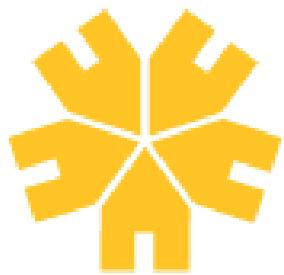


# Homelessness Research Plan: 2013-2018



greater victoria  
coalition to end  
homelessness  
hope has found a home

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Intention .....	2
Context.....	2
Background .....	2
Scope .....	3
Roles of Research in Ending Homelessness.....	4
Coalition Involvement in Research.....	5
Research Priorities.....	6
Theme: Housing Continuum .....	6
Production of affordable housing.....	6
Theme: Experiential Perspectives and Population Groups .....	7
Experiential perspectives .....	7
Homeless population and statistical analysis .....	7
Population groups .....	7
Theme: Poverty and Income.....	8
Policy barriers .....	8
Theme: Services Continuum .....	9
Housing and health services .....	9
Services maze .....	9
Theme: Prevention .....	9
Other Priorities .....	10
Principles .....	10
Partnership Strategies.....	11
Summary .....	12
Recommendations .....	13
Next Steps .....	13

## Introduction

### Intention

**The primary purpose of this Plan is to identify research priorities to contribute to knowledge and solutions for ending homelessness.** The utility of the plan should not be limited to the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (Coalition) but should provide guidelines for anyone intending to conduct research on homelessness issues in Greater Victoria. Partnering and collaboration are key components of this plan and it was developed through collaboration between partners of the Coalition. In this document, we outline the roles of research in ending homelessness, principles to guide research on homelessness and, key issues or areas where research is needed and put forth strategies and recommendations for conducting research.

### Context

Reflecting its role and purpose as a coalition of stakeholders concerned with ending homelessness within the Capital Region, the Coalition has multiple roles related to this Plan, including the following:

- As a partner with other community stakeholders in the identification of research priority needs and processes to act on those needs.
- As a lead or sponsoring agency to move forward specific Coalition research projects and initiatives.
- As a partner/participant in specific research projects and initiatives initiated by other community entities.
- As a user of data and analysis from any research initiatives to inform business planning and other actions in support of the mandate of the Coalition.

### Background

The Coalition hosted a facilitated half-day dialogue on research priorities in December 2012. Participants included service providers, business, funders, academic researchers drawn from Coalition partner agencies. People who have experienced homelessness were invited but unfortunately none were able to attend. A total of eighteen participants identified high, medium and lower priority areas for homelessness research in Greater Victoria. Based on the workshop proceedings, a five-person task force developed this initial draft.

This draft is intended to:

- Provide a broad base for discussion of research priorities.
- Inform those interested in undertaking relevant research.
- Provide the Coalition with direction for pursuing research partnerships.

This initial document is circulated with an intention to engage a broader group in the consultation process.

## Scope

The scope of this plan is meant to provide a set of research priorities for the area covered by the Coalition which is aligned with the boundaries of the Capital Regional District.

The plan covers the period 2013 to 2018, with recognition that there may be a need to regularly update the research priorities and strategies within this time frame.

The Coalition has adopted the Canadian Definition of Homelessness (2012)<sup>i</sup> as *the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it*. There are four categories of homelessness identified including:

- **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation.
- **Emergency sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence.
- **Provisionally accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure.
- **At risk of homelessness**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

## Roles of Research in Ending Homelessness

By providing the knowledge needed to inform planning and develop solutions, research is an important contributor to ending homelessness. Gaetz (2012) has identified three roles of research in ending homelessness:

- Conceptual includes work to clarify concepts and definitions that help in creating shared meanings or understandings of important concepts. This can be hugely helpful in guiding policy and practice. For example, the Canadian Homeless Research Network recently released a Canadian Definition of Homelessness to assist with guiding the conduct of research such as facility and homeless counts as well as shared understanding of those impacted.
- Instrumental research refers to original research which can span a range of questions and methodologies that answer priority research questions. Such research is usually undertaken to fill a specific gap in understanding and add to the overall knowledge base for ending homelessness. There are many examples of this kind of research including determinants of homelessness among youth, evaluation of transitional housing, health needs of homeless people.
- Symbolic research involves using research results to legitimate and sustain arguments, strategies and positions. Such research includes translation of existing research into a format that is usable to policy makers, service providers and others. This involves the practical application of data to move forward the requirements of an organisation and satisfy the demands of funders and decision makers.

