

A Place to Call Home:
Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

Executive Summary

Leadership Committee

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Homelessness is a growing problem in Edmonton. For the past decade, every year, whether the economy was soaring or slumping, the number of people experiencing homelessness in our city has increased.

The shame of us having the number of homeless people we have is very difficult for Edmontonians to accept. They're saying that's not acceptable. It's time to come up with a roadmap, one which will deal with this in an effective manner. We really can't bury our heads in the sand anymore.

Mayor Stephen Mandel

The most recent survey in 2008, counted 3079 people without a home: an increase of 18% from 2006 and triple the number counted in the first survey in 1999. These numbers include people living on the streets and in shelters as well as some, but far from all, of the hidden homeless: people who couch surf with friends and families.

Edmontonians want to see an end to homelessness in our city. We pride ourselves on being part of a community that cares for its most vulnerable. So in 2008, Edmonton's Mayor Stephen Mandel charged a committee of 30 prominent Edmontonians to come up with a plan to end homelessness. *A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* is that plan.

Housing First

A Place to Call Home focuses on the Housing First principle, which has been tested and proven in other North American cities. Housing First represents a shift in thinking: people no longer have to be 'prepared' or 'transitioned' into housing by first dealing with mental health or addictions issues. The Housing First philosophy recognises how difficult it is to solve such issues without stable housing.

Housing First works like this:

- **A permanent home:** clients are found a permanent home, regardless of their past or present issues.
- **Client choice:** clients and outreach workers together figure out how best to ensure the client can stay in that home.
- **Support services:** it is critical that each client has the right services in place as they adjust to life in a permanent home. The services vary in intensity and can include:
 - psychiatric and/or substance abuse treatment,
 - daily living skills training / health, wellness,
 - recreational activities,
 - help with family reconnections,
 - money management training,
 - vocational and supported employment services.

Housing First has demonstrated huge success, but will not be the answer for everyone. Practically, interim housing will be required for some and permanent supportive housing for others. For example, independent housing for youth leaving homelessness may not be an appropriate option. For others, the independent living model might never be an option. *A Place to Call Home* allows for varying levels of housing solutions with different support options.



Many of the people who are on the streets have severe mental health issues...I've seen hundreds of people who are on the streets, they lose their medications...or someone steals their medications. But when you have a home you have someplace to keep them, you have a team that's helping you get on the right path.

Dr. Raj Sherman

ER PHYSICIAN, MLA EDMONTON MEADOWLARK



Preventing Homelessness

A Place to Call Home aims to ‘open the back door’ out of homelessness by rapidly re-housing people in crisis with the right supports. It also plans to ‘close the front door’ with prevention programs designed for people at risk of becoming homeless. Helping families or individuals with rent, utility payments or support services before they become homeless is significantly more effective and less expensive than providing crisis services.

Even if we construct a perfect plan ... and we start to get chronically homeless people off the street, that's not to say that 10 years from now people won't arrive in the city and find themselves without a home, or fall behind, or fall into some circumstance that forces them to be out on the streets. But hopefully we will have systems in place then that help those people find homes, right away.

Linda Hughes

CHAIR, EDM. COMMITTEE TO END HOMELESSNESS

Implementing the Plan

The success of *A Place to Call Home* is dependent on the collaborative efforts of all levels of government and of the community at large. The Plan requires commitment from the Province of Alberta and the Government of Canada for short- and long-term funding, and for policy changes. Our Plan is aligned with the Government of Alberta’s plan, A Plan for Alberta, which is similarly rooted in the Housing First philosophy.

Edmonton City Council plays a leadership role in implementing the Plan: securing funding, appointing the Homeless Commission, and aligning city programs, policies and funding with the Plan.

The Homeless Commission is the champion of the cause: ensuring funding is directed appropriately, engaging community support, influencing public policy, setting and resetting aggressive targets, measuring outcomes and evaluating success.

A management agency, Homeward Trust, manages coordination of the Plan, allocates funding and ensures training programs are in place to maintain a standard of excellence in program delivery.

