



I have been given a  
second chance  
and I want to make the most of it.

and a place to call my home.

I have the support I need.

A Plan for Alberta:  
Ending Homelessness in 10 Years

# 3 YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

PREPARED BY: ALBERTA SECRETARIAT FOR ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS

Presented to the Minister of Human Services  
January 2013



“

*"In two and a half years, I lost my mom, my dad and my brother. To better cope with the loss, I became addicted to alcohol. Then, a local agency got me in touch with Homeward Trust which got me into Housing First. Thanks to the program, I beat my addiction. The program really gave me something to hang onto. Without it, I'd probably still be out there."*

*Stacey, formerly homeless*

”



# CONTENTS



<b>MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>PROGRESS IN ENDING HOMELESSNESS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ENDING HOMELESSNESS IS A PARTNERSHIP.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Better Information.....	8
Aggressive Assistance.....	10
Coordinated Systems.....	12
More Housing Options.....	14
Effective Policies .....	15
<b>THE ROAD AHEAD .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Priorities .....	18
<b>CONCLUDING COMMENTS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>24</b>

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Minister Hancock,

On behalf of the members of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, I want to share our excitement about the incredible progress that has been made in the first three years of *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*.

The Plan's impact has been felt throughout the province. More than 5,900 individuals and families have been provided safe, secure, permanent homes and are moving with pride towards greater independence. Preventive measures being put in place mean that countless others will never know the personal devastation of homelessness. The substantial economic costs of homelessness, paid by all Albertans, are being curtailed.

Alberta's Plan is recognized nationally and internationally as a model approach because it completely transforms how we think about and respond to homelessness. By declaring that an end to homelessness is possible, we are moving away from an approach based mainly on crisis intervention. We are deliberately building a coordinated system of care with all of its parts working in sync towards a common goal: that no one in Alberta should be without a permanent place to live for more than 21 days.

The pages ahead outline the significant achievements of those who have collaborated to implement the Plan since it got underway in 2009. We will also call attention to the areas that require our collective attention in order to sustain our strong momentum in the next phase of the Plan, which will be capably guided by the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness. The Secretariat has previously recommended a more cross-government,

integrated approach to Plan implementation, and we are pleased to see this approach take shape in the form of this Council. As a community-government partnership, it will build on the successful foundation that has been established over the past three years.

As Secretariat members, we are grateful and proud to have played a role in this effort alongside numerous individuals, community-based organizations, service providers, and all orders of government. At this point we stand aside, knowing that the Plan is on track.

As the role of the Secretariat in supporting the Plan comes to an end, I leave these thoughts with you and all partners collaborating to implement the Plan: continue to think and act systematically, maintain your diligent focus on the strategies in the Plan, be responsive to new evidence and make refinements, and preserve your strong commitment to the Housing First approach.

Instead of treating homelessness as an inevitable social ill, communities are demonstrating that with a plan, resources, and partnerships, we can prevent and end homelessness. Three years in, we continue to be convinced, that ending homelessness is the right thing to do for economic, social, and ethical reasons. It is the right thing to do for Alberta.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gary Bowie, Chair  
Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness

# A PLAN FOR ALBERTA – PROGRESS TO DATE

APRIL 1, 2009 – MARCH 31, 2012

**5,926** homeless Albertans have been provided housing and the supports that will help them remain housed.

**80%** of Housing First clients have remain housed for at least 12 months.



**1,455** people have 'graduated' from Housing First programs, meaning they have achieved housing stability.

In 2011-12, use of Government of Alberta-funded temporary shelter spaces decreased provincially by **10%**, compared to the year before the Plan came into effect, (2008-09.)

Reported changes in utilization of public systems among housing first clients:

**HEALTH:** Interactions with EMS: reduced by **72%**  
 Emergency Room visits: reduced by **69%**  
 Days in hospital: reduced by **72%**

**JUSTICE:** Interactions with police: reduced by **66%**  
 Days in jail: reduced by **88%**  
 Court appearances: reduced by **69%**

## KEYS TO SUCCESS\*\*

Between December 2011 and February 2012, 225 housing and homelessness stakeholders were asked what they thought the most important factors in our success have been. Here's what they said:

- › Provincial and local plans to end homelessness
- › Local decision-making
- › Housing First approach
- › Community collaboration

Government of Alberta investment in capital and Housing First programs in millions:

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Outreach Support Services (Housing First)	\$32M	\$41M	\$50M
Capital Funding	\$100 M	\$58M	\$34M
<b>TOTAL INVESTMENT</b>	<b>\$315 Million</b>		

\* Changes in utilization of public systems were reported by Housing First program participants. Figures compare systems use among participants for the year prior to being housed to the first year in housing.

\*\*Keys to Success was excerpted from *What We Heard... Interagency Council on Homelessness Community Conversation Summary*. To view the documents, visit: <http://employment.alberta.ca/14600.html>

# ENDING HOMELESSNESS IS A PARTNERSHIP

*A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years* is the road map for shifting the provincial approach from managing to ending homelessness. Our shared objective is that no one in Alberta should be without a permanent place to live for more than 21 days.

