Final Report

Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative

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Prepared for the Housing Support Services Hub
Edmonton, Alberta

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Executive Summary

A. Introduction

The 'Systemic Barriers to Housing' initiative was a project of the Housing Support Services Hub. The 'Hub', in turn, was a funded initiative of Homeward Trust Edmonton, supported by Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs. It was launched in 2008 as an interagency strategy to enhance the capacity of 13 member agencies[1] to secure housing, prevent evictions and increase the housing stability of the people with whom they work.

Early in the Hub's work, it became apparent to the team that systemic barriers were having an unintended negative impact on individuals' and families' ability to access and maintain stable housing. With funding from the Community Partnership Enhancement Fund,[2] the Hub contracted external consultants in 2009 to document and investigate the systemic barriers to housing in Edmonton.

B. Components of the Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative

The initiative included action in five areas:

- An **environmental scan** among community organizations to identify systemic barriers to housing, generating a set of 52.
- Research on **eight priority systemic barriers** (priorities selected by the Advisory Committee for the Systemic Barriers to Housing initiative) and stories of the impact on individuals and families.
- Preliminary **discussion of systemic barriers** between members of the Hub Council and government decision-makers within **three provincial ministries**.[3]
- A **forum** that brought together 80 people (half community and half government) in May 2010 to share the findings and look at **models and opportunities for ongoing dialogue** between **community and government** on systemic barriers to housing.
- Development of a new resource, *Pass it forward: a community resource for shaping government policy.* Intended to help community organizations identify the right people and the right doors within government to address systemic barriers related to practice, procedure, policy, and service gaps, and the most effective ways to bring forward proposals for change.

C. Methodology

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[1] Housing Support Services Hub Member Agencies: Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Canadian Mental Health Association, Capital Region Housing Corporation, E4C, Edmonton Community Legal Centre, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, George Spady, PAAFE, Schizophrenia Society, WJS, WINGS, YMCA

[2] Community Partnership Enhancement Fund was an initiative of Alberta Children and Youth Services between 2003 and 2009.

[3] Ministries: Alberta Employment and Immigration, Alberta Health and Wellness, and Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs.

Identified systemic barriers through practice experience
- Asked service providers within Hub member agencies to consider their practice experience and name concerns related to policies or rules that create unintended consequences.
- The emphasis in the scan of service providers was on experiential knowledge as one source of information that informs decision-making. The inquiry did not delve into the number of people who experience the same problem or probe for details behind each statement

Investigated a set of eight priority barriers
- Organized barriers according to short, medium, or long-term solutions. Hub advisors prioritized a set of eight for further investigation within the scope of this initiative.
- For the eight priority barriers[4], conducted research to clarify existing policies within Alberta and gather relevant examples of comparable policies and regulations in other Canadian provinces. Final report contains the research findings within each of the eight issues.

Facilitated dialogue with three relevant ministries
- In preparation for a series of initial discussions with provincial government ministries, gathered stories of the impact of the priority barriers on the lives of individuals and families.
- Arranged meetings between Hub representatives and government staff within three ministries. Discussed rationale behind existing policies, emerging barriers, the ministry's interest and current/planned work on these issues, and ways in which the community and ministry can jointly develop solutions.

Organized community/government forum toward sustained joint problem-solving
- Brought together 80 representatives, half government and half community, to share the findings from the Systemic Barriers to Housing scan and explore an effective model for ongoing joint problem-solving. Shared existing models, solicited participants' past experience with community/government dialogue, and identified opportunities.

Developed a sustainability plan
- The Hub launched the Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative but the capacity to sustain an ongoing process of community/government joint problem-solving extended beyond its mandate. Consultants prepared a sustainability plan that could be adopted by an appropriate leadership body.

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[4] Eight priority issues: Need for physician approval to qualify for medical supplements; impact of call centres and changing workers on individual relationships; need for sufficient outreach support; allowable employment income on income support; supports not accessed due to not understanding application process; address requirement for direct-to-tenant rent supplement; perception of eviction process from social housing; impact of having a criminal record on access to social housing.

D. Voices represented

The Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative involved interviews with 47 people in 20 agencies to gather input on barriers and stories, meetings with nine representatives within three provincial government ministries, and 80 participants in the May 2010 forum.

E. Concluding remarks

The Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative exposed a wide range of practices, procedures, policies, and service gaps that create unintended but often serious consequences for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The barriers named were a starting point for exploration, without 'censorship'. Each statement and story was a reflection of a lived experience. For every issue, there are layers to be understood that would shed light on context, opportunities and constraints.

Each step of the initiative reinforced the value of bringing together community representatives and government for mutual understanding and to jointly develop solutions. Existing barriers and barriers yet to be identified can impede an individual or family's capacity to access or maintain stable, affordable, quality housing, and, in turn, create more problems in other aspects of daily life. The initiative revealed both an imperative to address systemic barriers and an opening to create a sustainable model for ongoing dialogue and problem-solving for the benefit of individuals and families.

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A. Introduction

1. Background on the Housing Support Services Hub

The 'Systemic Barriers to Housing' initiative was a project of the Housing Support Services Hub ("Hub"). The Hub, in turn, was a funded initiative of Homeward Trust Edmonton, supported by Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs. It was launched in 2008 as an interagency strategy to enhance the capacity of 13 member agencies[5] to secure housing, prevent evictions and increase the housing stability of the people with whom they work. The focus was on the housing needs of young families and families with a large number of children and individuals with mental illnesses, addictions and concurrent diagnoses. The Hub team offered three core services: coordinated landlord recruitment, inter-agency case management, and trustee and money management services. In October 2009, the Hub became one of the Housing First funded initiatives and in April 2011, the Hub entered into a blend of contractual agreements to provide trustee and money management services.

