equally, landlords may not understand the challenges and benefits of housing low to moderate income households. There are opportunities to improve these relationships, both by assisting potential tenants in acquiring and maintaining their housing, as well as supporting landlords in order to make private market units more widely available to at-risk groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to provide a range of affordable housing options along the housing spectrum, including shelters and safe houses; low-barrier housing; transitional/ temporary housing; supportive housing; and independent living options.
- Continue to provide different types of shelters and safe houses as part of the housing spectrum, and focus on enhancing shelter safety, expanding operations to provide more on-site support and case planning, and strategically develop shelters in under-served communities and populations.
- Prioritize the development of purpose-built housing for specific at-risk populations (see Priority #2).
- Build independent living housing for low-income individuals and families that do not require integrated on-site support services.
- Increase access to private market housing by establishing programs and services that increase access to private market housing, and support landlords and tenants in market housing.
- Establish partnerships between housing providers, government agencies, businesses and developers to increase the number of subsidized units in the region.





HOUSING PRIORITIES

PRIORITY #2: PROVIDE HOUSING SPECIFIC TO AT-RISK POPULATIONS

STRATEGY:

Provide housing throughout the region that meets the needs of specific at-risk populations, such as housing specific to at-risk youth, women, families, seniors, the Aboriginal community, persons with mental health and addiction issues, and the LGBT2Q population.



DISCUSSION:

Each of the at-risk populations (youth, families, seniors, women, the Aboriginal community, persons with mental health and addictions issues, and LGBT2Q households) require safe and affordable housing that suits their needs. Their needs, however, tend to be complex and varied.

There has been an increase in the level of awareness of mental health issues by the public and by politicians, including the societal costs of inadequate housing and programs. It is essential to provide specialized housing for persons with mental health and addictions issues, and/or substance use challenges.

Youth are a top priority. It is important to provide a range of housing for youth, from shelters to supportive transitional homes to affordable independent living options. Service providers in the region reported that at-risk youth benefit from supportive housing that is non-institutional, with a home-feel, that integrates multi-disciplinary teams, such as occupational therapists, clinical support, mental health and addictions support, and peer counselling.

At-risk women have been under-served. Housing specific to women should be designed with a women-centred lens, offering supportive and independent living options. Supportive housing for women should integrate wrap-around services that are tailored to their specific needs. Providing security as well as a strong sense of safety is important. This may include women-only spaces within buildings, and locating buildings or units in neighbourhoods considered to be secure from predators and violence. Further, there is a need for dedicated, women-only housing for women fleeing abuse, and housing that is suitable and welcoming to women of all ages. It is important to plan for changes in housing need throughout the different stages of a woman's life.

Children are increasingly among the homeless. It is important to provide housing for women and children, but this form of housing should, where possible, be separate from women-only specific housing. There is a need to provide a range of family-only housing, including housing for women and children; couples and children; as well as housing for single fathers. Housing for all of these groups should range from family-shelters to permanent affordable housing. For families staying in shelters, it is important to provide services for children that facilitate continuity in their lives and reduce disruptions to the extent possible, such as providing transportation to school, space to cook meals, etc.

The population in Metro Vancouver and the rest of Canada is aging, as are the at-risk subpopulations that have been identified in the region. The housing needs of at-risk seniors are going to be increasingly important in all communities. For at-risk seniors, the need for a variety of housing and supports were clearly identified during the consultation, ranging from at-home support services to semi-independent living and assisted living facilities. Considerations should include seniors housing that is sensitive to the needs of different cultural groups, including Aboriginal groups.

People who identify as LGBT2Q face particular challenges when it comes to finding and maintaining housing, and non-profit organizations have been trying to catch-up to their specific housing and support service needs. It is important for the RSCH to consider the unique housing needs of the LGBT2Q population in the region.

Note: LGBT2Q refers to individuals who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit or gender-queer.

Amongst the sector, there is inconsistent definitions of LGBT2Q. RSCH has an opportunity to facilitate a discussion around creating clear and consistent language for this specific at-risk group.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

SPECIFIC HOUSING FOR PERSONS WITH MENTAL HEALTH + ADDICTIONS ISSUES

- Provide a range of supportive housing for persons with mental health and addictions issues, including scattered site units and dedicated buildings. This includes non-market housing as well as affordable rental housing for low and moderate income households with mental health and addictions issues.
- Housing for persons with mental health and addictions issues needs to integrate on-site or mobile wrap-around support services.
- Provide opportunities for persons with severe mental health issues to be housed in a safe and structured environment if that is best suited to their needs and desires.