## A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED INITIATIVE

As the first provincial plan to state an intention to end homelessness, *A Plan for Alberta* was ground-breaking in Alberta and Canada. Its vision and implementation have been recognized by a number of national awards.

- › 2012 Graham Emslie Award from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, to former Premier Ed Stelmach in recognition of his outstanding contribution in housing and community development.
- › 2011 Canada Award for Excellence, Certificate of Merit from Excellence Canada, recognizing Year One of Implementing the Provincial 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.
- › 2010 Gold Medal for Innovative Management from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, recognizing Year One of Implementing the Provincial 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Our role, as the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, has been to monitor the Plan's implementation and act as an advisory board that provides strategic advice to government.

Such transformational change depends on effective coordination and collaboration among a broad coalition of partners who have the skills and resources necessary to end homelessness. We want to take this opportunity to recognize the many partners that bring the Plan to life and that are integral to its success.

## GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

The Government of Alberta supports the implementation of the Plan through targeted financial investments in emergency shelters, Housing First programs, and housing development projects. The Ministry of Human Services provides leadership within government to address policies, programs, and services aimed at helping homeless Albertans.

## COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOS)

CBOs administer funding from all orders of government and allocate it according to local priorities. They support and lead the community by coordinating programming, monitoring progress, conducting research, sharing best practices, and engaging the wider community in efforts to end homelessness.

*"If people would look at the world with open hearts the world will change. All it takes is one person to change."*

*Housing First Client*

### HOUSING FIRST SERVICE PROVIDERS

These agencies are the ones on the front line. They provide a range of specialized and professional services to rapidly move homeless individuals and families into permanent housing and provide them with the supports they need to remain housed. These agencies take a collaborative approach to service delivery, resulting in better community and client outcomes.

### EMERGENCY SHELTERS

Emergency shelters play an important role in a homeless-assistance system that is designed to ensure no one remains homeless for more than 21 days. Shelters provide temporary accommodations to those in housing crisis and facilitate connections to assistance agencies if further supports are needed.

### HOUSING DEVELOPERS AND PROVIDERS

These organizations ensure people have access to affordable housing that meets their basic needs. They may work on the creation and development of new units, leveraging private dollars with public funding. Others provide rent subsidies and manage social housing units for families, seniors and individuals in need.

Together, over 400 organizations, including municipalities, housing management bodies, non-profit and private sector organizations work every day to ensure housing is available for the Albertans who need it.

### ALBERTANS AT-RISK OF HOMELESSNESS OR EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

People who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless play an active role in regaining their independence and stability. Programs and program staff cannot resolve the root causes of homelessness, but do give people the tools they need to achieve greater independence. Housing First programs empower people to identify their needs and to make choices that will lead to more stability in their lives.

**Ending homelessness is a collective effort. Additional partners in the private sector, faith-based organizations, research institutions, other orders of government, and countless volunteers also contribute to making the Plan a success.**

*"Without Housing First I would still be living on the street in Edmonton. That's the truth."*

*Housing First Client*

### THE HOUSING FIRST MODEL



EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING



EMPLOYMENT



FAMILY AND  
CULTURAL  
RECONNECTION



PERMANENT HOUSING  
WITH SUPPORTS



HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT,  
LIFE SKILLS, WELLNESS, AND  
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT



HEALTH AND  
ADDICTIONS  
TREATMENT



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

The Plan includes strategies for preventing and ending homelessness that have demonstrated success in other regions, and which have been tailored to suit Alberta's unique circumstances. It encompasses 17 individual strategies that address the interrelated factors that contribute to homelessness in Alberta. It recognizes that no single policy or program is the cause or the solution to homelessness.

The following section discusses the direct results of the strategies during the first three years of implementation, according to the five priority action areas:

- › Better information
- › Aggressive assistance
- › Coordinated systems
- › More housing options
- › Effective policies

The Secretariat's assessment has been informed by those who are collaborating to implement the Plan, including the Government of Alberta (led by Human Services) and seven CBOs. After three years of implementation, the Secretariat is able to report that progress has been achieved in all five priority areas of the Plan.

*"It's amazing, knowing that someone is there to help you find a place you can feel comfortable in and knowing you can call them for help."*

*Housing First Client*

"It is the first place I had of my own in nearly 10 years. I have my own shower."

Housing First client

## Better Information

Data and evidence give us a better understanding about the specific nature of homelessness in Alberta. They help us pinpoint paths into homelessness and evaluate our interventions aimed at helping people achieve housing stability. So critical are good data and evidence to the long-term success of the Plan that three of the four *Better Information* strategies were identified as immediate implementation priorities. It is clear to the Secretariat that concentrated efforts on *Better Information* have fostered a culture of evidence-based practice and reflective learning that will spur continual improvement of our implementation efforts.

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

**STRATEGY #2:** Establish a provincial 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 #4:** Measure outcomes and track progress on a regular, ongoing basis.