2. Description of the Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative

Early in the Hub's work, it became apparent to the team that systemic barriers were having an unintended negative impact on individuals' and families' ability to access and maintain stable housing. Many of the people served were homeless or at high risk of homelessness. With funding from the Community Partnership Enhancement Fund,[6] the Hub contracted Ann Goldblatt and Roxanne Felix in 2009 to document and investigate systemic barriers. The objectives for the project clustered into four areas:

- Identify systemic barriers experienced by service providers in the Hub member agencies.
- Generate a case study to explore systemic barriers in depth with one individual or family.
- Investigate strategies in use to address similar barriers in other jurisdictions.
- Facilitate initial dialogue, based on the findings, between community and government, leading to a mechanism for ongoing joint problem-solving on systemic barriers.

The Hub Council expressed an interest in sharing the learning with community agencies and government ministries in a forum to set the stage for joint problem-solving. The partners also identified the need for a resource to support community organizations in their desire to influence public policy. Marilyn Fleger joined the team as a researcher and Vasant Chotai as a co-facilitator for the forum and co-producer of the final resource, *Pass it forward: A community resource for shaping government policy.* The span of the project extended from April 2009 to June 2011.

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[5] Housing Support Services Hub Member Agencies: Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Canadian Mental Health Association, Capital Region Housing Corporation, E4C, Edmonton Community Legal Centre, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, George Spady, PAAFE, Schizophrenia Society, WJS, WINGS, YMCA

[6] The Community Partnership Enhancement Fund was an initiative of Alberta Children and Youth Services between 2003 and 2009.

3. Methodology

The consultants presented an initial workplan to Hub Council members (see Appendix A, Proposed Approach, April 2009), based on the objectives of the systemic barriers initiative. Council and the consultants added a forum to bring together community and government representatives to begin the process of joint problem-solving and a resource to support community organizations in shaping government policy.

An Advisory Committee formed to guide the project and the Hub's Team Leader kept the Hub Council members informed through regular updates via e-mail and meetings.

The following sequence represents the steps taken between April 2009 and June 2011.

1. Reviewed the systemic barriers identified by the Hub team as well as the team's service logs between September 2008 and March 2009. Organized the systemic barriers into themes.

2. Developed two core questions and set up interviews with front line service providers in the Hub agencies. The consultants asked providers to consider their practice experience and identify concerns related to policies or 'rules' that create unintended consequences, the 'catch 22 situations'. The interviews included telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings. Some of the meetings involved more than one service provider and one meeting involved a group of youth served by the program.

3. Organized the emerging barriers by theme and shared the findings with the Hub team for discussion. Hub team members provided clarity on particular items.

4. Clustered the barriers into short, medium and long term issues. The Advisory Committee prioritized eight barriers for further investigation, primarily among the short term barriers, given the timeframe for the project. (See Appendix B, Hub Systemic Barriers to Housing.)

5. Sought clarity on the eight prioritized barriers by reviewing written material and, in some cases, by consulting individuals with first hand knowledge of the policies, procedures and practices identified (initial research conducted in 2009; updated in June 2011).

6. In preparation for a planned series of meetings with select government ministries, returned to Hub agencies and other social service providers with an interest in the work of the Hub. The purpose was to inquire if the prioritized barriers reflected their experience, to ask if there were others to add, and to gather stories of the impact of these policies, procedures and practices on individuals and families. This process replaced the original plan to generate a single case study.

7. Investigated and documented relevant examples of comparable policies and regulations in other Canadian provinces.

8. In February 2010, presented highlights of the findings to the Hub Council and discussed plans to hold a preliminary meeting with the four ministries that would have an interest

in the identified issues. The meetings were not designed to advocate for changes to particular policies but rather, to open up dialogue on the findings with interested individuals, to discuss ways in which the ministries were already addressing these issues and to ask the ministries for advice on the most effective means of moving forward in a collaborative way.

9. Hub Council members expressed interest in joining the Advisory Committee for particular government meetings. Prepared tailored 'briefing notes' for each ministry to provide background, pertinent barriers and a sample of stories, and related experience from other jurisdictions. Meetings with three ministries took place during March and April 2010.

10. Designed a forum that took place in May 2010 to share the findings from the systemic barriers initiative and explore models and opportunities for ongoing community / government dialogue for joint problem-solving. (See Appendix C, Findings, Government Decision-Making and Strategic Alliance bullet points, PowerPoint presentations, and Appendix D, Hub Systemic Barriers to Housing Forum, May 19, 2010, Proceedings.)

11. Prepared a Sustainability Plan for the Edmonton Homeless Commission in response to expressed interest in assuming the lead role for a joint problem-solving initiative. Funds have been earmarked for 2011. (See Appendix E, Sustainability Plan submission, July 31, 2010.)

12. Produced community agency resource in June 2011, *Pass it forward: A community resource for shaping government policy.* (Available from the Housing Support Services Hub.)

The methodology for the systemic barriers inquiry placed value on experiential knowledge as one source of information that informs decision-making. The consultants asked service providers to think across their practice and identify barriers. The barriers named by respondents were used as the starting point for exploration, without 'censorship'. Each statement and story was a reflection of a lived experience.

The inquiry was not designed to delve into the number of people who experience the same problem nor to probe for details behind each statement. For each issue, there are layers to be understood that would shed light on context, opportunities and constraints. This becomes one of the bases for exploring more effective dialogue between community and government for joint problem-solving.

4. Voices represented

The first round of interviews focused on Hub member agencies.

Hub member agencies

Bissell Centre	1
Boyle Street Community Services	1
Canadian Mental Health Association	2
E4C	3
Edmonton Community Legal Centre	1

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers	2
George Spady	1
PAAFE	2
Schizophrenia Society	2
WINGS	1
WJS	1
YMCA	2
Total individuals	**19**
Total agencies	**12**

At the time of the first round of interviews, Capital Region Housing Corporation (CRHC), as a Hub member agency, elected not to participate in identifying systemic barriers, indicating they are part of the system as a management body for community housing and rent supplements. Umisk Housing, a Hub member at the time of the interviews, was unable to participate due to limited staff resources.

