



3 WAYS TO HOME

The Regional Homelessness Plan For Greater Vancouver

PLAN SUMMARY

The Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH) developed the Regional Homelessness Plan in 2000 through an extensive community-driven process funded by the National Homelessness Initiative. The Plan was updated in 2003. The Regional Homelessness Plan, a 10-year plan to address homelessness, is titled *Three Ways to Home* to reflect the three elements of the solution to homelessness: Affordable Housing, Support Services and Adequate Income. Regional priorities for addressing homelessness are identified under each of these elements. The Plan also identifies six principles that guide solutions to homelessness in the region.

Three Ways to Home

1 Affordable Housing

- emergency housing
- transitional housing
- supportive housing
- independent housing



2 Support Services

- prevention services
- outreach services
- drop-in centres
- health services
- mental health services
- substance misuse services

3 Adequate Income

- legislative reforms
- employment programs

Six Principles

- 1. COMPREHENSIVE:** The solution to homelessness consists of three basic elements: affordable housing, support services, and adequate income.
- 2. ACCESSIBLE:** Solutions are delivered according to community need. People have access to the housing and services they need regardless of where they are in the region.
- 3. INCLUSIVE:** Solutions reflect diverse needs arising from differences in age, cultural/ethnic background, gender and health status.
- 4. PREVENTATIVE:** Solutions consider the needs of both those who are without any physical shelter and those at risk of losing their shelter.
- 5. COLLABORATIVE:** Effective solutions require collaboration and coordination between all stakeholders in the region.
- 6. LONG-TERM:** Solutions have a long-term focus, and are designed to be updated regularly to respond to changing community needs.

The Regional Homelessness Plan also identifies **Aboriginal people** and **Youth** as particularly high priorities and focuses a chapter on each of these groups. The Aboriginal Chapter identifies priorities for addressing homelessness that are appropriate in the Aboriginal community. The Youth Chapter emphasizes youth engagement in solutions and the need for appropriate services for a range of sub-populations. See Page 4 for Aboriginal Plan Priorities and the model of youth engagement employed by the RSCH ...

Regional Homelessness Plan Priorities

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Access to adequate affordable housing is a key component in preventing homelessness and in assisting homeless people to exit the street and remain permanently housed. The housing continuum refers to the different types of shelter and housing that meet the differing levels of housing need among homeless people. The Regional Homelessness Plan calls for the creation of new affordable housing and the preservation of existing affordable housing stocks in all communities in the region, based on community need. The following types of housing make up the housing continuum and are identified as priorities in the Regional Homelessness Plan.

1 Emergency Shelters, Transition Houses, and Safe Houses

Emergency shelters prevent people from ending up on the street. They also provide an exit from the street and an entrance to the continuum of longer term housing. Transition houses and safe houses provide short term shelter for women and children fleeing abusive relations, and for at-risk youth.

2 Transitional Housing

Transitional housing is affordable independent housing that includes support services. It is usually time limited for a period of 2 to 3 years, allowing residents to stabilize before moving on to permanent housing.

3 Supportive Housing

Supportive housing is affordable housing that includes ongoing supports and services to residents who cannot live independently. This housing form can be located in a purpose-built development or in scattered site apartments. Support services may include skills training, housekeeping support, meal preparation, banking support, assistance with medical care and counseling. Supportive housing assists individuals in stabilizing their lives and re-establishing connections with the community. It is intended to be permanent.

4 Independent Affordable Housing

Independent affordable housing is permanent housing for individuals and families that can live autonomously in the community with little or no support. Affordable housing for low income households helps to prevent homelessness by ensuring that at-risk households can maintain their housing. It also provides a pathway out of homelessness for homeless individuals and families that have stabilized their lives and simply need affordable housing.

ADEQUATE INCOME

Increasing the income of homeless individuals and families, and of households at risk of homelessness, is an important way to ensure access to affordable housing. Obtaining sufficient income to enable one to live in adequate housing may be accomplished in a number of ways. The Regional Homelessness Plan places a priority on two ways that are of particular relevance to addressing homelessness: (1) employment assistance services and training, and (2) legislative reforms to ensure adequate levels of income. Additional employment assistance services are needed in all parts of the region, while legislative reforms will have region-wide impacts.