## STANDARDIZED DATA IMPROVES PLANNING AND OUTCOMES

In consultation with CBOs, service providers, and the Secretariat, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (now Human Services) developed tools and procedures needed to measure Housing First program outcomes:

- › **Common definitions and categories of homelessness** that are consistent across the province
- › **A comprehensive data collection plan** that covers a range of dimensions including: client demographics, historical experiences with homelessness, employment status, service needs, mental and physical health status, and interactions with public systems such as hospitals, justice, policing and child intervention
- › **A web-based data collection application** that serves as a provincial homeless management information system, (HMIS). This platform is used by approximately 70 agencies to collect standardized information about the experiences of more than 5,900 individuals and families who have entered a Housing First program. The HMIS is now being piloted in six emergency shelters



32% of all Housing First clients self-identified as being of **Aboriginal descent**.



These developments have yielded new data that are helping us understand client needs, assess program and system outcomes, improve planning, and target resources.

Through analysis of this data we are developing a clearer picture of homelessness, and in turn, a better understanding of how to develop programs, services and policies. This information can assist the Alberta government, CBOs and local service agencies in delivering assistance more effectively.

Establishing common data collection tools has been a significant milestone, but they will continue to be refined for the duration of the Plan and beyond, as we learn more about effective methods to end homelessness.

### NEW RESEARCH AIMED AT ENDING HOMELESSNESS

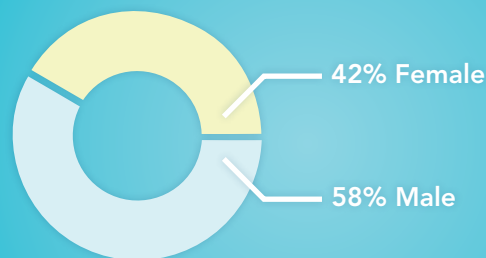
Provincial and community partners are committed to evidence-informed decision making. To further this goal, the Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium (AHRC) was established as a community-academic-government partnership to build our collective body of knowledge about how to end homelessness in Alberta. The AHRC's activities are guided by the *Alberta Homelessness Research Agenda (2011-14)*, which identifies the research priorities among those in community and government who are collaborating to implement the Plan.

In 2011-12, the AHRC supported eleven community-based research projects that are within the scope of the Research Agenda. These projects examine a range of topics, including:

- › homelessness among vulnerable sub-populations such as youth, seniors, and aboriginal peoples
- › improving data collection
- › program effectiveness

Community partners also lead efforts to generate Alberta-focused homelessness research that will inform policy and program decisions that will advance the Plan. Using multiple strategies to disseminate this research will benefit partners in every part of the province.

#### GENDER OF HOUSING FIRST CLIENTS



\*Gender identity was not reported for less than 1% of individuals.





## Aggressive Assistance

The 10-Year Plan stressed the importance of providing supports and assistance that:

- › help prevent homelessness from occurring
- › provide emergency response services to Albertans who fall into homelessness
- › help Housing First clients achieve housing stability

Since it was introduced across Alberta, Housing First has had a visible impact in our communities, and has changed the lives of thousands of Albertans.

**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.

### NUMBER OF HOUSING FIRST GRADUATES:

'Housing first graduates' are those individuals who no longer require intensive supports and have transitioned to stability within the community.



### THOUSANDS OF ALBERTANS HAVE BEEN HOUSED UNDER A HOUSING FIRST APPROACH

When the Plan was introduced, the housing first approach had demonstrated success elsewhere, but it was not a central feature of homelessness strategies in Alberta. Three years later, approximately 70 agencies in seven communities manage Housing First programs. The housing first approach has become a critical tool in provincial efforts to end and prevent homelessness.

Over the past three years:

- › A total of 5,926 Albertans experiencing homelessness have been provided with permanent housing and individualized supports to help them break the cycle of homelessness.
- › There have been 1,445 "graduates" of Housing First programs. These formerly homeless Albertans have achieved housing stability and are living more self-sufficient lives.
- › 80% of Housing First participants have remained stably housed.

*"I never want to be homeless again. I have been given a second chance and I want to make the most of it."*

*Housing First client*

These data suggest the housing first approach is working. It has resulted in good outcomes for the individuals and families who now have permanent homes and the tools they need to stay stably housed. It has also had significant benefits for communities. Since becoming housed, Housing First clients report fewer interactions with public health and justice systems. (See *Progress in Ending Homelessness*, pg 3)

### SHIFTING TRENDS IN UTILIZATION OF EMERGENCY SHELTERS

At the same time that people experiencing homelessness have been moving into permanent housing with supports, use of provincial emergency shelters has been declining. During the first three years of the Plan, 337 shelter spaces were closed, with the majority of those occurring in Calgary. When deciding which spaces to close, Human Services carefully considered the degree of homelessness in each of the communities where shelters were funded as well as the overall demand for emergency shelter use across the province.