For the second round of interviews, the consultants returned to the Hub member agencies and added organizations that had been part of the 'Scan for Potential Growth' (June 2009)[7]. These were non-Hub member organizations with an interest in the Hub's services as well as local Aboriginal organizations with shared interests.

Hub Member Agencies

Boyle Street Community Services	1
Canadian Mental Health Association	2
PAAFE	1
YMCA	5

Non-Hub Member Agencies

Aboriginal Consulting Services	1
Ben Calf Robe Society	2
Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society	1
Boyle Street School	1
Grey Nuns Hospital – Psychiatric social work	2
Metis Child and Family Services	6
Operation Friendship	1
Old Strathcona Youth Society	3 staff; 4 youth
Total individuals	**29**
Total agencies	**12**

Following the second round of interviews and the prioritizing of eight barriers, the consultants met with Capital Region Housing Corporation, as a Hub-member agency, to clarify CRHC's rules on the issues raised in the first round of interviews. Three people provided input in response to

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[7] The Scan for Potential Growth was an exploration of potential interest in the services of the Hub if there were additional resources to expand beyond the member agencies.

the questions. The consultants also contacted the AISH program and Income Support to clarify information related to the barriers.

The following reflects participation from government staff working at the provincial and/or regional level, in the meetings arranged with three ministries.

Alberta Health and Wellness	2
Alberta Employment and Immigration	4
Albert Housing and Urban Affairs	3

At each meeting with government, the Team Leader of the Hub and one member of the Hub Council participated along with one of the two consultants.

5. Limitations

A number of limitations are evident in the systemic barriers to housing inquiry.

- The inquiry did not inquire about positive and negative experiences. The initial question asked respondents to focus on difficulties.
- The Advisory Committee selected eight priority barriers from the list of 49 barriers for further exploration. The process did not include going back to the Hub Council member agencies to verify the selection of priorities.
- The investigation into the eight priority barriers primarily relied on document review. Each of the barriers could be investigated with the body that is responsible for the associated policies, procedures and practices to understand the context in depth.

B. Findings

In the first round of interviews, participants generated 49 barriers (the barriers subsequently split into 52). The statements blend three major types of concern: barriers that arise from limited resources (22), problematic rules (15), and experiences interacting with systems (12). The 'problematic rules' are linked to provincial policies, to procedures that may be provincial or regional, and to regional practices. Many of the issues cross government ministries.

The Advisory Committee confirmed a sorting of all of the issues into ones that could be addressed in the short (15), medium (21) and long term (13).

The relationship between the two appears as follows:

	Limited resources	Problematic rules	Experiences interacting with systems	TOTAL
Short	0	11	4	15
Medium	11	4	6	21
Long	11	0	2	13
TOTAL	22	15	12	49

The identified barriers are observations and perceptions based on the practice experience of service providers. Each barrier could be explored in depth to uncover the layers beneath the

surface. Some of the issues will match how they are perceived from the government perspective. In others, the information in the community may be different from the intentions or rules and potentially reflect a communication gap. Further, the rules may have changed since the first round of interviews in late 2009 and early 2010.

The identified barriers are clustered under five themes below:
1. Access to housing
2. Capacity to maintain housing
3. Access to income and adequate income to meet basic needs
4. Adequate income related to physical and mental health
5. Access to services

See Appendix B for a complete list of barriers identified.

1. Access to housing

Service providers named barriers that stand in the way of **accessing social housing.**

Documentation
- Photo identification is required as part of the application process which can be costly and complex. Street-involved life circumstances create vulnerability to losing ID or having it stolen.
- Many people face challenges in their attempts to complete application forms, influenced by literacy, language, culture and cognitive factors. Community agency staff dedicate a significant amount of time helping people through this process. The concern is that people will drop out of the application process and miss the opportunity to access benefits for which they are eligible.

Eligibility
- A criminal record can be a reason to turn down an application for social housing.
- Individuals or families require an address to apply for social housing for the purpose of contact information.
- If an individual or family qualifies for a rent subsidy in the private market, they are removed from the cue for social housing. Because private market rent is not geared to income, social housing may be the preferred option. Individuals may benefit from the direct rent supplement program.
- People under the age of 18 are not eligible for social housing.

The inquiry into the priority barriers added information and clarity on a number of concerns. The inquiry confirmed some of the issues (e.g. an address is required for rent supplement applications), corrected information not widely known in the community agencies (e.g. persons under 18 are eligible for social housing) and identified action underway to mitigate some of the identified barriers (e.g. photo identification),

Three barriers focused on **access to emergency shelter.**
- Shelters are often full and have to turn people away. For adults with children, it is more difficult to find [emergency] shelter space.
- An individual has to be homeless to qualify for emergency housing in a hotel.

- There are inconsistencies in the availability of coverage for the cost of staying in a hotel.

Four barriers were tied more specifically to **rent supplements** from government for use in the private market.

- Individuals require an address to qualify for a rent supplement for the purpose of providing contact information. Because there is a waiting list, the individual may have to sign a lease without assurance that the supplement will come through.
- As named above, photo identification is required to receive a rent supplement.
- Individuals can apply for damage deposit assistance every three years. This poses problems for people who have to move for reasons of safety or an increase in family size.
- When assessed for eligibility, the community understanding is that income support is considered an allowance though it falls below private market rental costs. Similarly, work income can disqualify an individual from a supplement. Individuals dealing with addictions sometimes wind up in affordable rental units that are not conducive to staying clean and dry. [Core Need Threshold]

Service providers identified limited resources as a barrier to accessing social housing and rent supplements.

- The social housing authority was overwhelmed by the added responsibility for rent supplement applications. This had an impact on being able to access information and the waiting period for supplements. The wait time for approval of applications was six to nine months.
- The rent shortfall cap and damage deposit assistance leaves people with insufficient funds to cover rent.
- The social housing waiting list is two years long.