Goals

Targets

1 Provide permanent housing options for all people living on the streets and in public places

● All people living on the street or in public places will have been given the option of permanent, supported housing

2 Ensure an adequate supply of permanent, affordable housing with appropriate supports for people who are homeless

PERMANENT HOUSING							
Existing							
Pathways	● 50	● 100	● 150	● 200	● 100		
Streets to Homes	● 100	● 200	● 200				
New Housing							
Modestly-sized Units			● 150	● 200	● 250	● 250	●
PSH - Addictions			● 50	● 50	● 50		
PSH - Mental Illness			● 50	● 100	● 100	● 100	
Addictions - Treatment			● 50	● 50	● 50	● 100	
Total	150	300	650	600	550	450	
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING							
Family Units			● 50	● 50			
Post-health institution			● 50				
Youth			● 50	● 50			
Total			150	100			

3 Ensure emergency accommodation is available when needed, but transition people quickly into permanent housing

● Decrease the number of sheltered homeless to 2006 levels

● Decrease the average length of stay at an emergency shelter to less than 7 days

4 Prevent people from becoming homeless

● Reduce the need for emergency shelter capacity by 50%

5 Establish a governance structure and an implementation process for the Plan that builds on the strengths of the community; develops capacity; promotes collaboration, innovation and cost-effectiveness; and measures progress

● The Homeless Commission produces an annual update, documenting progress on implementing the Plan, to be submitted to all orders of government

TARGET DATE

2009

2010

2011

2012

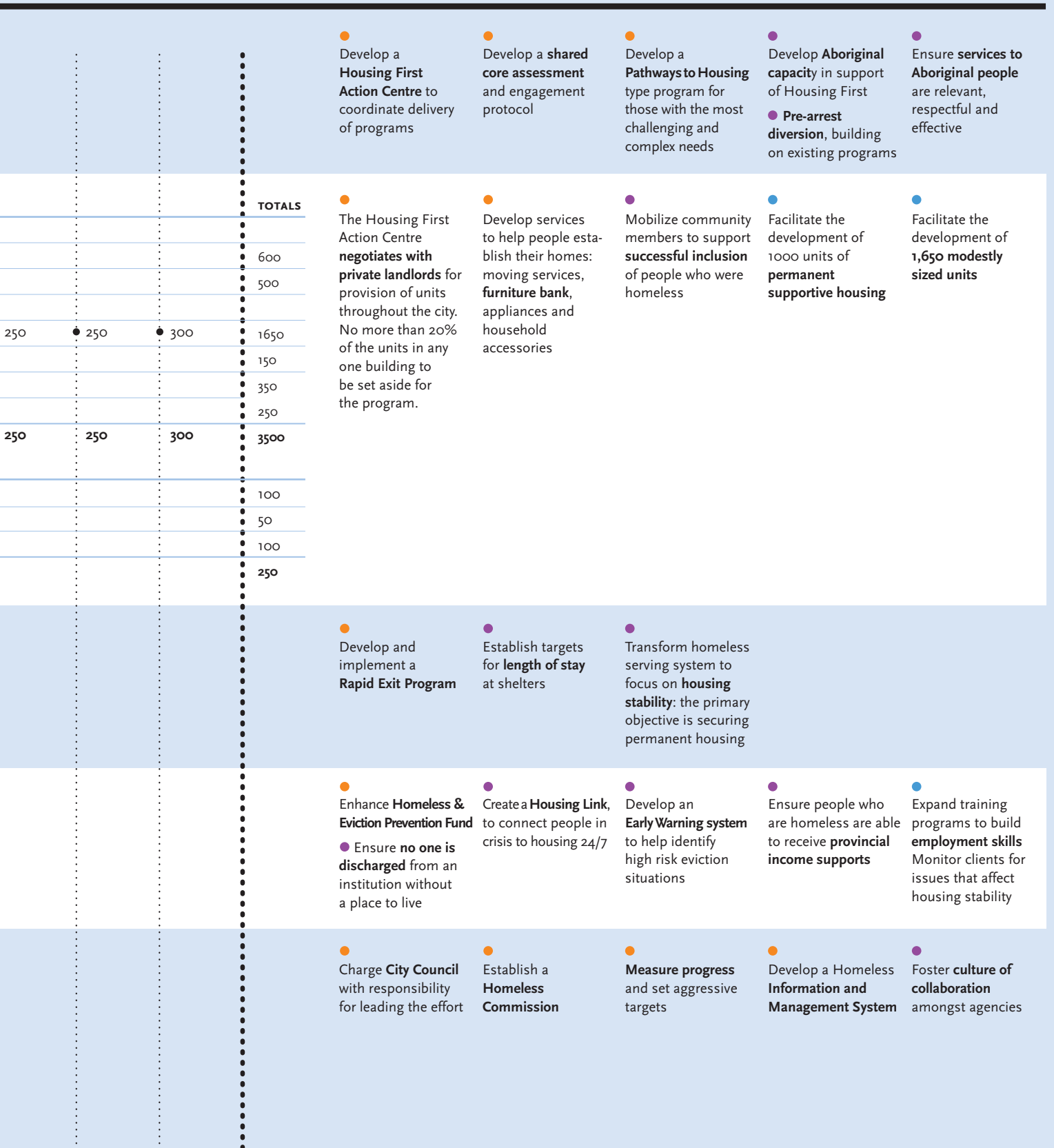
2013

2014

2015

2016

Strategies



● Develop a **Housing First Action Centre** to coordinate delivery of programs

● Develop a **shared core assessment** and engagement protocol

● Develop a **Pathways to Housing** type program for those with the most challenging and complex needs

● Develop **Aboriginal capacity** in support of Housing First
● **Pre-arrest diversion**, building on existing programs

● Ensure **services to Aboriginal people** are relevant, respectful and effective

● The Housing First Action Centre **negotiates with private landlords** for provision of units throughout the city. No more than 20% of the units in any one building to be set aside for the program.