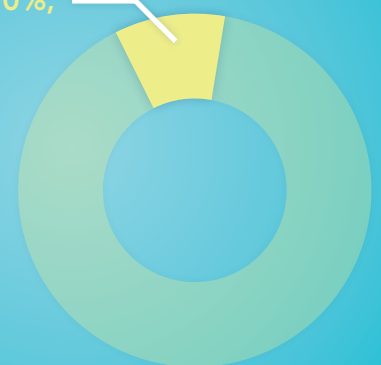
However, there are still fluctuations in shelter use. Usage can increase depending on factors such as increased economic activity or migration to Alberta. Whenever there is a significant increase or decrease in the number of people arriving or leaving a community, shelter usage can be affected.



**44%** of all Housing First clients are considered to be **CHRONICALLY HOMELESS**.

That is, they have been continually homeless for a year or more, or have been homeless at least four times in the past three years.

**In 2011-12, USE OF PROVINCIALY FUNDED TEMPORARY SHELTER SPACES DECREASED PROVINCIALY BY 10%, compared to the year before the Plan came into effect, (2008-09)**



\* Emergency Shelters and Short Term Supportive Housing Facilities.

*"I am home at last, and I finally found a place to call my home. For the first time I have a Christmas tree at home."*

*Housing First client*

## Coordinated Systems

Prior to the creation of the Plan, efforts to address homelessness resembled a patchwork of policies and programs. They were well-intended and benefited many, but were often disconnected.

Plan implementation activities over the past three years demonstrate that Alberta is moving towards client-centered, integrated systems of care, where key partners are working in a coordinated fashion towards the shared goal of preventing and permanently ending homelessness for everyone.

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

**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 #10:** Support community plans to end homelessness.

## GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA INVESTMENT IN HOUSING SUPPORTS AND SERVICES FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS

Over the past three years, the Government of Alberta has invested \$249 million in housing and shelter assistance for homeless Albertans, (not including capital funding investments):

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Outreach Support Services (Housing First)	\$32 million	\$41 million	\$50 million
Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative	-	-	\$4 million
Emergency Shelters, Short/Long Term Supportive Housing	\$42 million	\$41 million	\$39 million

### Outreach Support Services for Housing First Clients

Within broad provincial parameters, CBOs manage these funds and determine allocations to the Housing First programs that assist the community's priority populations.

A portion of this funding also supported the Winter Emergency Response Plan, which included additional emergency shelter spaces and essential services for those experiencing homelessness in winter.

SUP

### Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative

Responding to needs identified by communities, the Government of Alberta committed \$4 million in 2011–12 to ensure successful Housing First participants do not fall back into homelessness. Clients pay the majority of their costs and have no further need of intensive supports, but receive additional rent support while they transition to independence. This funding is expected to create additional system capacity, allowing more people to participate in Housing First, and alleviate pressures on the public systems that homeless people rely on while living on our streets.

### Emergency Shelters, Short/Long Term Supportive Housing

The Emergency Short and Long-Term Supportive Housing Initiative currently provides funding to 18 organizations operating 28 shelters with 3,228 spaces located in eight communities throughout the province.

### Discharge planning to prevent homelessness

Part of a comprehensive strategy for preventing homelessness is ending the practice of discharging people into homelessness from public health, justice and child welfare systems.

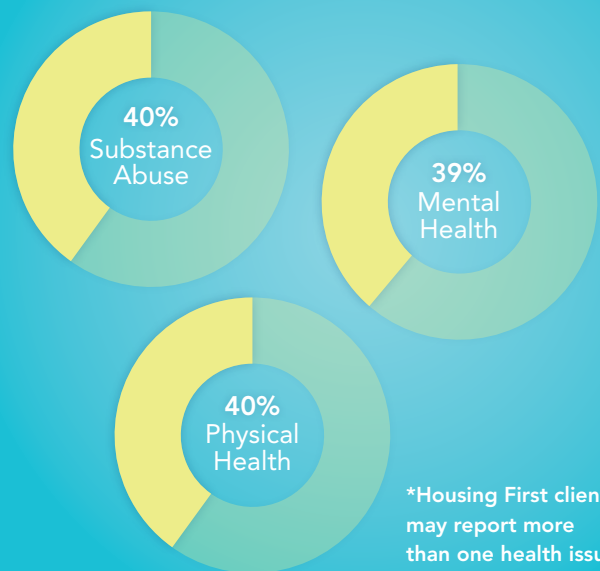
The Government of Alberta and community partners have examined current health and correctional facility discharge practices to identify system improvements that will prevent people from becoming homeless.

This groundwork has led to a pilot project that seeks to improve continuity of care for people who are discharged from mental health acute care beds at Alberta Hospital

Edmonton. A discharge plan will ensure that when patients are released from hospital, they will be connected to appropriate housing and supports. The results of the pilot will be available in winter 2013, and could contribute to establishing best practices that can be broadly applied within Alberta Health Services and other provincial systems.

Local committees, led by designated CBOs, have also been established in Calgary and Red Deer to examine systemic issues related to local discharge practices. The committees have been effective in bringing together members of the community who can identify ways to integrate local services for better client outcomes.

### PERCENTAGE OF HOUSING FIRST CLIENTS REPORTING PHYSICAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND/OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES



*"This was not a free ride. I had to put in to the program as much as I got out. I took a hand up, not a hand out."*

*Housing First Client*

## More Housing Options

The Plan called for the Government of Alberta to help create housing units by using its policy and financial levers, and through collaborative work with other governments.