2. Capacity to maintain housing

Once in social housing, barriers surface related to maintaining the housing. Most of the issues relate to actions considered unacceptable by the landlord. These three issues are based on experiences interacting with systems.

- Tenants perceived that rent is raised, without notice, if suspected of having another tenant not listed on the lease agreement. The housing authority indicated that notice is always given.
- A tenant can be evicted or dropped from a benefit if suspected of wrong-doing. The social housing authority has a protocol of making telephone contact and sending three letters prior to an eviction, with the intent of preventing homelessness.
- The tenant is considered 'guilty until proven innocent' if the decision is appealed. In the case of social housing, tenants who are successful in their appeal go back into the cue and assessed anew, based on the point system.
- If a tenant has pests, they are not allowed to move to another unit until the pests have been eliminated.
- When people who have been homeless move into public or private housing on their own, clean and dry, they often get lonely. Some return to a shelter to find company. The people they know are people who may still be using. Their presence may trigger the individual to start using again or lead to disturbance and eviction.

- While hospitalized, a person can lose shelter and have nowhere to go when discharged.

Outreach support was a focus related to maintaining housing.
- People who do not want to be in the shelters, because they find them inhumane, are also not legally allowed to maintain camps in the river valley and people do not want to see them sleeping on urban benches and lawns. As a result, it is difficult to provide outreach support when people have to keep moving.
- Prior to moving into housing (the housing first model), some people first want help with other immediate needs, e.g. assistance to deal with a toothache or a broken bone, basic living skills. They are not asked what they need first.
- When people who have been living on the street move into housing, they require one-to-one support.

3. Access to income and adequate income to meet basic needs
- People receiving income support have an insufficient amount of income to cover rent and other expenses that contribute to health and well-being (transportation, telephone, cable and recreation).
- Assistance rates have stayed fairly stable while cost-of-living has gone up.
- Money received from income support for the months between losing employment and starting employment assistance (EI) is clawed back once an individual starts receiving their EI.

Income assistance specifically **related to housing**
- Landlords have 10 to 30 days to return a damage deposit. This can leave a person without money to put toward the next damage deposit. The alternative was to go to a shelter.

Two concerns focused on difficulties **accessing cash** from income support.
- Individuals require government-issued photo identification to cash a government cheque.
- Workers do not know or pass along information that they can fax a form to a bank which would allow the person to cash government cheques, without a bank account or photo identification.

4. Adequate income related to physical and mental health
- Only medical notes from physicians are accepted to prove the need for additional financial support related to physical and mental health.
- Support for special diets for people with Hepatitis C and HIV was combined and therefore reduced by half. The change occurred without advance notice.
- Eligibility for benefits is reviewed on an annual basis (legislative policy), even if the condition is chronic.
- Some people receiving disability assistance cannot earn the allowable amount to supplement their income.

5. Access to services
- Workers with enormous caseloads are difficult to reach.

The issue of **relationship-based practice** surfaced in several barriers.
- Persons accessing mental health services have to change workers at the age of 65.
- Change to a call centre model for income support removes one-to-one relationships.

The female equivalent of Urban Manor does not exist, leaving women with addictions in a vulnerable position.
- People who hoard need one-to-one support.
- When parents with children who are dependent adults have to move into care for themselves, this creates stress for the adult child who requires appropriate housing and support.

C. Research on eight priority systemic barriers to housing

The Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative zeroed in on eight priority barriers from the initial list of 49 identified by service providers (subsequently split into 52). The criteria for choosing priorities among the short to medium term issues for resolution were importance and timing, i.e. ones that could be explored within the timeframe of the Systemic Barriers to Housing initiative by members of the project Advisory Committee.

Eight priority barriers:
1. Access to required medical supplements on Income Support
2. Consistent workers when accessing services
3. Sufficient outreach support
4. Earning enough income to cover expenses while on social assistance
5. Support to complete the application process
6. Meet the requirements to apply for and access housing
7. Prevent evictions and penalties while living in social housing
8. Access social housing with a criminal record

For each of the priority barriers, we provide information on four elements:
- Issue identified through the scan for systemic barriers (some of the issues are based on a cluster of related barriers).
- Level of change, i.e. whether the issue is related to government policy, procedure, practice or a service gap, and mandated department.
- Clarification based on a review of online policies and regulations, and comments from key informants.
- Related experience and perspectives from other provinces (arranged from west to east).

More in-depth research on these and the other systemic barriers identified in the scan would involve dialogue with the relevant departments to add clarity on existing rules and additional information on the context. The context includes the rationale for the rules that are in place and work underway (past, present or anticipated) to address the emerging issues. There could also be research to provide more detail on experience from other provinces.

Eight priority barriers

1. Access to required medical supplements on Income Support

1.1 Issue
- Medical supplements are difficult to get and funds are often not sufficient to cover the full cost. The issue is two-fold: (a) individuals are asked to produce proof of the need from a physician (difficult to get an appointment); and (b) the amount of money given for a medical supplement is inadequate.

- Rates are restricted since they are in the regulation and the authority is held by the Minister (which is delegated to the Director who can vary the rate within the set ceiling). Therefore, service-delivery workers or delivery-directors in the regions do not have any flexibility to meet the unique needs of individuals; each request for a change has to be submitted to and decided by headquarters.

- The rates are low in Alberta in most categories compared to other provinces. This results in individuals having to forgo the required diets, or use clothing or rent money to cover their added expenses.

1.2 Level of change and mandated department for this issue
The requirement for proof of need from physicians is a decision made at the level of **practice** since the policy does not require physician proof. The amount of money made available for medical supplements is a matter of **policy**. This policy is embedded in the regulation with the Minister holding authority over the amount. Therefore, an appeal panel has no jurisdiction to vary it; this authority is delegated by the Minister to the Director of Strategic Policy & Supports. Alberta Employment and Immigration is the ministry responsible.