These research types are not mutually exclusive of each other and often are used as building blocks to action, for example by moving from conceptual to practical. Furthermore, they encompass a range of research methods and designs. These include both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

## Coalition Involvement in Research

Since 2008, the Coalition has co-authored a series of reports on housing and supports in collaboration with Bernie Pauly at the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, University of Victoria. Through collection of data from existing sources, these reports detail the determinants of homelessness, and track the extent of homelessness and responses to homelessness in the Capital Region.

The Coalition has also commissioned or contracted the completion of a number of topical papers that have incorporated current research or contributed to a better understanding of Coalition priorities. These include: *Finding our Path, Aboriginal Homelessness; Prevention of Homelessness*<sup>ii</sup>; a literature review of promising practices for social inclusion<sup>iii</sup>, and an evidence based policy framework for integration of harm reduction into initiatives to end homelessness<sup>iv</sup>.

The Coalition is a partner on several proposed multi-year research projects including the CIHR Her Way Research proposal to investigate needs of low income women and housing experiencing substance use and the Canadian Homelessness Research Network proposal to develop a Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Both of these proposals are under review with outcomes to be announced in 2013.

## Research Priorities

In this section, we identify areas of research that can help end homelessness in this region, and sorts these priorities into broad themes. According to what was identified in the roles of research section, research is not necessarily original but can build upon existing research.

### Theme: Housing Continuum

The Housing Continuum refers to the range of housing options from shelters through to market housing. The continuum should “recognize the need in most BC communities for non-market affordable housing, which is not social housing (i.e. government supported), for low and medium income earners.”<sup>v</sup> (Curran and Wake, page 3) Ideally individuals will move through that continuum but some may face too many barriers. As well, the use of ‘continuum’ as a descriptor is not meant to imply that individuals must move through its components in a linear progression.

- Study / research to increase awareness/understanding of the Housing continuum: homeless shelters – supportive – independent public rental – private sector rental – ownership.
- Through supply/demand studies determine shortfalls or gaps along the continuum.
- Strengthening the links between each continuum element, e.g., private sector providing rental units to reduce demand on existing public stock, creating supportive availability, etc.
- Examine innovative use of available housing today vs. building social housing five+ years out.
- Supportive housing – how many current residents of supportive housing are capable of moving to lighter supports in market rent.
- How to effectively provide housing and stabilize the lives of Victoria’s “street-entrenched” population (or Hard to Reach).
- How can market housing become more available to homeless people?
- Beyond income what are the barriers to accessing affordable quality housing?

### Production of affordable housing

By affordable housing the Coalition means housing, including any additional shelter expenses, that costs less than 30% of before tax household income and is of a suitable size and condition.

- How can we facilitate the building of more housing that is affordable and suitable?
- What are the economic and social benefits of reallocating public funds to create affordable, suitable housing?
- What exemplary practices exist to increase the supply of affordable, suitable housing?
- What barriers (policies, public opinion, etc.) exist to increase the supply of affordable, suitable housing?

## Theme: Experiential Perspectives and Population Groups

### Experiential perspectives

- What are the barriers to being adequately housed or the pathways out of homelessness?
- What do homeless persons want regarding services for obtaining housing?
- Experiences of homelessness from the perspective of those who are homeless.
- What do those who experience homelessness think needs to be done to end homelessness in the region?
- What services are most used by the homeless population? Why?
- Why do some individuals not choose to accept resources where offered?

### Homeless population and statistical analysis

- Analysis of chronic homeless population sub-groups; how many need supports?
- Shelter users – one time? Periodic? Chronic?
- Research chronic shelter users, not always those that generate extremely high costs for the system-but still chronically homeless.
- Standardized data on people who use shelters.

### Population groups

Aboriginal: children and families, youth and rural/regional research. These overlap with the Tier 1 theme of “experiential perspectives”, and can be addressed through research with that focus. Aboriginal research topics and questions include the following:

- Impact of on-reserve housing on off/on reserve homelessness and risk of homelessness.
- Aboriginal strategies in housing security.
- Improving Aboriginal research partnerships.
- Transitions out of homelessness for Aboriginal peoples.
- Pathways to wellness for Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal youth transitioning out of foster care.
- First nations or Aboriginal housing – how much is there? How much is needed?

Children and family research topics and questions include the following:

- Transitions out of homelessness for women and families.
- Elder abuse manipulation of parents and grandparents for money etc.
- What happens to women with their housing when their children go into care?
- Grandparents becoming the primary caregiver/guardian for their grandchildren.
- Best practices for affordable housing for families including on-site child care.
- Supportive housing models for parents/families.

Youth research topics and questions include the following:

- Exploring with Ministry of Children and Family Development how homelessness/under housing intersects with children in care.
- Youth, particularly Aboriginal youth, transitioning out of foster care.
- Does the region have the right programs or enough resources to effectively intervene in the lives of young people who are at-risk of becoming homeless? How to prevent.
- How many youth are homeless in the Capital Regional District? And type: foster care, run away, abuse, etc.
- Impact of housing standards and insecurity on child welfare/wellbeing (re intersection with child welfare, children in care).
- Pathways out of homelessness for youth.
- What are the seasonal effects on homelessness for youth?
- Youth employment.