In response to the Plan, new housing developments specifically targeted for homeless individuals and families are being created in each of the communities where the Plan is being implemented.

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

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

## CAPITAL INVESTMENTS IN HOUSING UNITS FOR HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

Over the first three years of the Plan the Government of Alberta has contributed \$192 million to the development of 1,964 housing units for homeless citizens, which are expected to be in place over the next few years.

The Government of Alberta typically contributes up to 70 percent of capital costs for the development of housing reserved for homeless individuals and families. This support leverages funds from other governments, non-profit organizations, and the private sector to maximize their impact.

These funds support a range of housing developments, reflecting local needs and opportunities. Types of development include new builds, purchases, and renovations of existing units. This diversity is consistent with the Plan, which calls for a variety of housing options to be created.

In addition to the housing developments funded by the Government of Alberta and its partners, communities have pursued and led housing development projects of their own. Details of these projects can be found in the annual reports published by the CBO in each community.





## Effective Policies

Effective programs and increased funding are essential tools for ending homelessness; however, they must be complemented by effective public policy.

Public policies establish the parameters in which all partners work. They must be consistent and aligned. On this front, promising work is underway.

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

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

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

**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.

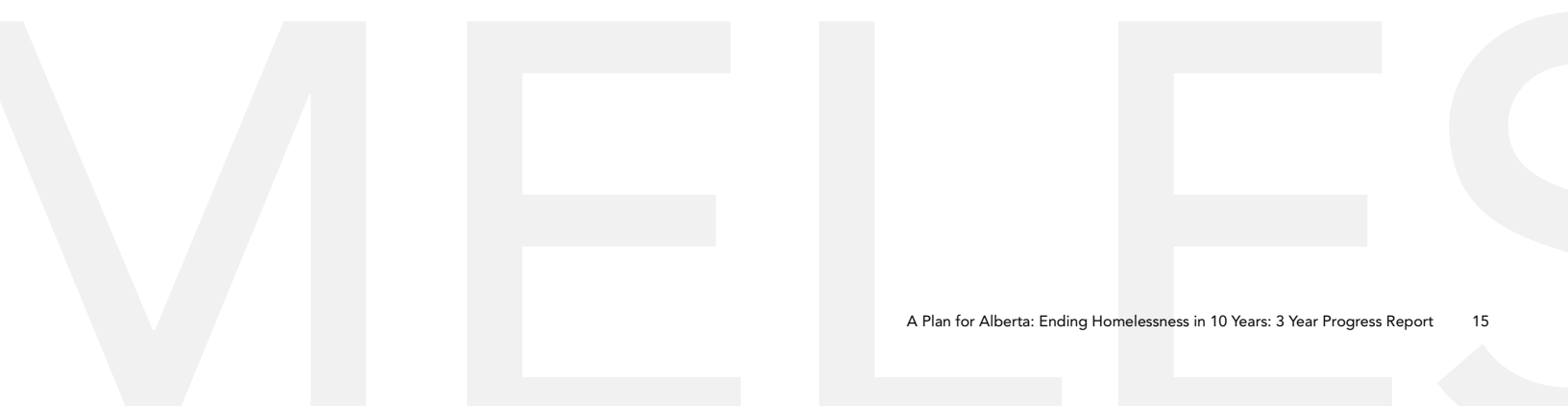
## INCREASING ACCESS TO PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

A lack of permanent housing can be a significant obstacle to obtaining government identification. Without identification, it is very difficult to achieve the things everyone needs to be independent, such as a job, a bank account, and proper housing.

With an address and proof of identity, any provincial citizen can obtain the Alberta Identification Card. Some citizens may need minor assistance to navigate the standard process for obtaining ID, with the support of a homeless-assistance agency. For others who need additional assistance, two new processes were introduced by the Government of Alberta.

The **Address Authorization** process allows a person to use a shelter or drop-in centre as a valid address. For people with no other means to identify themselves, the **Identity Certification** process allows a trained service provider to work with a client to verify his or her identity.

Since 2010, approximately 300 people have obtained identification through these two new processes. At present, 37 homeless-assistance agencies are authorized to provide these services, and all 227 registry agent offices in Alberta now accept identification applications that utilize these processes.



*"I've got a place now and I feel fantastic.  
I want other people to feel that same way."*

*Housing First Client*

## NEW POLICY INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

New directions in government and the acceptance of the Plan have helped open the door to broader policy discussions about how to address the root causes of homelessness in Alberta, including poverty.

These discussions have taken shape in several new provincial government initiatives that reflect a more collaborative approach to program service and policy development that the Secretariat has recommended; a message which has been echoed by community partners. These developments are timely and encouraging, and lay the ground work for preventing homelessness in Alberta.

