

**MINISTRY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL
HOMELESSNESS POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS BRANCH
INFORMATION BRIEFING NOTE**

PURPOSE: For INFORMATION for David Eby, QC
Attorney General and
Minister Responsible for Housing

ISSUE:
Homelessness Action Plan and related activities

SUMMARY:

- The 2017 mandate letters to the Ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Social Development and Poverty Reduction directed Ministers to develop a homelessness action plan.
- The Homelessness Action Plan was approved by Cabinet in 2018.

BACKGROUND:

- The 2017 mandate letters to the Ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Social Development and Poverty Reduction directed Ministers to “*Work in partnership to develop a homelessness action plan to reduce the homeless population through permanent housing and services. As part of the plan, conduct a province-wide homelessness count.*”
- A team composed of staff from the two ministries and BC Housing was established to develop the Homelessness Action Plan (HAP), led by an Executive Director steering committee.
- Development of the plan included:
 - Research and analysis, including five research reports commissioned from City Spaces Consulting
 - Cross-ministry engagement, including Mental Health and Addictions, Health, Children and Family Development, Solicitor General and Indigenous Relations
 - Review of feedback from Poverty Reduction Strategy public engagement
 - Consultation with a panel of experts, chaired by Ministers, which met twice in 2018. A discussion paper was prepared for the first meeting, at which the panel confirmed the priority needs of three groups:
 - Youth generally, and especially those aging out of care
 - Indigenous homelessness
 - 20 per cent with complex mental health and substance use needs
 - At the second meeting, the panel identified priority actions, the top four of which were:
 - Policy alignment and accountability across government
 - Provincial access and assessment and shared client-information system
 - Target transition points
 - Financial and social supports for tenants in private market rental
- The HAP was approved by the Housing Working Group and Cabinet in November 2018 (Attachment A).

- A request to fund Phase 2 actions of the HAP went to Treasury Board in January 2019.
- The HAP shifted the response to homelessness from a reactive approach focused primarily on housing, to a more systemic approach involving multiple partners.
 - The HAP aligned with other government strategies that help prevent homelessness, including Homes for BC, TogetherBC and the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, among others.
 - The 3-phase plan set out 14 actions, under four pillars:
 - Prevention (to make homelessness a rare occurrence)
 - Immediate response (to make the experience brief when it does occur)
 - Stability (to make homelessness a one-time occurrence for individuals)
 - Working better together (partnership, collaboration, alignment and accountability)
 - The HAP was not publicly released. A brief description of the plan's approach was included in TogetherBC, released in March 2019 (Attachment 2).
- One action was to designate a provincial government lead on homelessness to help align accountabilities across government and with partners. To do this, in April 2019, the provincial government created the Office of Homelessness Coordination, within the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. The Office of Homelessness was renamed the Homelessness Policy and Partnerships Branch when it was integrated into the Office of Housing and Construction Standards under the Ministry of Attorney General in late 2020.

DISCUSSION:

- Several actions were funded to address homelessness in 2019. These include:
 - Office of Homelessness Coordination
 - Provincial homeless count, and complimentary research on Indigenous homelessness
 - BC Rent Bank
 - Homelessness Community Action Grants program
 - BC Employment and Assistance policy enhancements
- Since 2019, the Homelessness Policy and Partnerships Branch, formally the Office of Homelessness Coordination, has worked to action several initiatives funded and/or endorsed as part of the Homelessness Action Plan. In addition to initiating the actions noted above, these include:
 - Development of an Integrated data strategy
 - Research and engagement on youth homelessness
 - Co-chairing the Vulnerable Populations Working Group (pandemic response)
 - Support in preventing and responding to encampments
 - Community inclusion knowledge guide
 - Video series on Indigenous homelessness
 - Addressing critical transition points, such as seniors transitioning to Canadian Pension Plan

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- Integration of health and homelessness services (model of care, substance use system of care)

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CONSIDERATIONS:

- The representation of Indigenous people in the homeless population is far greater than that within the general population. In the 2018 BC homeless count, 38 per cent of the respondents were Indigenous, compared to 6 per cent in the provincial population as a whole.

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GBA+ OR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS:

- The HAP recognized that other distinct groups have unique experiences and pathways into homelessness, including people with mental health and addictions challenges, seniors, LGBTQ2S individuals, and women. Further work will be done to identify distinct issues and solutions for these groups.

OTHER MINISTRIES IMPACTED/CONSULTED:

- Health, Mental Health and Addictions, Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Children and Family Development, Public Safety and Solicitor General, Municipal Affairs

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Attachments (2)

1. Homelessness Action Plan
2. Action of Homelessness

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Action on Homelessness

Homelessness is inextricably linked with poverty. Without a home, people have few ways of addressing their basic needs, let alone finding a way out of poverty.