1.3 Clarification based on review of Alberta`s policies and regulations (online)

Alberta policy
Individuals who require a special diet for health reasons are provided an allowance to cover the difference between the regulated food rate and the cost of the food required for a special diet. The Minister has authority to establish special diet rates, and this authority is delegated to the Director, Strategic Policy and Supports. Rates for special diets are not subject to appeal to a Citizen's Appeal Panel.

Policy reference
Expected to work/Not expected to work policy and procedures, 10 Supplementary Health Benefits, Special Diets, March 2010, ISHTB Regulation, Schedule 2, Section 2.
Expected to Work/Not Expected to Work Policy and Procedures, Alberta Employment and Immigration, May 2011.
http://employment.alberta.ca/AWonline/IS/4874.html

Special diets are regulated as per ISHTB Regulation, Schedule 2, Section 2 as the difference between the amounts set out in section 1(3) of Schedule 1 for food and the cost of the special

diet as determined by the Minister. The amount set out for food per ISHTB Regulation, Section 1(3)(c) is $83 for each dependent child in a household unit.

Rates
These rates are the difference between the regulated food rate and the cost of the specific established special diets. For more information on nutritional requirements of these diets, see Special Diets Helpful Information.

Special diet/nutrition supplement
Where a physician or registered dietitian, or in the case of a special infant diet, a public health nurse, provides a written opinion that it is necessary for a member of the household unit to follow a special diet, the Director may provide a monthly allowance that is the difference between the amounts set out in section 1(3) of Schedule 1 for food and the cost of the special diet as determined by the Minister.
Income and Employment Supports Regulations, Alberta Employment and Immigration, April 2004.
http://employment.alberta.ca/AWonline/IESA/4133.html

If a client requests a special diet not on the list, the worker may issue $20 pending approval by the Executive Director, Alberta Works Programs. If an individual requires more than one special diet, money used to be provided for both diets, but no longer, for example, for people who have low cholesterol and low fat and have HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

Appeal
In Alberta, **rates** for **special diets** are **not subject to appeal** to a Citizen's Appeal Panel. The Minister has authority to establish special diet rates, and this authority is delegated to the Executive Director, Alberta Works Programs. Rates for special diets are not subject to appeal to a Citizen's Appeal Panel.
Expected to Work/Not Expected to Work Policy and Procedures, Alberta Employment and Immigration, May 2011.
http://employment.alberta.ca/AWonline/IS/4874.html

Proof of need
For most special diets, confirmation from a registered dietician or other health care professional is required indicating the type of diet required and/or medical condition, and the length of time the condition requiring the diet is expected to last if it is not permanent. For pregnancy, confirmation from a health care professional or a verbal or written statement from the client is accepted, and for breastfeeding, a client can indicate, verbally or in writing, that she is breast-feeding and for how long.

If documentation exists (e.g., a Medical Report) to show that a client has a specific health condition which is likely to require a special diet listed in the table (e.g., Hep C) then further substantiation from a health professional is not required to verify the need for a special diet. If it is obvious that a health condition is permanent (e.g., diabetes) then confirmation of the length of time the special diet is needed is not required.

In Alberta, the ministry is not responsible for any **fees** associated with required documentation.

1.4 Related experience in other provinces

Dietary supplements for health conditions in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario

Health Issues	Alberta	British Columbia	Saskatchewan	Manitoba	Ontario
Low sodium, low fat/low cholesterol, high fiber, high calcium, high protein, lactose free, high/low potassium	$20 per month each	$10 - restricted sodium diet $40- high protein diet	$53 for high protein diet	$32.40 to $36.20	$51 for hyperlipidemia or hypercholesterolemia
Diabetic, heart healthy	$40 per month	$35 per month			$81
High calorie (over 2500 calories)	$36 per month each		$42 for 2500 – 2999 calorie $75 for 3000+ calories	Range from $136.93 @ 2500 calories to $171.49 @ 3000 cals.	$51 for Extreme Obesity
HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C	$36 per month each	$40 for high protein diet	$140 HIV/AIDS - includes food supplements or $53 for high protein diet	High Protein/High Calorie Exceeds 100 grams protein daily $136.93	HIV/AIDS range from $191 to $242, depending on weight loss levels
Milk free	$50/month				$32 - $47 varies by age
Celiac/gluten free	$80 per month	$40 for each calendar month		$171.62	$97
Pregnancy	$25 per month	$45 single pregnancy or birth $90/mo. multiple pregnancy or birth	$48		$40 - $50
Breastfeeding (up to 12 months)	$30 per month		$48		$145 - $162
Renal failure/insufficiency	$110 per mo.	$30/mo.	$35	$59.33 per mo.	$52 - $191 or $242 depending on weight loss

Sources:
Expected to Work/Not Expected to Work Policy and Procedures, Alberta Employment and Immigration
http://employment.alberta.ca/AWonline/IS/4874.html
Health Supplements and Programs, BC Employment and Assistance Rate Tables, Ministry of Social Development and Responsible for Multiculturalism
http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/mhr/hsp.htm
Saskatchewan Assistance Program, Policy Manual, Income Assistance and Disability Services, Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services
http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/SAP-policy-manual.pdf
Basic Assistance Rates and Specific Item Guidelines, Employment and Income Assistance Administrative Manual, Manitoba Family Services and Consumer Affairs
http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/manuals/eia/18/index.html#standard
Health benefits: Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Nutritional Allowance, Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services
http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/social/odsp/income_support/odsp_pregnancy.aspx

Saskatchewan and Ontario – More than one condition
- If a person has **more than one of the eligible medical conditions**, in most provinces, the person may receive only the amount of the highest diet supplement for which he or she is eligible, e.g., Saskatchewan. There are **special accommodations** that allow for individualized responses to health needs. In Ontario, if an approved health professional confirms more than one medical condition for which a special diet allowance is provided, the **cumulative**, total allowance for that member cannot exceed $250.
  Special Diet, Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, April 2011
  http://www.toronto.ca/socialservices/Policy/spdiet.htm#Legislation