### Alberta Human Services

Formed in October 2011, the new ministry of Human Services amalgamates human service-related operations from the former Ministries of Children and Youth Services, Employment and Immigration, Housing and Urban Affairs, and Seniors and Community Supports. This has brought together a number of program areas that support vulnerable Albertans, including those who are homeless. Alberta Works, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped; Persons with Developmental Disabilities; Alberta Supports; Office of the Public Guardian; and Office of the Public Trustee are now all within Human Services.

Support for youth shelters, women's shelters, and homeless shelters have also been brought together within the new ministry, which will assist in clarifying the role that community agencies have in connecting all shelter clients with appropriate housing and supports.

## Social Policy Framework and A Poverty Reduction Strategy

Human Services is leading the development of a Social Policy Framework. The intent of the Framework is to guide how the Government of Alberta develops policies and makes decisions about social programs and services. The development of a Social Policy Framework can help to better align government assistance programs that contribute to preventing homelessness.

Once the Framework is developed, it will be used to inform the development of a Poverty Reduction Strategy for Alberta. While other provinces have poverty reduction strategies in place, this would be the first of its kind in Alberta.

### Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness

The Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness signals the creation of the transition in the implementation of the Plan. The Council is a partnership among government departments, (including Human Services, Municipal Affairs, Health, Justice and Solicitor General), municipal and federal governments, social agencies, and private sector representatives. Its role will be to provide comprehensive solutions that cut across multiple systems in order to advance the strategies of the Plan.

Alberta Human Services undertook a comprehensive stakeholder consultation process that informed the Council's structure and mandate, making sure it reflects the priorities of all partners who are collaborating to implement the Plan.



## CROSS-GOVERNMENT POLICY COORDINATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

Other new and existing Government of Alberta initiatives also support the goals of the Plan by targeting Albertans who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homelessness. Key initiatives include:

**Creating Connections: Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health** is a strategy to transform the addiction and mental health system in Alberta. The ultimate goal is to reduce the prevalence of addiction and mental illness in Alberta through health promotion and prevention activities and to provide quality assessment, treatment and support services to Albertans when they need them. One of the priorities articulated in the Strategy is to partner with other ministries, stakeholders and service providers to facilitate ready access to a range of housing options and community supports that are matched appropriately to the continuum of needs of individuals impacted by addiction, mental health problems and mental illness.

**The Safe Communities Initiative** focuses on crime reduction through a balanced approach based on prevention, intervention and enforcement with a firm commitment to partnerships. Between 2008 and 2011, 20 Safe Communities Innovation Fund projects focused on at-risk homeless populations. In 2009-10, 7% of projects focused on this same group and 10% in 2008-09.

**Service Delivery Transformation** means moving social-based assistance programs towards a more unified, aligned and integrated approach to program development and delivery. This will enable the public to access multiple services in one place, reduce service gaps and improve client outcomes. One example of this is the Homeless Outreach Support Services test initiative in Lethbridge where clients are helped to access income support programs. Additionally, the Alberta Supports Contact Centre and Web Portal provides a one-stop information source about Alberta's social programs and services including information designed specifically for homeless and at-risk Albertans.

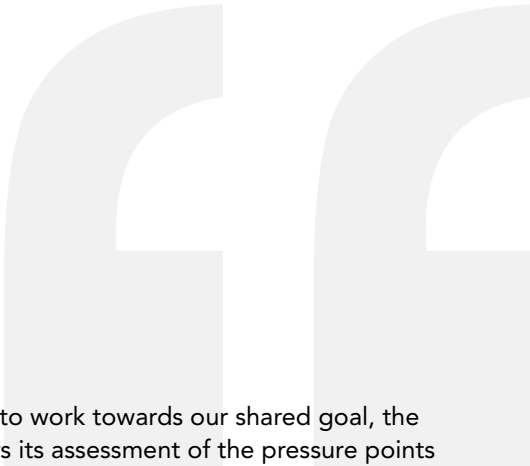
**Information Sharing Framework**, led by Alberta Human Services, aims to build information sharing practices that balance privacy and confidentiality rights with the timely sharing of client information within government and with community service providers. The outcome will be more timely decisions that are in the best interest of GOA clients.





## THE ROAD AHEAD

This far into our ten-year plan, we have made outstanding progress. The past three years focused on introducing the tools that will end homelessness in our province. This work will provide a solid foundation upon which the next phase of the Plan can be built.



As we continue to work towards our shared goal, the Secretariat offers its assessment of the pressure points that require our collective attention and action in order to continue the Plan's strong momentum.

### Priorities

1. Address the need for permanent supportive housing in order to maintain the current level of success.
2. Engage in policy initiatives that will address the root causes of homelessness.
3. Focus attention on the housing and support needs of distinct populations.
4. Address the impact of migration on urban centres.
5. Establish a long term vision for emergency shelters and transitional housing.
6. Establish benchmarks, measure progress, and report to Albertans.

*"Things are not easy by any means... but I have the support I need. I know I am not going to get kicked out on the street if I make a mistake."*

*Housing First client*

## 1. ADDRESS THE NEED FOR PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE CURRENT LEVEL OF SUCCESS

Ending homelessness for over 5,900 individuals and families has had significant benefits for Alberta and Albertans. Use of public systems by Housing First clients has decreased, resulting in cost savings for all Albertans. And people now in housing have hope for a future that they could not conceive of when they were homeless.

