



LET'S TALK  
ENDING  
HOMELESSNESS

# CAPACITY BUILDING

## REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS PLAN DISCUSSION PAPER

### INTRODUCTION

Consultations for the Regional Plan are intended to focus on three issue areas: Housing First, Prevention, and Capacity Building.

The purpose of this paper is to help shape the discussion on “Capacity Building” and help identify priorities and strategies within this broad subject area. The paper looks at what is working well in our region and opportunities to increase our effectiveness in ending and preventing homelessness.

### WHAT IS CAPACITY BUILDING?

Our regional homelessness plan, 3 Ways to Home, defined capacity building as an ongoing process to strengthen the ability of individuals, agencies, networks and the broader community to develop a meaningful and sustainable response to homelessness. The Plan identified the following priorities and actions to increase capacity building:

- Increase the range of funders and potential contributors at community planning and implementation tables
- Encourage all levels of government and their appropriate Ministries or Departments to participate in the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH)
- Assist agencies to develop networks to undertake joint activities and coordinate their services to achieve common goals and provide better service to clients
- Further develop community awareness of homelessness

A recent report prepared for the Comox Valley Community Capacity Initiative Collective (CVCCIC) states that capacity building “gives people the skills, ability and confidence to take a leading role in the development of their community. It equips people with the information, understanding and training that enable them to perform effectively in bringing about desired change” (Ignite Consultancy, 2013). According to this report, objectives of capacity building are to:

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

### WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED IN METRO VANCOUVER?

Metro Vancouver is ahead of most parts of the country in terms of how we are working together as a region to address homelessness in areas like setting priorities, sharing good practices, and building community homelessness networks. The RSCH is community based and has been able to grow strong community connections since it was created in 2000. Capacity building has always been part of the activities of the RSCH, through the community development role of staff at the Secretariat and through Youth and Business Engagement Strategies.

Examples of RSCH initiatives designed to increase capacity in the region to address homelessness include:

- **Regional Homelessness Plan:** The Regional Homelessness Plan, 3 Ways to Home, set out broad policy directions for addressing homelessness in the Metro Vancouver region and served as a template for other sub-regional plans, including efforts by municipalities, neighbourhoods and private foundations committed to a structured approach to addressing homelessness.
- **Homeless Counts:** The RSCH conducted its first homeless count in 2002 to inform the development of the 2003 Regional Homelessness Plan. The RSCH has conducted a homeless count every three years since then to obtain current data and identify trends in the homeless population. Municipalities, funding agencies, health authorities, service providers and community groups throughout Metro Vancouver use data from the homeless counts to identify priorities and make funding decisions about housing and services to address homelessness.
- **Engagement Strategies:** In May 2013, the RSCH adopted a new membership structure to be more inclusive, strategic and effective. Whereas the previous structure included a maximum of 40 members who were required to participate equally in meetings and working groups, the new structure provides for an open membership, a new decision-making body (the Constituency Table) and opportunities for members to participate through Advisory Groups and other forums. The RSCH has more than doubled its membership, which includes all levels of government, community foundations and agencies that provide a range of services to address homelessness in the region.
- **Community Homeless Tables (CHTs):** Over the years, the RSCH has worked with CHTs to help them strengthen community networks, increase knowledge, develop local strategies, and promote communication and collaboration. At the 2012 Forum of CHTs, participants reported that they had made considerable progress in developing their tables. Nine CHTs are currently operating in Burnaby, Langley, New Westminster, North Shore, Richmond, Ridge Meadows, Surrey, the Tri-Cities and White Rock. These tables have created the Council of Community Homelessness Tables to work collaboratively together and have a seat at the Constituency Table.
- **Funders Table:** The RSCH has created a Funders Table that includes all levels of government and private and philanthropic foundations that fund local homelessness initiatives and support the RSCH vision to end homelessness in Metro Vancouver. The purpose of this Table is to create a collaborative forum for regional funders to play a leadership role in:
  - ♦ Promoting a common vision for funding priorities to end homelessness;
  - ♦ Maximize resources and efficiencies for programs and services to end homelessness in Metro Vancouver; and
  - ♦ Advocate for policies and systems changes that promote cross-sector coordination and permanent solutions to homelessness.
- **Homelessness Action Week:** This initiative has been conducted throughout the region since 2006. The goals are to increase awareness about homelessness in the region, organize efforts and resources of communities to address homelessness, showcase best practices in ending homelessness, and identify gaps in community services.

## KEY LESSONS/SUCCESS FACTORS

The literature identifies the following key success factors for building capacity to end and prevent homelessness. These include:

- Creating a more cohesive, integrated and shared approach to service delivery;
- Increasing cross-ministry/community collaboration; and

- Increasing training within the homeless sector workforce.