YOUTH-SPECIFIC HOUSING

- Ensure that a range of youth-specific housing options is available, including low-barrier safe houses, transitional housing, and independent living options.
- Ensure housing for youth is located in safe neighbourhoods and is accessible to services, programs, and transit.





HOUSING PRIORITIES

PRIORITY #2: PROVIDE HOUSING SPECIFIC TO AT-RISK POPULATIONS (*continued*)

- Develop congregate housing for youth with integrated, multi-disciplinary support services (e.g. clinical support, peer support, intergenerational mentorship) in a non-institutional environment.
- Match youth-friendly landlords to youth who are ready to live independently in market housing, and provide support as needed.

WOMEN-SPECIFIC HOUSING

- Approach women-specific housing using a women-centred lens. This could involve integrating community building activities and peer support.
- Provide a range of affordable housing options for women, from low-barrier transitional housing to supportive housing, affordable independent living, and housing that is suitable for different ages (e.g. mature women). Special consideration needs to be incorporated in buildings that house women fleeing domestic abuse or trafficked women.

FAMILY-SPECIFIC HOUSING

- Provide flexible housing options that can accommodate a variety of family household compositions, including women with older sons, larger families, single fathers, multiple generations, and other situations to minimize family separation.

- Housing for women with children needs to be larger, with multiple bedrooms, located close to schools, parks, and community services. It should prioritize safety in building design and neighbourhood location.
- Continue to provide family-only shelters with support services, where parents are not at-risk of losing custody of their children.
- Develop rapid-rehousing programs to support families and to limit the impact of homelessness on children.

SENIORS-SPECIFIC HOUSING

- Provide a range of affordable housing options for seniors, including independent living, semi-independent living with non-medical supports, and assisted living.
- Ensure seniors housing is culturally appropriate and accessible to a range of ethnic groups and non-English speaking seniors (e.g. Aboriginal elders, Indo-Canadian seniors, etc.).
- Increase opportunities for at-risk seniors to stay in their homes and/or communities, by adapting housing to be accessible, continuing to provide rent supplements and access to support services.
- Build relationships with landlords in market housing and other service providers to build a safety net for at-risk seniors living on their own.

SPECIFIC HOUSING FOR THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

- Approach Aboriginal-specific housing using an Indigenous lens.² This could include using culturally-sensitive design features such as clustered housing, multi-generational units, sweat lodges, and integrated Aboriginal-specific services.
- Aboriginal-specific housing should be managed and operated by Aboriginal individuals and incorporate Aboriginal community traditions such as smudging and food sharing.
 - » Note: Additional consultation with the Aboriginal community is needed to confirm and further enrich these recommendations.

SPECIFIC TO THE LGBT2Q POPULATION

- Identify best practices to incorporate LGBT2Q-friendly/dedicated spaces in shelters.
- Provide supportive, transitional and permanent housing options that are specific to the LGBT2Q population, and/or that provide LGBT2Q-friendly spaces and units (i.e. dedicated floors in the building to LGBT2Q households).

² For the purposes of this report, “Aboriginal” refers to describing services for people categorized as “Aboriginals”, particularly for government programs. The term “Indigenous” speaks to the Indigenous perspective.

PRIORITY #3: PROTECT + IMPROVE THE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

STRATEGY:

Prevent the loss of affordable rental housing units and improve the quality of older rental housing stock (e.g. renovate older buildings in poor condition).



DISCUSSION:

The stock of rental housing (market and non-market) in the region includes many older buildings. Some of these buildings have not been well maintained, resulting in some tenants living in substandard conditions. Persons who are leaving shelters or transitional housing and moving into independent buildings in poor condition have been reported to be vulnerable of becoming homeless again.

There are opportunities to upgrade or redevelop the older housing stock in poor condition. In addition, there are opportunities to prevent affordable housing stock from falling into disrepair by implementing regional livability standards and establishing multi-governmental partnerships.