Recognizing the urgency of the housing and homelessness crisis, Budget Update 2017 and Budget 2018 included several major investments, including:

- 2,000 supportive modular homes over the three years through the Building BC: Rapid Response to Homelessness.
- 2,500 supportive homes over 10 years through the Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund.
- 1,750 homes over 10 years for Indigenous peoples, both on- and off-reserve through the Building BC: Indigenous Housing Fund.
- 1,500 spaces of transition and second-stage housing over 10 years for women and children escaping violence through the Building BC: Women's Transition Housing Fund.
- 14,000 mixed-income homes over 10 years, 70% at below market rental rates, through the Community Housing Fund.
- Expanded eligibility and increased benefits under the Rental Assistance Program and Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters to help an estimated 35,000 families stay stably housed.
- The first-ever provincial report on homeless counts, providing a snapshot of the demographics and service needs of people experiencing homelessness.

The 2018 Report on Homeless Counts in B.C., summarizing findings from 24 homeless counts conducted in communities across British Columbia, indicated a total of 7,655 individuals are experiencing homelessness. Of these, 63% were sheltered and 37% were unsheltered; 20% were seniors (55+ years of age); 15% were youth (under 25 years of age); and, 38% of survey respondents identified as Indigenous. Individuals who have been in foster care have a higher risk of becoming homeless.*

** The Report acknowledges this to be a conservative estimate.²⁹*

A New Approach

Under the previous government, homelessness was allowed to increase, leaving more people cold, hungry and trying to survive on the street.

This approach was reversed with the new government, which took immediate action to examine the scale and the scope of the problem, while also working quickly with 22 communities to build more than 2,000 low-barrier, modular homes with 24/7 supports for those most in need.

Work to build homes for people experiencing homelessness is continuing with Budget 2019, which includes additional funding for supportive modular housing. Together with the Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund, these investments are opening up the homes that people need to get out of homelessness and begin their journey out of poverty.

To guide further action on homelessness, we have launched the Office of Homelessness Coordination, to move beyond reactive emergency responses to homelessness and towards a co-ordinated, effective approach that prevents people from becoming homeless in the first place. Our government's approach to addressing homelessness can be summed up by the following four points:

1. **Prevention:** Make homelessness rare by preventing people from becoming homeless and by helping people who are at risk of homelessness or precariously housed.
2. **Immediate Response:** If someone becomes homeless, actions should make the experience brief to reduce harm and help prevent chronic homelessness.
3. **Stability:** Once a person has a roof over their head, give them the supports they need to make sure their experience with homelessness is a one-time occurrence.
4. **Working Better Together:** Co-ordinate actions across provincial and local government and with community partners. This includes being clear about responsibilities and making sure responses to homelessness are effective in every part of the province.

Reducing homelessness is a shared mandate of the Ministers of Social Development and Poverty Reduction and Municipal Affairs and Housing. Further, addressing the real causes of homelessness is included in the 2017 Confidence and Supply Agreement between the BC Green Party Caucus and the BC New Democrat Caucus (CASA).³⁰

Further Actions on Homelessness

Provincial Rent Bank: Emergencies happen — people get too sick to work, hours get cut, a roommate suddenly moves — and a person's income can be unexpectedly interrupted. Recognizing that a temporary crisis can increase the risk of homelessness for renters, we are investing \$10 million to support community-based rent banks to help people keep their homes.

Targeted interventions: When people experience a crisis, the right interventions at the right time can help keep them from becoming homeless. The Office for Homelessness Coordination will work with partners across government and in the community to better understand the needs in our communities and help make sure people aren't falling through the cracks.

Policy Enhancements: Along with the \$26 million announced in Budget 2019 to remove administrative barriers to accessing income and disability assistance, government is investing more than \$10 million to ensure policies and procedures do not contribute to — or fail to prevent — homelessness. Beginning in summer 2019, government is removing several restrictions on access to the moving supplement for people on income or disability assistance. This will help more people moving to lower-cost housing or moving closer to work, services, or family and friends.

We are also eliminating the "transient" category to ensure that a person without a fixed address is eligible to receive the same supports, general supplements and earned income exemptions as other income assistance clients.

Rapid Response and Supportive Housing: Government's Rapid Response to Homelessness program was initiated in September 2017, with a goal of building 2,000 new modular homes with 24/7 supports for British Columbians in need by the end of spring 2019.

Budget 2019 builds on the Rapid Response to Homelessness program with funding to build another 200 supportive modular homes for people in need in communities around the province.

The Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund funds the creation and operation of 2,500 homes with 24/7 services and supports for those who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless.

Provincial Homeless Counts: The Province will work with communities throughout B.C. that conduct local counts, to co-ordinate the next provincial count in 2020.