Rural/regional perspectives and issues:

- Are there enough resource in the right places throughout the region to respond to homelessness and support people becoming more stable in terms of housing? What more needs to be done?
- Understanding and increasing the awareness of homelessness and affordable housing needs in non-urban areas.

## **Theme: Poverty and Income**

- Focus on “ending poverty” as a way to “end homelessness” – a poverty plan for the region.
- How do we get the provincial government on board in addressing poverty and inequality?
- What minimum income level is needed to prevent homelessness?
- What do we need to do to address poverty? What first steps are most effective and how can we do this?
- Focus on research related people who fall between the cracks – no addiction, no mental illness diagnosed, but homeless or working poor at risk of homelessness.
- What policy changes would be most effective in addressing poverty tomorrow?

## **Policy barriers**

- Research the social, fiscal, and housing policies at all levels of government that may impact homelessness – set targets/measures.
- Policy barriers for effective services provision.
- Policy – shelter rate, 5 week wait – systemic barriers to service provision and access.

## Theme: Services Continuum

### Housing and health services

- How can we see more housing connected to addiction recovery and mental health issues available? What resources are needed?
- What supports are needed to house people with very complex problems?
- Housing and harm reduction programs to prevent harms of substance use, with housing as part of interview.
- How can medical services become more available to homeless people?
- Outreach and best practices.

### Services maze

- Are we doing our best to collaborate and integrate services to homeless persons?
- How are supports and housing best provided to ensure effective and efficient use of services?
- Are the regions programs diverse enough to meet the needs of diverse citizens? (e.g. youth, Aboriginal people, newcomers to Canada, seniors).
- Opportunities for collaboration (i.e. research, funding, program delivery).
- Asset mapping.
- Identify gaps in programs and human services that may be contributing to homelessness.
- Provide increased training for outreach workers (as identified by outreach workers).
- Research promising practices of effective collaboration between service providers.

## Theme: Prevention

- Homelessness prevention research – how to support vulnerably housed people.
- Working poor – a neglected population?
- Eviction from supported housing – who, why, where do they go?
- What role does family support play in coping with homelessness?
- Prevention – key transition points into chronic homelessness, best practices to address them.
- Research numbers on how many of the people who are “housed” each year become homeless again.
- Increased economic participation.

## Other Priorities

Other research topics identified include the following:

- Research rising senior homeless populations.
- What role do the media play in shaping public perception of causes of homelessness?
- Can local government influence public support for housing projects?

## Principles

The following principles are intended to guide all research related to ending homelessness in this region.

1. **Acknowledge the systemic nature of homelessness.** People who are homeless are not the problem. Homelessness is largely a systemic problem.
2. **Use experiential expertise.** The experience and input of people who have experienced homelessness is important in all types and topics of homelessness research.
3. **Use collaborative approaches.** Everyone involved in the research is a research partner. Roles may be formal or informal, but all are contributors and/or participants.
4. **Foster mutual understanding and respect among research partners.** People based in universities, governments, community agencies and on the street exist in diverse environments with different needs and cultural contexts. Mutual understanding, recognition of different roles and responsibilities are important in bridging these worlds.
5. **Use diverse kinds of evidence.** Research evidence may be in many forms, such as: existing or new statistics; words... images...
6. **Involve end users early.** It is strategic to engage users of homelessness research - such as politicians, public servants, community leaders, service providers and people who have experienced homelessness – as early as possible in the process.
7. **Encourage useful research.** Ideally research processes and products will be rigorous in their methods while also useful to organizations working to end homelessness.
8. **Focus on knowledge mobilization and translation.** For example, research can play a vital role in documenting successful initiatives and emerging preferred practices - and identifying what would be required to scale up.

## Partnership Strategies

Participants were asked to identify new and existing partnerships as well as strategies to develop and sustain research partnerships. A wide range of research partners were identified.

Partners in research to end homelessness include the following:

- **Coalition funders:** Capital Regional District (CRD), City of Victoria, United Way of Greater Victoria, Vancouver Island Health Authority, BC Housing, Victoria Foundation
- **Academic community**
- **Municipal, Provincial, and Federal governments**
- **Housing and health agencies and associations**
- **Non-market housing providers and networks**
- **Private housing providers and networks**
- **Community, social service and health agencies and associations serving homeless people**
- **People who have experienced homelessness**
- **Provincial and national research networks**
- **First Nations, regional and local government bodies**
- **Funding agencies**
- **Others**

Potential partnership: where do needs of the coalition coincide with needs of partners?