The expiry of social housing operating agreements is also a major challenge with respect to protecting the existing stock of affordable housing. Housing providers are increasingly seeking alternative options to generate rental revenue to cover their subsidy loss after their operating agreements expire. These options may include adjusting market rents, adjusting the rent geared to income (RGI) mix, or converting non-market units to market units, and redeveloping existing properties. It is important for policy-makers to know the number of affordable RGI units that could be lost, in order to appropriately identify preventing actions and strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Upgrade the existing older stock of buildings that typically house low income households, provide self-contained units where possible and ensuring all units meet basic standards of maintenance and safety.
- Develop a regional livability standard and ensure municipalities work with property managers and landlords to ensure buildings and scattered site units are safe, secure, and maintained.
- Ensure individuals are not placed in housing situations that are potentially unsafe or harmful.
- Work with municipalities to implement replacement policies for purpose-built rental units throughout the region as part of major upgrading or redevelopment of the older stock of buildings.
- Support redevelopment of low-density social housing sites.
- Support non-profit organizations with expiring social housing operating agreements and find effective solutions to transition.



PREVENTION + SUPPORT PRIORITIES

PRIORITY #4: IMPROVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE + ELIGIBILITY

STRATEGY:

Improve the situation of people who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness by making financial assistance and subsidy programs accessible and adequate.



DISCUSSION:

One of the most challenging issues in Metro Vancouver is the shortage of affordable rental units in all parts of the region that are suitable to a variety of household types and needs. It is difficult for persons who are earning minimum wage or are receiving financial assistance (pension, disability, or income assistance) to afford market rents in the region in addition to affording groceries, household bills, and to maintain a basic quality of life.

There is an opportunity to improve the financial situation of persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness by increasing access to financial support services, expanding eligibility criteria programs, offering rent banks, improving access to financial assistance, increasing income assistance and financial literacy programs, implementing debt reduction programs, and increasing income assistance levels to improve households' ability to participate in the regional real estate market as renters.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support rent bank programs and consider developing a regional rent bank program.
- Advocate and work with Provincial agencies to:
 - » Increase the number of rent supplements available to homeless outreach programs.
 - » Continue to provide rent assistance for low-income families through the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) and seniors through the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters Program (SAFER) and expand the eligibility of these programs.
 - » Reduce institutional barriers for accessing income assistance, such as creating centralized access to rent subsidies, reducing the process time for rental assistance applications, creating user-friendly websites, and updating file-access systems.
 - » Increase the amount of income assistance, disability assistance, shelter allowance, and rental subsidies to match regional housing costs.
- Increase access to education and employment opportunities for at-risk groups to improve their financial situation and prospects for personal growth.

PRIORITY #5: ENHANCE SUPPORT SERVICES

STRATEGY:

Increase, enhance and update outreach and support services so they can be more flexible, responsive, and inclusive in their approach.

DISCUSSION:

Providing support services to persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness is critical in order to help people obtain and maintain safe, affordable housing in the region. Building trusting relationships with support workers is important, as well as offering accessibility to a range of services. Further, outreach workers can often identify the particular needs of clients and are able to respond by helping clients obtain appropriate housing to meet their needs.

While they do not fall within a clear funding program, drop-in centres provide a valuable point of access to information, services, peer support, and referrals. Continued support for new and existing drop-in centres is recommended, particularly where outreach teams and other service providers are able to work with drop-in centres to address the needs of under-served groups.

Access to client-centred support services is essential for maintaining housing and preventing homelessness. Support workers can assess the risk of individuals and families before they become homeless, and connect them with the most appropriate services for help. Without adequate support services, persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness would be less likely to be re-housed and less likely to maintain their housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Prioritize client needs assessments and case planning work by front line service providers (e.g. shelters, outreach teams, and drop-in facilities) to identify the level and type of services that best meet each client's needs.
- Ensure outreach teams have access to rent subsidies and flexible funds that they can use at their discretion to support clients in maintaining their housing and create a positive home environment (e.g. damage deposits, household furniture and supplies, moving expenses, and groceries).
- Support the expansion of outreach programs to enable client support on evenings and weekends and provide ongoing life-skills training, including increasing the number of outreach workers.
- Enhance service providers' capacity to work with clients to complete forms for disability assistance, rental applications, identification replacement, and filing taxes.
- Facilitate access to drop-in centres throughout the region that foster a safe and compassionate environment, particularly where drop-in centres target specific at-risk groups including women, seniors, youth, the Aboriginal community, persons with mental health and addiction issues, and the LGBT2Q population.
- Increase the capacity of service providers to hire more staff, increase staff wages and provide specialized training.
- Foster community-building and a sense of belonging by creating social networks and connections for clients.
- Improve access to food programs and nutritious meals for individuals who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, living in shelters and in supportive housing.
- Increase communication across sectors, agencies, end-users and all levels of government to improve the awareness of programs and services available, including advocating to senior levels of government where issues extend beyond municipal and regional jurisdictions.
- Continually improve consultation and planning processes that are meaningful and inclusive, including making housing and homelessness research widely available.

