Ending Homelessness in Calgary

Despite considerable efforts over the past two decades, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Calgary continues to grow. In 2007, Calgary will embark on a 10-year plan to end homelessness.

The State of Homelessness in Calgary

There were 3,436 homeless individuals in Calgary in 2006, up 32% from the previous count in 2004.

Calgary’s Homeless Population = 3,436
- 12% on the streets
- 78% male
- 46% aged 25-44
- 145 families

The Cost of Homelessness

Homeless persons are high users of costly public services such as hospitals, emergency medical services, and police services. Studies have found there are positive outcomes and reduced expenditures for permanent supportive housing relative to hospital/institutional costs. Chronic homelessness in particular, consumes a disproportionate amount of costly resources. Addressing the needs of this population will free up resources for other homeless subpopulations including youth and families.

10-Year Plans to End Homelessness in the United States

Since 2000, beginning with a movement by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and further engaged by the Bush Administration’s 2003 budget goal of ending homelessness in 10 years, over 200 cities in the U.S. have developed 10-year plans to end homelessness. These plans, supported by research and grounded in practical experience, center on developing local level strategies to end homelessness rather than to manage it.

About one-third of the plans developed to date target chronic homelessness specifically, with the argument that demonstrated improvements in the most difficult area motivate further change and illustrate that the entire social problem can be solved. Early results show clear and significant outcomes.

10-Year Plans: Measurable Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Goal Area</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>↑ number of people helped by homeless prevention services</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>↑ number of permanent supportive housing and interim housing units</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>↑ number of permanent and transitional housing units</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>↑ number of families provided with homelessness prevention assistance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>↑ number of chronically homeless people moved into housing</td>
<td>↓ shelter waiting lists/turn-away counts</td>
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Steps to an Effective 10-Year Plan

The National Alliance to End Homelessness set out four principal strategies that should be undertaken simultaneously by communities to develop and implement a 10-year plan to end homelessness:

1. **Plan for Outcomes**: establish solid baseline data and create a planning process that focuses on the outcome of ending homelessness, rather than managing it.

2. **Close the Front Door**: reduce the number of people entering the homeless system from other systems such as mental health, justice, and child welfare.

3. **Open the Back Door**: focus on moving individuals into permanent supportive housing as quickly as possible (i.e. housing linked to support services to ensure they remain housed).

4. **Build and Strengthen the Infrastructure**: deal with the root causes of homelessness (e.g. address poverty, develop supportive and affordable housing, institute creative land use policies, ensure supports such as rent subsidies).
Development of 10-Year Plans in Canada

Similar to initiatives in the U.S., a number of cities across Canada are in the initial stages of developing 10-year plans. Vancouver and Red Deer have both begun developing a plan, and in Calgary, the creation of the Calgary Committee to End Homelessness was announced in January 2007. Comprised of twenty-four Calgary corporate, government and community leaders, the committee has been established to develop a 10-year plan to end homelessness in the city. It is expected the plan will be delivered in 18 months. In addition, the 2016 Foundation, an organization committed to ending homelessness in Canada in the next ten years, has advocated that the federal government lead a national strategy to end homelessness and support the development and implementation of municipal 10-year plans.

Role of Governments

Through the U.S. experience, a number of key roles have emerged for governments in the development and implementation of 10-year plans to end homelessness:8

- Political will and leadership
- Involvement from all levels of government as decision-makers

In addition to the 2016 Foundation’s recommendation, Calgary’s Sustained Poverty Reduction Initiative (SPRI) has set out a number of recommendations in the area of affordable housing and homelessness for all levels of government. Broadly, the SPRI calls for commitment to better intra-government policy integration and coordination. Specific recommendations for all three levels of government include9:

**Recommendations for the Government of Canada**

- Sustain current levels of funding and implement sustainable and predictable funding for affordable and supported housing
- Institute tax incentives to support development of affordable housing
- Identify and dedicate surplus federal land and buildings for affordable and supported housing

**Recommendations for the Government of Alberta**

- Establish a provincial Commission on Affordable Housing & Homelessness
- Match federal funding dedicated to affordable housing
- Institute legislative changes to permit (1) enhanced use of municipal and reserve land for affordable housing and (2) secondary suites
- Institute tax incentives to engage the private sector in developing affordable housing
- Identify and dedicate surplus provincial land and buildings for affordable and supported housing

**Recommendations for Alberta Municipalities**

- Work with the provincial government on necessary legislative changes
- Create guidelines in local land use regulations that require or encourage residential developments to include a certain percentage of affordable housing
- Identify and dedicate surplus municipal land and buildings for affordable and supported housing initiatives

“No one level of government, no one sector can do this job alone. Every level of government and every stakeholder from the private sector, including consumers, need to be partnered to reach the goal.” – Philip F. Mangano, Executive Director, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness

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4 Ibid.
6 Ibid.