Examples of how these approaches have been used successfully are provided in Appendix A.

## **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR METRO VANCOUVER - CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

While we have made significant progress in growing the region's capacity to address homelessness, several challenges remain. One of the goals for the future is to find ways to make more efficient use of resources and skills within the region, strengthen our networks, and address values, attitudes and motivations that may bring us closer to our goal of ending homelessness.

### **Resources/funding to end homelessness**

#### **CHALLENGES**

The federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy provides an important source of funding to support capital projects and services to address homelessness. However, it is not possible to end homelessness without the involvement of other key stakeholders, including the province, municipalities, private foundations and the business community. The lack of a national housing strategy and a commitment of adequate funding from the federal and provincial governments is a key challenge to capacity building and ending homelessness.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

The RSCH Funders Table has the potential to provide a collaborative forum for regional funders to maximize resources and efficiencies for programs and services to end homelessness in Metro Vancouver. The RSCH Business Engagement strategy looks at the potential to build stronger ties with the business community to increase funding and support for the Regional Homelessness Plan and solutions to homelessness. Working with the business community could help build capacity and increase funding and resources to end homelessness.

### **Resources/funding for capacity building**

#### **CHALLENGES**

While CHTs have made considerable progress in developing their tables and increasing capacity within their communities to address homelessness, their funding is limited and unstable. This makes it difficult for CHTs to engage in long-term planning, initiate longer-term projects, and operate as effectively as they might.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

The new RSCH structure, including the Funders Table and Business Engagement strategy may provide opportunities to find increased resources to support the CHTs – particularly if capacity building is identified as a community priority.

### **Culturally appropriate housing and services for Aboriginal people**

#### **CHALLENGES**

About 30% of the homeless population in Metro Vancouver identifies as Aboriginal. Little progress has been made over the years to reduce this percentage. Building a strong partnership with the Aboriginal community and the AHSC has been a priority for the RSCH, but there is still more work to be done.

## OPPORTUNITIES

The regional homelessness plan recognizes that the delivery of culturally appropriate services is a best practice. This means the delivery of Aboriginal housing and services by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The new RSCH structure provides greater opportunities for Aboriginal participation and collaboration with the AHSC and may provide new opportunities to support culturally appropriate housing and services.

### **Integrated service delivery**

## CHALLENGES

The integration of human service has been identified as a factor for success throughout the national and international homelessness sector. This involves "...services, providers, and organizations from across the continuum working together so that services are complementary, coordinated, in a seamless unified system, with continuity for the client" (Alberta Health Services, 2009). However, larger agencies may be reluctant to work with smaller specialized service providers, and smaller agencies may not be able to meet the demand for their services without additional funding.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Service providers in some communities have begun working collaboratively together to address their clients' needs and to develop a person/client-centred (and client directed) integrated strategy to ensure their clients are housed and receive the services they need to maintain their housing. Pooling resources, co-locating services, providing a 'one-stop shop' approach to facilitate access to services also provide opportunities to increase the capacity of agencies to facilitate access to services to end and prevent homelessness.

Other opportunities include limiting duplication of services, streamlining services and referring clients to other agencies that have the necessary expertise.

### **Cross-ministry/community collaboration**

## CHALLENGES

Homelessness is a complex social problem that requires strong coordination within governments, between different levels of government, and between governments, community groups and the private sector. Cross ministry/agency collaboration is one way to accomplish this. Factors for success in promoting this type of collaboration include:

- A clearly articulated strategic framework of goals and specific results-oriented benchmarks to keep governments and their partners focused;
- Leadership by politicians and key officials, including treasury board support; and
- Pooled budgets for policy and program initiatives.

## OPPORTUNITIES

The new RSCH structure may provide an opportunity at the regional level for all levels of government, community groups and the private sector to collaborate to develop policy and program initiatives to end and prevent homelessness. With a new plan focused on ending homelessness and strong support from many different sectors (municipalities, business, funders, and community organizations) it may be possible to focus government efforts on the long-term cost savings that can be achieved through prevention and housing first.

## Data collection and analysis

### CHALLENGES

Data collection is necessary to improve planning, strategic decision making, and measuring success. More work is necessary in the region to identify measurable outcomes and indicators and to develop consistent data collection and reporting systems to ensure that data is reliable, accurate, and comparable among agencies.

### OPPORTUNITIES

The switch to the Community Entity model for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy gives the RSCH unprecedented ability to monitor outcomes from the investment of federal dollars. It will also enable the region to collectively learn about what is working well and what can be done to increase our effectiveness in ending and preventing homelessness. Participation and engagement of funded agencies in improving data collection and analysing and evaluating our progress will be an important part of improving the regional capacity to measure success.