- Police, e.g. police calls with Victoria Integrated Community Outreach Teams (VICOT) team before and after VICOT came into being – role is data provision; Ministry of Social Development.
- Non-traditional: prevention for example: economic greening sustainable economy – city and others initiatives economic greening how can it be socially inclusive?
- CRD Carey Road project for seniors, Aboriginal youth work experience thru community college, who is end audience for policy initiative and funding for new projects?
- New partner buy-ins to concepts, easier to go forward with initiatives.
- Aboriginal communities and First Nations – we need to extend ourselves to them – invite in-person, elders - provide an honorarium, respect their protocols.

## Summary

It is clear that research to end homelessness needs to involve and engage a wide range of partners from people who have experienced homelessness to service providers, to business and academic researchers. Clearly, collaborative approaches to research have been identified as a key approach to doing research. Potential partnerships already exist and may involve an expansion of existing or development of new research partnerships. However, in undertaking collaborative research, there is an explicit need to clearly identify the different roles and priorities of various research partners.

Clearly, the principles identified by the participants highlight the importance of collaborative research where research priorities are mutually identified and there is collaboration between partners throughout the process of the research. Within a collaborative approach to research, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies can be incorporated dependent on the particular research purpose and questions. This approach to research as collaborative is sometimes known as integrated knowledge translation because various partners in the research both produce and use knowledge throughout the process of the research. As such, collaborative research is more likely to be used in practice as it is aligned with identified priorities and needs of community. Community and academic researchers play a role in developing research proposals and implementing research protocols. The Coalition is potential partner for those conducting research in the key priority areas identified in this report. As such, the Coalition can provide access to networkers and assist with moving new knowledge into practice. This approach requires that needs, roles and responsibilities of all research partners are identified and there is an opportunities for dialogue and transparency in the process of research.

There is also a clear need for better translation of existing research. Good research has already been done but is not being read or used.

## Recommendations

1. The Coalition is a true participatory coalition and as such can continue to support partnerships and collaborative approaches to research in addressing homelessness and demonstrate to others the utility of such partnerships. The Coalition has a particular role to play in facilitating the involvement of a range of partners such as service providers, government and people experiencing homelessness in using and contributing to research.
2. Research on homelessness is needed in three key areas including:
  - a. A better understanding of the nature and key experience of homelessness among different groups in the population (e.g. youth, Aboriginal peoples, shelter users, women and so on).
  - b. Transitions and pathways out of homelessness for different groups of people experiencing homelessness.
  - c. Addressing determinants of homelessness including the supply of affordable housing.
3. As priorities the Coalition should continue and expand its work on:
  - a. The nature of homeless populations including seeking clarity around the nature of the subpopulations within that group and their housing needs.
  - b. How this relates to gaps in the housing continuum in Greater Victoria and best practices for addressing those gaps.
  - c. Identify research funding to support these priorities and support partnerships seeking access to research funding.
4. Use existing research to prepare an evidence-based white paper on housing needs.

## Next Steps

1. The Coalition will post this document on its website and distribute to potential research partners and other relevant agencies.
2. The Coalition will meet with its partners, including key funders, to determine the most important research priorities in the near term.

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<sup>i</sup> Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012) Canadian Definition of Homelessness.

Homeless Hub: [www.homelesshub.ca/CHRNhomelessdefinition/](http://www.homelesshub.ca/CHRNhomelessdefinition/)

<sup>ii</sup> Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2010), Finding Our Path: Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness:

[http://issuu.com/VictoriaHomelessness/docs/finding\\_our\\_path\\_3\\_1](http://issuu.com/VictoriaHomelessness/docs/finding_our_path_3_1)

<sup>iii</sup> Norman, Trudy and Pauly, Bernie (2013), Promising Practices for Meaningful Participation among constituencies Working Toward Ending Homelessness in Victoria, BC: Phase I: A Review of the Literature, University of Victoria, Center for Addictions Research of British Columbia.

<sup>iv</sup> Pauly, Bernie; Reist, Dan, Schactman, Chuck and Bell-Isle, Lynne (2011). Housing and Harm Reduction: A Policy Framework for Greater Victoria, University of Victoria, Centre for Addictions Research of British Columbia.

<sup>v</sup> Curran, Deborah, and Wake Tim (2008), Creating Market and non-Market Affordable Housing: A Smart Growth Toolkit for BC Municipalities, Smart Growth BC,

[http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca/portals/0/downloads/s gbc\\_affordable\\_housing\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.smartgrowth.bc.ca/portals/0/downloads/s gbc_affordable_housing_toolkit.pdf)