● Develop services to help people establish their homes: moving services, **furniture bank**, appliances and household accessories

● Mobilize community members to support **successful inclusion** of people who were homeless

● Facilitate the development of 1000 units of **permanent supportive housing**

● Facilitate the development of **1,650 modestly sized units**

● Develop and implement a **Rapid Exit Program**

● Establish targets for **length of stay** at shelters

● Transform homeless serving system to focus on **housing stability**: the primary objective is securing permanent housing

● Enhance **Homeless & Eviction Prevention Fund**
● Ensure **no one is discharged** from an institution without a place to live

● Create a **Housing Link**, to connect people in crisis to housing 24/7

● Develop an **Early Warning system** to help identify high risk eviction situations

● Ensure people who are homeless are able to receive **provincial income supports**

● Expand training programs to build **employment skills**
Monitor clients for issues that affect housing stability

● Charge **City Council** with responsibility for leading the effort

● Establish a **Homeless Commission**

● **Measure progress** and set aggressive targets

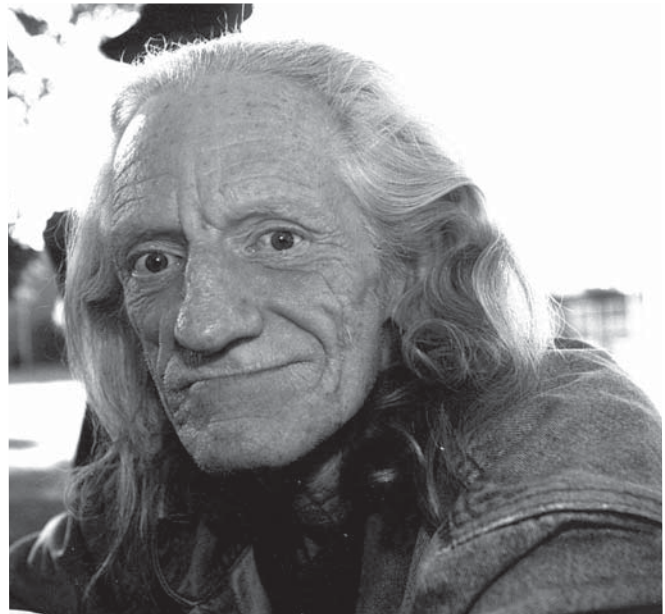
● Develop a **Homeless Information and Management System**

● Foster **culture of collaboration** amongst agencies

Investing in the Solution

Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness requires significant upfront investment, including capital costs of \$401.6 million (over 10 years) and operating costs of \$567.5 million (over 10 years). By 2018, when the Plan is running at full capacity, the operating cost will be \$90 million/ year.

The capital investment over the next 10 years will be for the construction of new independent (1650 units), and supportive/transitional (1000 units) housing units. The operating costs are associated with wrap-around supports for the newly housed in those homes, as well as for those in 1100 existing units through Pathways and Streets to Homes type programs.