British Columbia – BC Homeless Protocol
- Under the BC Homeless Protocol, where the client has a drug, alcohol or mental health condition and **does not have a physician**, **other health professionals** may be contacted for the same information, e.g., addictions counselors, social workers, mental health workers, street nurses, substance intervention workers. The supervisor can waive the requirement for a Medical Report in exceptional circumstances (e.g., client with mental health issues is reluctant to see a health professional).
  Homelessness Procedures, BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development.
  http://www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online_resource/program_administration/homelessness/procedures.html

Manitoba – Therapeutic diets
- In Manitoba, the Ministry of Family Services and Consumer Affairs provides policy **flexibility** to allow individualized responses to health needs for a person requiring **a diet that cannot be classified under one of the listed categories**.
  Section 18.4.2: Therapeutic Diets, Manitoba Family Services and Consumer Affairs
  http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/manuals/eia/18/index.html#standard

Ontario – Special diets

- In Ontario, if an individual receives a special diet allowance that is determined by that individual's weight loss or body weight, this portion of the allowance should **not** be reduced as the recipient changes weight, in order to **help the individual maintain their weight** over time.
  Directive #6.5: Special Diets, Ontario Works
  http://www.peelregion.ca/ow/receiving/special-diet.pdf

- Health Providers against Poverty (HPAP) in Ontario lobbied for the special diet policy to **include diets for prevention and a wider range of conditions**. After the Ontario government tightened the rules for special diets in 2005, HPAP sent a notice to all health providers encouraging them to carefully complete forms re: special needs for low income clients to obtain the maximum amount of money possible (up to the $250/month allowed) given the stringent new rules.
  New Special Diet Forms – Tips for Health Providers, Health Providers Against Poverty (HPAP),
  November 2006
  http://www.cleonet.ca/instance.php?instance_id=2892

- **Eligible professionals** who can prescribe special diets, covered under the Ontario Disability Support Program, include a *physician*, *registered nurse* in the extended class, *registered dietitian*, *registered midwife*, a *traditional Aboriginal midwife* recognized and accredited by her or his Aboriginal community. In British Columbia, to be eligible for a diet supplement, recipients must provide written confirmation from a *medical practitioner, nurse practitioner* or from a *dietitian* registered with the College of Dietitians of BC.
  Directive #6.5: Special Diets, Ontario Works
  http://www.peelregion.ca/ow/receiving/special-diet.pdf
  Diet Supplements, BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development
  http://www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online_resource/health_supplements_and_programs/diets upp/policy.html

2. Consistent workers when accessing services

2.1 Issue

- People do not have **consistent benefits workers** with whom they can build a relationship when accessing income support programs. At age of 65, individuals accessing mental health services at the 108 Street Community Mental Health Clinic have to change workers.

- Some Income Support offices have shifted to a call centre model. The intention is to make more efficient use of limited front line staff rather than expecting staff to meet the needs of a large number of people on a single caseload.

- With the call centre model for Income Support, providers say that a lack of relationships and continuity exists for both the people receiving supports and for the workers. Individuals seeking support often have to repeat their story several times. In the absence of a relationship, workers are asked to make significant and fast judgment calls without the benefit of context and full information about an individual.

- Individuals find it difficult to access workers by telephone. Calls are returned to workers but not consistently to individuals.

- When people accessing AISH are moved from one worker to another, community advocates find they need to resubmit documents when materials are not transferred to the new worker, creating unintentional delays and confusion. Individuals are not consistently informed that they are being moved from one worker to another.

- A related issue involves FOIP regulations that are interpreted as workers not being able to share information across organizations that would benefit individuals.

- Having a consistent worker when accessing services is closely tied to the third issue of sufficient outreach support.

2.2 Level of change and mandated department for this issue

Decisions about staffing structures are made at the level of **practice**. For Income Support and AISH, this falls within the domain of program managers employed by Alberta Employment and Immigration and Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, respectively. Similarly, the staffing structure for a mental health clinic falls under the umbrella of an Alberta Health Services program manager.

2.3 Clarification

- Some offices of Income Support moved to a call centre approach. This was decided by managers within local offices.
- AISH has information officers who respond to general inquiries. Each individual is assigned an individual worker.
- Individuals move to the geriatric program of the 108 Street mental health clinic at the age of 65.

2.4 Experience in comparison with other provinces

British Columbia – Outreach follow-up
- BC Housing Outreach Worker must be notified for follow up when clients in the Homeless Outreach Program are not returning to the ministry office for income assistance. A **proactive approach to finding or reconnecting the client is optimal**. *Homelessness Procedures, Homeless Application Protocol* (February 2009). BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development http://www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online_resource/program_administration/homelessness/procedures.html

Ontario – Consistent caseworkers
- Ontario Works states that each client will have a **caseworker who will meet with them on a regular basis**. More specifically, Ontario Works for the Region of Peel, as an example, stipulates that each client will have a caseworker who will meet with them on a regular basis to review financial eligibility, discuss short and long term employment goals, discuss other services available to them, and provide referral services. *Our Services,* Ontario Works in Peel http://www.peelregion.ca/ow/ourservices/client-services.htm

- In a Toronto area study, tenants suggested that, rather than having one housing worker place a person in housing and a different worker responsible for follow-up support. it was **more beneficial to have one worker involved throughout the process as this provided consistency and they did not have to adjust to or learn to trust a new staff person.** *Housing Connections Alternatives to Homelessness: Combining Rent Supplements and Support Services* (May 2007). Joyce Brown, Jacques Tremblay, Becky McFarlane, & Lily Singh. WoodGreen Community Services, The Fred Victor Centre http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/03/12/03-012.pdf

United States - Insights on service based on a participatory research project
- **Train and adequately support health care and social service providers in government, hospital and community-based services** to: increase their awareness and understanding of the various issues affecting diverse homeless and low-income people; to be respectful, non-judgmental, responsive and sensitive to the people they serve; and to provide trauma-informed service delivery, which takes into account knowledge about the physical and emotional impact of trauma and incorporates appropriate strategies for providing services.