PRIORITY #6: PROVIDE SUPPORT SERVICES SPECIFIC TO AT-RISK POPULATIONS

STRATEGY:

Provide a range of support services throughout the region that are specific to at-risk populations, such as services specific to at-risk youth, seniors, women, families, the Aboriginal community, the LGBT2Q population and persons with mental health and addiction issues.



DISCUSSION:

Enhancing support services is essential to preventing homelessness and to assisting individuals and families obtain and maintain safe, affordable housing. This priority area re-affirms the notion that different groups have complex and varied needs and that service providers need to work with each client individually to best address their needs. Where possible, it is important to develop a safe and welcoming environment for vulnerable at-risk groups, including at-risk youth, seniors, women, families, the Aboriginal community, the LGBT2Q population and persons with mental health and addiction issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recognizing the complexity of issues and needs, the following list of strategies should be considered a sample of the types of support services that could be supported throughout the region.

FOR YOUTH

- Provide seamless and flexible funding and support before and after the age of 19, as needed. This includes the continuation of client/social worker relationships for youth aging out of youth-designated programs.
- Improve access to flexible rent subsidies and create a rent bank specific to youth.
- Provide a range of youth-specific services, (e.g. outreach and drop-in centre services for youth aging out of government care, programs for teen parents).
- Increase the availability of beds at youth-specific treatment centres.

FOR SENIORS

- Develop programs and checklists for pre-seniors to become “senior ready” and prevent future instability and financial uncertainty.
- Increase capacity for service providers to provide senior-specific services, such as training to work with seniors.

FOR WOMEN + FAMILIES

- Incorporate peer support programs and wrap-around services for at-risk women and families.
- Review the assessment protocol for women fleeing domestic violence, and shift the role of assessing women's safety and well-being onto women's centres as opposed to the RCMP.
- Ensure that housing policies and programs assist parents with maintaining or regaining custody of their children.
- Provide family counselling and tools to cope with relationship issues or tragedy to prevent family breakdowns.

FOR THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

- Increase access to Aboriginal specific services throughout the Metro Vancouver region.
- Provide Aboriginal-specific life-skills services.
- Increase the availability of services for Aboriginal individuals that are staffed and managed by Aboriginal organizations. This includes treatment programs and drop-in centres.
 - » Note: Additional consultation with the Aboriginal community is needed to confirm and further enrich these recommendations.

FOR PERSONS WITH MENTAL HEALTH + ADDICTION ISSUES

- Enhance outreach teams to include workers with mental health training, clinical staff, other population-specific expertise (e.g. Aboriginal individuals or youth) and support the establishment of specialized outreach teams focused on health, mental health, and concurrent disorders.
- Increase links between service agencies (e.g. BC Housing and health authorities, mental health services and youth agreement workers, and clinical staff and outreach teams).
- Enhance early intervention and detection assessment of persons with mental health and addiction issues, and connect them with appropriate services.
- Provide additional or specialized assistance to individuals who have issues associated with hoarding.

FOR THE LGBT2Q POPULATION

- Incorporate peer support programs and wrap-around services specific to LGBT2Q households.
- Increase awareness of LGBT2Q housing and homelessness issues, as well as provide staff training such that services and programs can better respond to the needs of the LGBT2Q population.





CAPACITY-BUILDING PRIORITIES

PRIORITY #7: FACILITATE COLLABORATION

STRATEGY:

Facilitate collaboration between local and regional government agencies; housing and shelter providers; and health practitioners to increase the collective capacity to provide services, build consensus on new initiatives, and enhance support across communities.

DISCUSSION:

Organizations that provide housing and support services to persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness benefit from working together, rather than working in silos. In the region, organizations are often unaware of other services available to them and to their clients. Improving the awareness, communication and connectivity between the sector benefits organizations in the sector and benefits clients. It is important to encourage organizations to connect, share knowledge, and share services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage local and regional collaboration and referrals across agencies and discourage the duplication of services.
- Increase opportunities for local and regional agencies to interact, mingle and collaborate by hosting events and conferences. This may include facilitating inter-agency workshops on a regular basis with a variety of stakeholders.
- Coordinate round table discussions between funders and service providers that work with the same at-risk populations in the region, including hospitals and health service providers.
- Support the implementation of shared spaces, hot desks (multiple workers using single work station at different times), and mobile work spaces across agencies to provide client access to a range of professionals and referrals.
- Designate key contacts at service organizations to liaise directly with key ministries (e.g. Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Children and Family Development).
- Support and coordinate partnership efforts by senior governments, municipalities, and developers in building affordable housing.