However, a portion of Housing First clients face multiple barriers to housing stability, which may include a combination of physical disabilities, mental illness, and substance abuse. Clients with such disabling conditions have the greatest chance of success in those Housing First programs that offer permanent supportive housing, which includes intensive and long-term support.

Communities continue to support clients with complex needs in order to prevent them from falling back into homelessness. This is resulting in a system-wide backlog, and is preventing new clients from entering Housing First. Community partners of the Plan suggest that it will be difficult to maintain the tempo of the previous three years without new investments in permanent supportive housing.

## 2. ENGAGE IN POLICY INITIATIVES THAT WILL ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

In response to specific strategies of the Plan, there have been important initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness. For example: discharge planning for people leaving provincial systems; and the Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative, which will prevent successful Housing First clients experiencing economic insecurity from returning to homelessness. These are essential, and what is also needed is a comprehensive public policy approach for addressing the root causes of homelessness, such as poverty, mental illness, and addictions.

This report has pointed to a number of new provincial policy initiatives that can advance efforts to prevent homelessness, including the Alberta Social Policy Framework and Alberta's Poverty Reduction Strategy. There is a clear opportunity to leverage these and other policy mechanisms as they relate specifically to those who are vulnerable to losing their homes.

Plan partners must engage in these initiatives, which, combined with new research that is improving our understanding of the factors that can lead people into homelessness, will result in a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to preventing homelessness.

*"Everyday, I pray I'll have a home. Especially when it's cold."*

*Housing First Client*

### 3. FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE HOUSING AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF DISTINCT POPULATIONS

The original Plan did not call attention to the needs of specific groups of people who experience homelessness, but we have learned that better housing outcomes are achieved when specialized interventions are offered to particular sub-populations of homeless individuals.

We know that people have particular challenges that are defined by their experience as a member of a particular group. A person of Aboriginal descent, a young person, a victim of domestic violence, or a newcomer to Canada, can all benefit from a unique service response that acknowledges their distinct needs.

The Secretariat points out these distinct populations, which Plan partners agree would benefit from specific and targeted interventions:

- › Aboriginal persons
- › Youth
- › Families Fleeing Domestic Violence
- › Immigrants and newcomers to Canada

Data now being collected provides Plan partners with an understanding of particular sub-populations accessing Housing First. These data can contribute to building a homeless-serving system that effectively responds to specialized needs of those who are homeless.

However, data only gives us an idea of the needs of those who are accessing Housing First. More investigation is required to understand the barriers to accessing housing services among certain populations, such as youth.

### 4. ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON URBAN CENTRES

Alberta is again becoming a destination for those seeking job opportunities, putting pressure on community homeless-serving systems. From January to March 2012, Alberta gained 13,396 interprovincial migrants, compared with about 5,300 people in the same period last year, and just under 150 people in 2010.

This influx reduces the availability of rental apartments. When rental housing is scarce, rental rates can rise, pushing housing out of reach for more low income earners.

Also of particular concern is that all seven communities implementing local plans to end homelessness report that people migrating to urban centres from surrounding Aboriginal communities is putting pressure on their ability to provide adequate services.

Service providers serve all Albertans, including those arriving in their communities who are without housing or the resources to obtain housing. But because provincial funding is determined on a per capita basis, communities are facing resource pressures. Developing a proactive response to anticipated increases in migration to Alberta's urban centres should be a priority for Plan partners.



## 5. ESTABLISH A LONG TERM VISION FOR EMERGENCY SHELTERS AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Conversations in the seven communities are getting underway that will define a long-term vision for emergency shelters and transitional housing within a system that is organized around the principles of Housing First.

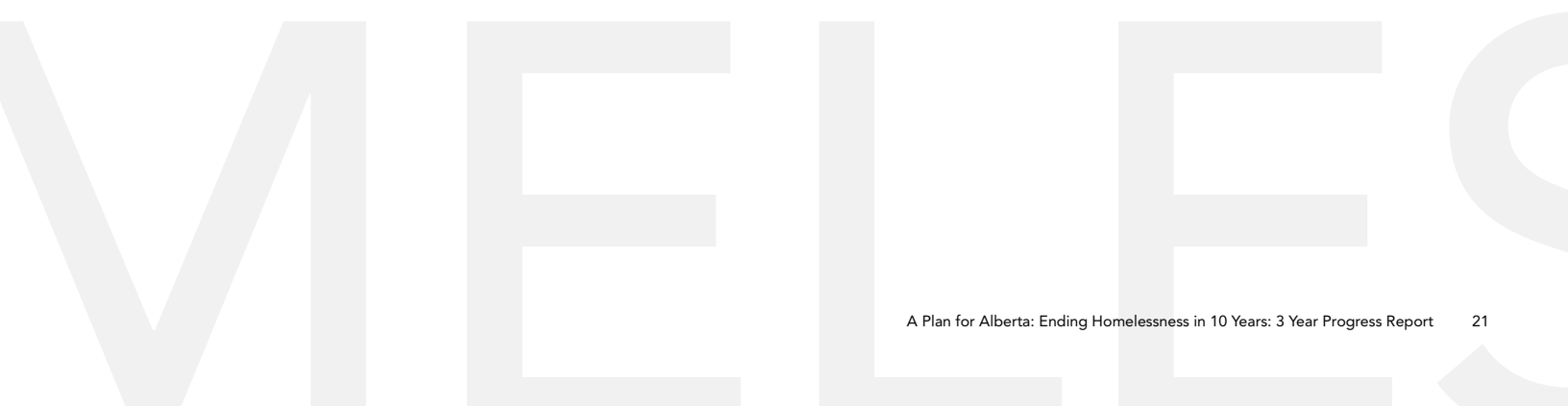
Before a vision can be implemented, one of the challenges is creating adequate capacity within the homeless-serving system that will move people from emergency shelters to permanent homes, lessening time spent homeless. However, this community-driven process is a positive step towards building a system in which people in crisis can access a safe space while being connected to appropriate housing and support services within 21 days of becoming homeless.