- **Increase the availability of accessible up-front supports and support workers** to assist applicants in navigating the application process.

- Historically, homeless individuals have difficulty gaining access to many of the services and income supports to which they are entitled. **Due to the barriers they encountered when seeking mainstream services, a parallel homeless-targeted services system evolved.** As a result, mainstream systems have generally deferred serving this

population to homeless-targeted programs. Thereby, advocates point out, evading the costs and responsibility of helping their most disadvantaged and difficult to serve clients.

Addressing Long-Term Homelessness: Permanent Supportive Housing (August 2003). Lisa K. Foster and Patricia Snowdon, California Research Bureau
http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/03/12/03-012.pdf

3. Sufficient outreach support

3.1 Issue

- People with multiple barriers have a problem maintaining stable housing and fitting into the community. There is insufficient outreach support for people to rehabilitate and integrate.

- Outreach support needs to be built into subsidized housing rather than relying on tenants to come with external outreach support.

- In the absence of sufficient outreach support, early warning signs of deterioration are missed. Loneliness leads people back to being with people they left behind on the street.

- People with medication management issues require outreach support. If it is not available, they end up returning to hospital.

3.2 Level of change and mandated department for this issue

This is a **service gap**. It is a wide issue that needs to be discussed at a high level with a broad understanding of the whole system. Resolution of the service gap may involve a number of government ministries (such as Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs, Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Seniors and Community Support). Resolution could have organizational and cost implications for one government ministry or several ministries. Coordination between ministries and between government and community is critical.

3.3 Clarification

Social housing management body sees its mandate as managing a stock of housing and not providing outreach support to its tenants.

3.4 Experience in comparison with other provinces

- Alberta's Housing First and Pathways to Housing initiatives emphasize outreach support. To be eligible for Housing First support, individuals have to have been homeless for a specified length of time. Pathways to Housing is designed for individuals with severe mental illness who require long-term, multidisciplinary outreach support.

- The Hope Mission's Women's program in Edmonton has outreach workers who will accompany an individual into hospital, maintain contact while the person is hospitalized and then assist with the transition and ongoing support once he or she is back in the community.

- People who've been caught in the trap of chronic homelessness might need intensive, specialized services indefinitely. Prescribed time limits will not be set on these services. Others will need help for a limited time, 'graduating' out of supported housing into more independent living situations.
  A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (January 2009). Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness

http://www.endedmontonhomelessness.com/docs/report_NoSpreads_ForWebDownload_jan26-2009.pdf

British Columbia – Ongoing support
- Outreach workers and external evaluation highlighted the need to provide clients with **ongoing support** after they've been housed. Life skills support with budgeting, groceries, and home maintenance, as well as ensuring that clients are keeping appointments and staying 'on track,' are necessary to sustain housing.
  Project Highlight Report: CMHA BC Income/Homeless Outreach (n.d.). Canadian Mental Health Association
  http://www.cmha.bc.ca/files/OutreachProjectHighlights.pdf

Toronto - Support from housing workers
- One of the most important issues to consider in housing people with a history of homelessness in a rent supplement program is the **amount of ongoing support** that is needed from housing workers or other support staff.
- When there were issues with Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program or landlords or when there were other pressing issues in their lives (medical concerns, domestic violence, substance use issues, etc.), the Emergency Homelessness Pilot Project participants reported that they contacted the WoodGreen Community Services staff.
- What helps you to **stay housed**?
  - 91% said a **good housing worker, peer support or community support**.
- The support needs required after tenants moved into their units were reported to vary considerably. A number of tenants needed assistance with life skills— some needed to learn how to shop after many years of living in shelters, others needed help in getting to appointments or assistance accessing Ontario Disability Support Program. Most staff felt that **the degree of support that was needed lessened** after the tenants were housed. Some were managing well without support, others had periodic needs for support and still others had ongoing support needs. People with **substance use issues, mental health issues, or developmental challenges** were said to be particularly in need of ongoing support.
- Although the support services were originally meant to remain in place for a period of six months, later extended to a year, it become evident that **support was needed for a longer period**.
  Housing Connections Alternatives to Homelessness: Combining Rent Supplements and Support Services. (May 2007). Joyce Brown, Jacques Tremblay, Becky McFarlane & Lily Singh. WoodGreen Community Services, The Fred Victor Centre.

Toronto - Determinants of homelessness
- Study in Toronto reconfirmed recent findings that being "housed" does not automatically result in an individual no longer being "homeless". Recognizing that homelessness is, in large part, a psychological **state of disconnection from family, friends, social networks, and communities, rather than simply a state of not having a roof over one's head.**

- A more holistic view of these disconnections leads to the conclusion that more work needs to be undertaken to **assist homeless individuals in re-developing strong formal and informal social support networks**. Failure to develop such networks will inevitably lead to individuals **re-entering the cycle of homelessness**. Supports such as recreation, mental and physical health, skills development training/social enterprise, and community building programs will assist individuals in making the psychological transition from homelessness to safety that is required to ensure sustainable housing works.