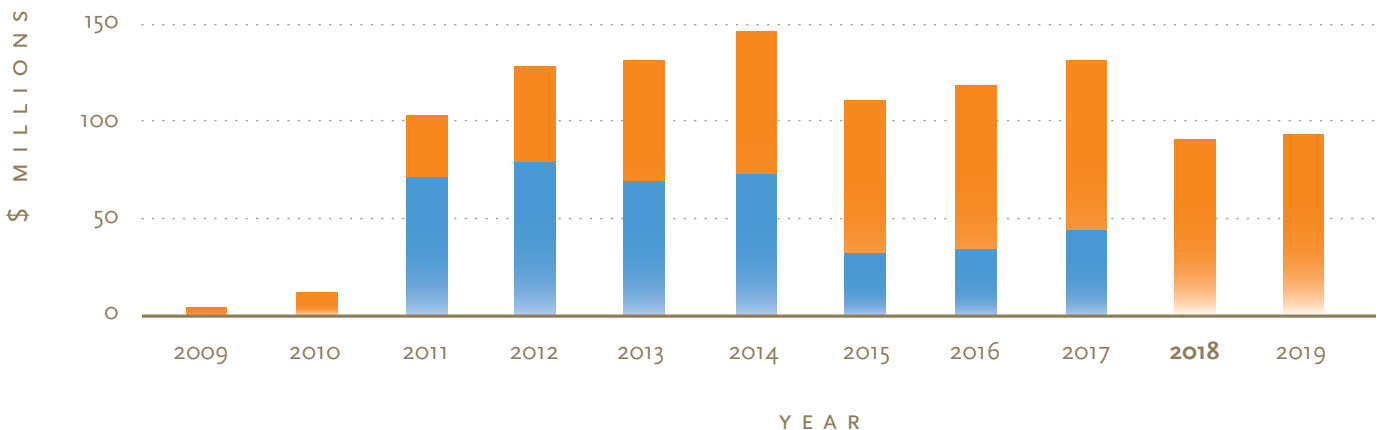


Some people believe that solving homelessness is going to be so expensive that it's impossible to do. But it's not impossible, because if we think long-term, say 10 years, it will be cheaper.

Roger Gouin BUSINESSMAN, LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE TO END HOMELESSNESS

Total cost of the Plan

■ Total capital costs ■ Total operating costs



The Costs of Maintaining the Status Quo

Maintaining the status quo, allowing the numbers of homeless on our streets and in our shelters to grow, is expensive. Public dollars go into shelters, but also into all the ancillary services associated with homelessness. A person who is homeless spends more time in hospital, makes more calls for emergency services, and is more likely to come into contact with the justice system.

The facts:

- In extreme weather, a homeless person in Edmonton is 40 times more likely to access an emergency room than the general population. (Alberta Health Services)
- A homeless person admitted to hospital from September 1, 2007 to August 31, 2008 spent on average 28 days in hospital. The general population spent 9. (Alberta Health Services)
- If Alberta Hospital Edmonton is included in hospital stays, the average length of stay for a homeless person is in excess of 66 days. One day in hospital costs about \$1,400.
- In 2003 79% of respondents to a homelessness survey said they'd spent time in jail, mainly for relatively minor offences. (Homeward Trust)
- Institutional responses to homeless people (detention, prison, psychiatric hospital) cost between \$66,000 and \$120,000 each year.

Source: Pomeroy, *The Cost of Homelessness: Analysis of alternate responses in four Canadian Cities*. Ottawa: National Secretariat on Homelessness, 2005

We know with some certainty that if we continue to respond to homelessness in Edmonton in the current fashion, the number of people experiencing homelessness will continue to grow. Assuming a growth rate of 8% per year (the average from the last 3 homeless counts), there would be approximately 6,500 homeless Edmontonians in 2018. Assuming that we provide emergency shelter space to 40% of that population, as we now do, the annual cost of 2,627 shelter spaces alone would be \$54.3 million, not including all the additional costs of health care and other services. And those costs would grow unabated. By comparison, the operating costs of implementing this Plan will be \$90 million a year

By the year 2020, when this Plan is fully implemented and running at maximum capacity, our projections indicate it will cost taxpayers slightly less than the cost of maintaining the status quo. And we will have brought an end to chronic homelessness in Edmonton.

Because there is no price tag at the end, and no one gets an invoice, it's really lost on the general population how expensive it is to have someone go through all the systems- the justice system, the health system, and running up bills or costs that aren't unnecessary, but in some cases could be avoided or dealt with in a different way.

Bruce Bentley
PRESIDENT AND CEO, MACLAB ENTERPRISES

Benchmarks

Short-Term (first year)

- Establish and set up Homeless Commission
- Appoint management agency
- Set up the Housing First Action Centre
- Secure 100 units of supported housing in the private rental market
- Develop the Homeless Information and Management System
- Develop core assessment tool
- Develop a Pathways to Housing type program
- Secure supported housing for 50 individuals with severe mental illness and substance abuse issues
- Develop Rapid Exit Program

Mid-Term (first three years)

- Develop a Housing Link
- Develop capacity for an Aboriginal agency(s) to support the Housing First program
- Develop an Early Warning System
- By the end of this phase, the number of sheltered homeless should be down to 2006 levels
- Institutional discharge plans will be coordinated
- First 200 units of modestly sized housing come on-line

Long-Term (five years +)

- Average length of stay at an emergency shelter is less than 7 days (2014)
- Need for emergency shelter space has decreased by 50%



I was tired of being alone. I lived in a field by the airport. Slept in the middle of the field. It was a bad place because it was really windy there and I got buried by the snow.

Kelly Ridsdale