5 Employment Assistance Services and Training

Providing employment opportunities is necessary to break the cycle of homelessness. Employment assistance programs consist of a wide variety of services, including training and education initiatives aimed at reconnecting individuals with employment.

6 Legislative Reform to Provide Adequate Levels of Income

Legislative reforms to achieve this priority include increasing minimum wage to reflect rising housing costs, improving access to employment insurance, and increasing rates and improving access to provincial Income Assistance.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Increasing the supply of affordable housing and ensuring adequate income will have a significant impact for many homeless people in the region. However, many people who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness require additional support services if they are to find, access and maintain adequate housing. The support services that are essential to the continuum of housing and supports are described below. The Regional Homelessness Plan strongly recognizes the need to expand these services in every community in the region.

7 Prevention Services

Prevention services describe a range of programs and services aimed at helping to prevent people from becoming homeless. Prevention efforts can be direct, such as providing short-term funding to a family to cover one month's rent and prevent eviction. They can also be indirect work to address collective needs, such as advocacy work to protect tenants' rights. Prevention is particularly important due to its potential to reduce future human and financial costs of homelessness.

8 Outreach Services

Outreach services are delivered by individuals who seek out and approach people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Outreach workers are often the first people to have contact with a homeless person. They work with homeless people to assess their needs, help connect them to services (e.g. food, drug and alcohol treatment, health care, income assistance and shelter), and help facilitate a process of transition to enable them to find and maintain housing. Outreach workers build a sense of trust with both homeless individuals and service providers and are a critical part of the continuum of housing and support.

9 Drop-in Centres

Drop-in centres, along with outreach services, may be the first point of contact with services for a person who has become homeless. Drop-in centres offer people a place to come in off the streets where it is warm and dry. Many offer coffee, a meal, use of a washroom and shower, and referrals to other services and housing. Some also offer life skills, training and employment assistance.

10 Health Services

The lack of shelter, poor nutrition, mental health and addictions issues and the stresses all these conditions engender result in a high incidence of physical and chronic health issues for homeless people. Access to primary health care, including medical and dental services, are important for the wellbeing of homeless people and because chronic and untreated health conditions pose serious barriers to exiting the street.

11 Mental Health Services

Mental health services cover a broad range of inpatient and outpatient services and programs that are best delivered through an integrated system provided in each local mental health area. Clinical services are provided through Health Authorities and non-profits deliver outreach services with a non-clinical approach. Outreach services are often housing-focused, helping people with mental health issues maintain their housing.

12 Addiction Treatment Services

Addiction treatment services include residential and non-residential detox, treatment and recovery programs. They also include harm reduction measures such as needle exchanges and safe injection sites. Addiction treatment services are also an important support component of many supportive housing programs.