PRIORITY #8: COORDINATE FUNDING

STRATEGY:

Encourage integration of services by coordinating funding providers, increasing access to funding, creating consistent criteria, and promoting collaboration among applicants for funding.



DISCUSSION:

Organizations in the housing and homelessness sector invest significant effort and resources into applying for program and service funding. Often, different funding sources have different application forms, organizational criteria, program/service criteria, and evaluation criteria. The varying requirements of funders place additional strain on under-resourced organizations to undertake administrative and reporting tasks. It is important, therefore, to support organizations by removing barriers to applying for funding and to support organization's ability to collaborate and share knowledge, services, and resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Work with funding bodies and key agencies (e.g. through the RSCH funders' table) to identify ways to improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of service providers. Suggestions include:
 - » Encourage service providers and organizations to team-up on projects and share funding resources.
 - » Support the coordination and streamlining of funding programs.
 - » Streamline the criteria for funding eligibility.
 - » Develop greater flexibility in funding programs and eligibility criteria.
 - » Re-align funding to provide more stable and longer term funding for services and programs.
 - » Support the development of programs that provide sustained funding for training, including replacement staff time, to enable service providers to better serve at-risk populations.



CAPACITY-BUILDING PRIORITIES

PRIORITY #9: ENHANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS

STRATEGY:

Facilitate the sharing of knowledge and understanding of homelessness issues to the general public, organizations, and all levels of government.



DISCUSSION:

There are a number of studies and projects that provide insight into the challenges and opportunities of supporting persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Consultation participants noted that there are continued misconceptions regarding the issues facing homeless sub populations (e.g. youth, women, families, seniors, Aboriginal people, persons with mental health and addictions, and the LGBT2Q population) who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.

In order to foster community and political support for housing initiatives in the region, it is important to develop clear and consistent language on housing and homelessness. The RSCH is well positioned to provide that clarity and consistency throughout the region through its research and reporting. It would be equally valuable to communicate and share the lessons learned from housing projects and key studies in the region and elsewhere. The RSCH could support education and communication activities that reach out to key decision makers, such as municipal Councils, community resident associations, as well as the general public, to help foster a greater understanding of housing and homelessness issues and increase the levels of support for development projects and programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure there is consistent and clear language on housing and homelessness terms and definitions and communicate these broadly throughout the region.
- Assist with education and information sharing efforts that help to improve the general level of awareness and support for housing and homelessness projects and initiatives:
 - » Distribute information to key groups, such as Business Improvement Associations, community resident groups, and municipal Councils to gain support for community housing and homelessness projects.
 - » Organize roadshow events and materials that tell peoples' stories to help raise awareness and understanding of homelessness.
 - » Showcase savings that can be achieved for health services, corrections, and the court system by providing housing for people who are homeless.
 - » Educate the general public on the history and experiences of the Aboriginal community to foster better understanding and cultural sensitivity.





CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The priorities identified in this report support the objectives of the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH) to develop a Regional Homelessness Plan that reflects input from community based organizations and other stakeholders who are engaged in housing and homelessness in Metro Vancouver. Collectively, the priorities identified in this report provide the RSCH with a framework that, when implemented, will inform the Regional Homelessness Plan as well as guide the allocation of federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) funding.

The Regional Homelessness Plan will be prepared over the course of 2014, building off the Priorities identified in this report and establishing broad policy directions and an implementation timeline for addressing homelessness in the region. As was the case in previous regional homelessness plans, the next Plan could potentially serve as a guide for other sub-regional plans in Metro Vancouver.

The Priorities outlined in this report have been carefully selected with the understanding that the tasks and actions required under each priority can be realistically undertaken by the RSCH and within the jurisdiction of Metro Vancouver. Some of the strategies that were identified through the consultation may not be within the capacity or jurisdiction of the RSCH to implement independently and, therefore, will require collaboration and partnership with all levels of government and other organizations. Even though the RSCH cannot meet every need, the recommended strategies present a list of key directions that would affirm the region's commitment to ending and preventing homelessness, with a strong focus on issues facing specific vulnerable groups.