## Training and support for the homeless sector workforce

### CHALLENGES

Research in the US suggests building the capacity of the homeless service workforce might improve the nation's response to homelessness and that it is necessary to focus on training and retaining an experienced workforce. Workers in homeless services face many challenges, including:

- Insufficient training or experience to understand the special needs of people who are homeless, many of whom may have experienced trauma
- Reluctance of many people experiencing homelessness to engage in services
- The need to provide services in non-traditional settings
- The need to address multiple needs of people who are homeless – in communities where these needs are typically addressed by a number of separate and seldom effectively coordinated agencies
- Low wages
- Burnout and compassion fatigue

### OPPORTUNITIES

Research in the US suggests that many people working in the homeless sector feel a strong commitment to their jobs because of the social value of their work. Strategies for sustaining this commitment to service include improving the capacity of leadership and management to create a supportive organizational culture, fostering a culture of respect and empowerment, building a sense of community, improving benefits, offering flexible work schedules, establishing a culture of recognition, helping workers to develop their professional careers, and developing the leadership and management skills of program administrators. The RSCH may be able to play a role in supporting leadership within the homelessness serving sector and identifying training and support needs and opportunities.

# APPENDIX A:

## EXAMPLES OF CAPACITY BUILDING APPROACHES

# HOUSING FIRST APPROACHES - METRO VANCOUVER REGION

## 1. Homelessness Intervention Project, 2009-2011

The BC Government's Homelessness Intervention Project (HIP) is an example of a 'cross-agency' initiative that adopted an integrated service delivery model to reduce chronic homelessness. It operated in five BC communities: Vancouver, Surrey, Prince George, Kelowna, and Victoria.

The program involved creating a single integrated team in each community that included the regional health authority, regional BC Housing staff, the Ministries of Social Development, Health Services and Public Safety and Solicitor General, and an extensive list of local community groups and non-profit organizations. The goal was to place 1,720 chronically homeless people in stable housing over an 18-month period. Community teams surpassed this goal, and succeeded in housing 3,209 clients and connecting them to supports and services they needed to retain their housing. Over 23 months, the project housed close to 4,000 people, more than half of whom were confirmed as chronically homeless, and 85% remained stably housed after a year.

The HIP project demonstrated that a coordinated, client-centred approach that involves partnerships among community stakeholders (e.g. by creating a single integrated team) is an effective way to end homelessness. Ideally, these teams should include a full range of stakeholders, including all levels of government and relevant government departments, service providers and health authorities, and the full spectrum of health and social services clients need to be successful, including housing, income assistance, life skills, employment, health services, and mental health and addictions services.

## 2. Partners in Community Collaboration, Kelowna

In Kelowna, a group known as Partners in Community Collaboration (PICC) provides an example of a service network that adopted an integrated case management approach to serve their clients. Outreach workers and service providers began meeting once a week in 2007 to develop strategies for individual clients. This group includes members from youth, health, mental health, employment, income assistance, housing, skills development, and addictions services. The community believes PICC meetings are a factor for success in reducing the number of people who are homeless in Kelowna.

## 3. Homeward Trust, Edmonton

Homeward Trust Edmonton is a not-for-profit organization that uses a community-based approach to work towards ending homelessness in Edmonton. It works with 9 community agencies across Edmonton to deliver the Housing First program, including two agencies that work specifically with Aboriginal clients. A key factor for success is providing training and education to Housing First workers on topics such as the core concepts of Housing First, Aboriginal diversity, and motivational interviewing.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

1. BC Ministry of Social Development. (2011). Homelessness Intervention Project: Review and Assessment. Retrieved from [http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/publicat/pdf/HIP\\_review\\_assessment\\_report.pdf](http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/publicat/pdf/HIP_review_assessment_report.pdf)
2. Homeward Trust, Edmonton. Retrieved from <http://www.homewardtrust.ca/programs/housing-first.php>
3. Ignite Consultancy. (2013). Delivering integrated service responses to Homelessness: Best Practice Review of Leading Communities for the Building Community Capacity Project in the Comox Valley, Vancouver Island BC. Prepared for the Comox Valley Community Capacity Initiative Collective.
4. Mullen, Joan and Walter Leginski. 2010. Building the Capacity of the Homeless Service Workforce. The Open Health Services and Policy Journal, 2010, 3, 101-110.
5. Peach, I. (2004). Managing Complexity. The Lessons of Horizontal Policy-Making in the Provinces. Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy.

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