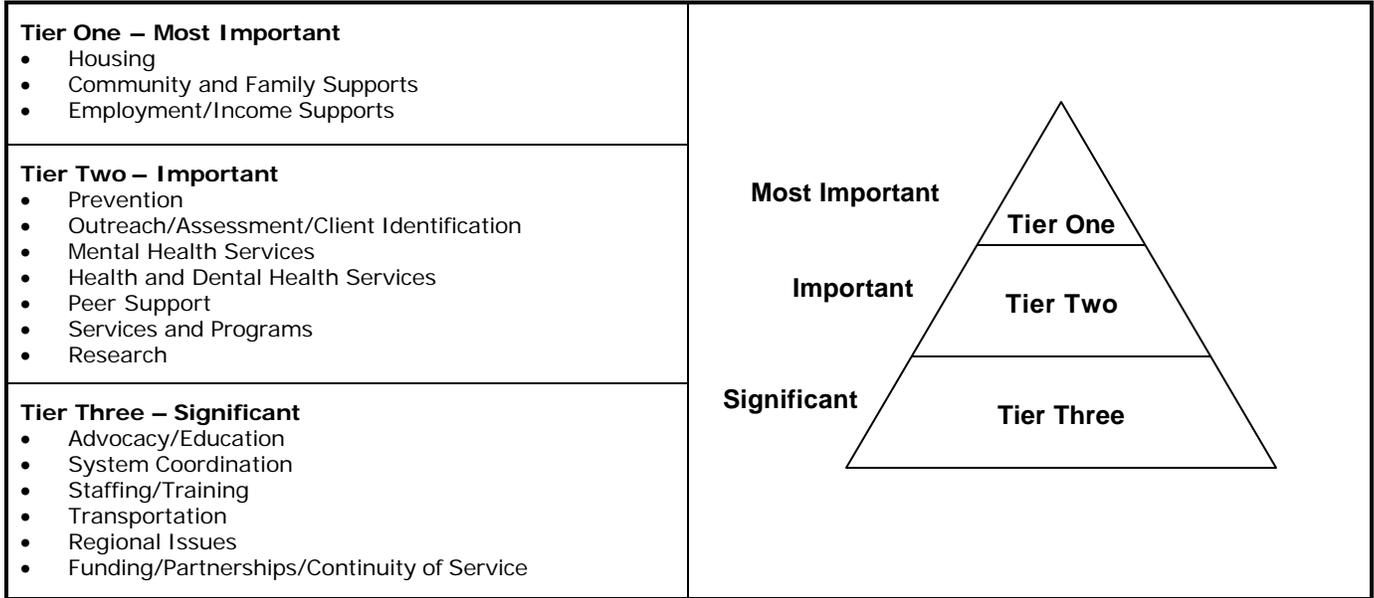
13 Research, Planning and Capacity Building

Extensive research has been completed on homelessness and the homeless population in the region. Research projects include the 2002 Research Project on Homelessness in Greater Vancouver and the 2005 Homeless Count. Ongoing research is needed to ensure that planning and funding priorities continue to reflect the needs of homeless people in the region.

Capacity building refers to work to increase the collective ability of communities to respond to homelessness. To this end, the RSCH works with local homelessness task forces in communities throughout the region and with service providers seeking to sponsor projects to address homelessness in their communities.

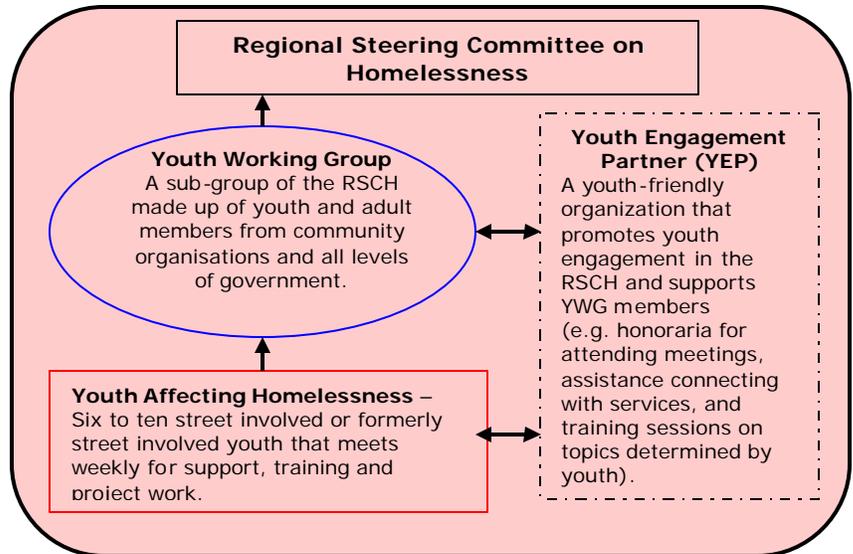
Aboriginal Homelessness Priorities

Regional priorities in addressing Aboriginal Homelessness were identified by the Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee in consultation with the Aboriginal community, including service providers and people who are homeless.



The Youth Working Group Engaging Youth in Solutions to Youth Homelessness

The Youth Working Group is comprised of formerly and currently street involved youth, service and shelter providers, and all levels of government. The YWG provides advice, guidance and support to the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness on issues, projects and priorities related to youth homelessness as well as on the RSCH process of youth engagement.



For a copy of the Regional Homelessness Plan, visit the GVRD Homelessness website at: <http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/homelessness/>