## 6. ESTABLISH BENCHMARKS, MEASURE PROGRESS, AND REPORT TO ALBERTANS

Partners are committed to the principle that Plan implementation be evidence-informed. We can do more to translate this principle into meaningful activity by making research and data active ingredients in the decision making process.

There has been substantial work done to develop data tools that will assist in measuring progress under the Plan. There has been significant investment by the Alberta government, CBOs and service agencies to move from minimal reporting to an outcomes-based, provincially-standardized data collection system.

These data can be of greater benefit to implementation efforts. The Secretariat encourages the development and publication of performance targets so that implementation activities under the Plan can be objectively assessed and learnings can be integrated back into the system. Communicating activities and progress to the public is important. Having clear milestones and measurable indicators would tell partners whether we are on track to achieve our objective of ending homelessness, and it would reveal where and how service pressures on public systems are being decreased as a result of housing and supporting people in the community.



# CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It takes a systematic approach to address the personal and societal factors that are at the very root of homelessness.

There are many factors that have contributed to our remarkable progress on our journey to end homelessness in Alberta:

- › A focused and collaborative approach to implementing the strategies of the Plan
- › A shared, strong commitment to the Housing First approach
- › Acknowledging that ending homelessness starts with housing, but it doesn't end there.

As we enter a new phase of the Plan, the Secretariat is optimistic that we are headed in the right direction. More importantly, the many partners working to end homelessness are doing it together – deliberately, collaboratively, and with determination. We now have systems in place that are moving Albertans off the streets, giving them renewed hope and changing their lives.

Importantly, a new government-community leadership body will be in place to guide its implementation through the challenges presented in the next seven years. The Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness embodies the principles of strong leadership and effective collaboration that the Plan requires to be successful.

The Secretariat expresses its sincere appreciation to the countless individuals, agencies and government representatives it has worked with since its formation in 2008 to develop and monitor the Plan. We wish you continued success in your efforts, and look forward to celebrating along with you, an end to homelessness in Alberta.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness expresses its appreciation to the following organizations that provided information for this report.

- › Calgary Homeless Foundation
- › City of Grande Prairie
- › City of Lethbridge
- › City of Red Deer
- › Homeward Trust Edmonton
- › Medicine Hat Community Housing Society
- › Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

Members of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, as of March 31, 2012.

- › Dr. Gary Bowie, Chair
- › Jane Manning, Vice Chair
- › Robb Campre
- › Mike Ellis
- › Susan McGee, 7 Cities Representative
- › Patricia Mackenzie
- › Dr. Gayla Rogers
- › Susan Taylor, Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Services (*ex-officio*)

*"All I needed was a chance."  
Housing First Client*

# REFERENCES

Data included in this report is for all 5,926 clients housed in Housing First programs from April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2012.

## LINKS TO ALBERTA'S COMMUNITY PLANS TO END HOMELESSNESS:

Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness:  
<http://calgaryhomeless.com/10-year-plan/>

A Place to Call Home – Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness: <http://homewardtrust.ca/homelessness/resources.php>

Grande Prairie's Multi Year Plan to End Homelessness:  
<http://www.cabh.ca/reports/>

Bringing Lethbridge Home: 5 Year Community Plan to End Homelessness: <http://www.bringinglethbridgehome.ca/index.cfm>

Starting at Home in Medicine Hat: Our Five Year Plan to End Homelessness: <http://www.mhchs.ca/>

Everyone's Home – Red Deer's 5 Year Plan Towards Ending Homelessness: <http://reddeeranddistrictcommunityfoundation.ca/kristine/RDHomelessnessPlanFinal.pdf>

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's Heading Home – The Right Thing to do: [http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca/living\\_2227/Social-Support-Services/Asset1316.aspx](http://www.woodbuffalo.ab.ca/living_2227/Social-Support-Services/Asset1316.aspx)

“

*I got a place now and I feel fantastic.  
I want other people to feel that way.*

*Donny, formerly homeless*

”