- Homelessness needs to be conceptualized as **a cycle requiring on-going support, not as a simple transitional stage to be managed using short-term solutions**. Often, people stay housed on a long-term basis. However, many more have been housed 5 or 6 times before they stay housed (Tremblay and Ward 1998).
  Keeping the Homeless Housed: An exploratory study of determinants of Homelessness in the Toronto community (July 2009). Jacque Tremblay, Action Consulting
  www.wellesleyinstitute.com

Toronto - Critical characteristics for supported housing
- **Support with independent living**: learning community living skills. Support managing finances and learning skills related to caring for the home (e.g., cooking, cleaning).
- **Support in preventing and managing a crisis**: in the event of a crisis, access to a support person is critical. Many also noted that it is important for service providers to be attuned to changing events and cues in a client's life, in order to prevent potential crises.
- **Support with pursuing work and school**
- **Support and assistance with creating and maintaining social connections**: Many residents felt that support from their friends (often including other residents) and family members was key to stability.
- **Support and assistance with health issues**
- A range of supports is required including those that focus on **social networks, accessing community resources, crisis prevention and management, skills for independent living,** and **landlord education.**
  Critical Characteristics of Supported Housing (August 2009). Findings from the Literature, Residents and Service Providers, Wellesley Institute. Bonnie Kirsh, Rebecca Gewurtz, Ruth Bakewell, Brenda Singer, Progress Place; Mohamed Badsha, Reconnect Mental Health Services; Nicole Giles, Canadian Mental Health Association, Toronto
  www.wellesleyinstitute.com

Toronto - Streets to Homes
- **Community integration** is essential for the client to feel their housing is their home and the neighbourhood is their community.
- Support neighbourhood walks, get to know staff at local community centre, library, corner store, neighbours.
- The **focus** of the **follow-up supports** is **not just on the client**, but **also on the community where the person is housed**. Follow-up workers develop ongoing relationships with landlords or superintendents and work to troubleshoot any issues

before they turn into reasons to consider eviction. Also assist in hosting community events and focus on community development in the areas where their clients live, because a place that feels welcoming is a place where a person is inclined to stay. *Enhancing Streets to Homes service to address the needs of people who are street-involved, including those who panhandle (April 2008).* Staff report, City of Toronto http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-12533.pdf

United States - Outreach Service Structure: Linkage vs. Continuous Relationship Model

- Some outreach programs serve as linkages, referring clients to mainstream mental health or other service-providers. Other examples may include linking temporarily displaced families with housing.

- **Linkage-only programs that do not provide follow-up tracking have been determined to be ineffective** for some disabled populations. A 1986-87 study of 13 federally funded homeless mental health demonstration programs reported that **most outreach programs were running ineffective models.** Many spent the majority of their time in screening and identifying individuals and providing verbal referrals, but little follow-up assistance. One project contacted 430 eligible persons, yet only 22 received follow-up mental health treatment. Five found housing and three received entitlements (Hopper, et al., 1990 in Morse, 1996).

- **Providing linkage-only services to certain homeless populations can lead to barriers and service gaps, resulting in lost clients**. Morse (1991, 1996) suggests **strategies to increase the effectiveness of this model**: incorporate the expectation of an eventual service-provider transition early in the engagement and service-planning with a client; remain involved and actively involve the client in the referral process, including scheduling appointments, arranging transportation, and providing emotional support; work with the linkage site staff, informing them about client needs and characteristics; provide follow-up support as needed to both client and new staff; and provide advocacy on behalf of the client if needed.

- In a continuous relationship model, workers perform outreach and continue on as the person's case manager. **Outreach has been shown to be a necessary component of ongoing case management for mentally ill clients**. Axelroad and Toff (1987), point out the difficulty in distinguishing outreach from case management for homeless mentally ill persons for two reasons. First, the **fragility** of the population requires trust and continuity of care when helping clients move from an outreach phase to a treatment phase. Second, outreach workers must often provide case management services because of the frequent shortage of appropriate and relevant case management services for which to refer clients.

- The drawbacks to the continuous relationship model are small recommended caseloads, 10:1, which may be unrealistic for many agencies, and little capacity to outreach with new clients (Morse, 1991, 1996). However, **the approach has been shown to be effective at maintaining contact with clients and housing retention** (Morse, 1996). In addition, outreach workers may prefer the excitement, lack of structure, and immediacy

of outreach. For this and other reasons related to individual personality traits, some outreach workers may not be as effective as case managers.

To Dance with Grace: Outreach & Engagement to Persons on the Street (1998). Sally Erickson & Jaimie Page. Presentation, National Symposium on Homelessness Research http://aspe.hhs.gov/homeless/symposium/6-Outreach.htm

4. Earning enough income to cover expenses while on social assistance

4.1 Issue

- Benefits levels for Income Support and AISH are low and people are not able to cover their daily expenses. If the earnings exemption policy was changed and people were allowed to keep more of their employment earnings, they would be able to cover their expenses.

- Alberta's Income Support and AISH rates place people below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) in Canada.

- Family reunification can be delayed when a single person is not eligible to rent a social housing unit with additional bedrooms to accommodate children who could return from foster care.

4.2 Level of change and mandated department for this issue

This is a **policy** issue. This is a program policy as opposed to delivery policy. The earnings exemption policies for both Income Support and AISH are embedded in the respective regulations. This one issue involves two programs operated by two separate ministries - Income Support by Alberta Employment and Immigration, and AISH by Alberta Seniors and Community Supports. Any change will require regulation changes through the responsible Ministers and will have cost implications for the departments.

4.3 Clarification

Alberta's Income Support = Core essential benefit (food, clothing, transportation, etc.) + Core shelter benefit (rent and utilities)

Core essential benefit, Effective August 1, 2010

Core Essential Benefit (monthly amounts)			
	Expected To Work (ETW)	**Not Expected To Work (NETW)**	**Full-time Learner**
Single Adult Childless Couple	$ 260 476	$ 364 633	$ 511 633
Single Adult With 1 Child 2 Children 3 Children	$ 343 387 450	$ 460 520 593	$ 888 948 1021

4 Children	506	662	1090
5 Children	563	731	1159
6 Children	623	802	1230
Each Additional Child Add	$ 56	$ 56	$ 56
Couple With			
1 Child	$ 521	$ 678	$ 1184
2 Children	578	746	1252
3 Children	635	814	1320
4 Children	691	882	1388
5 Children	748	950	1456
6 Children	808	1021	1527
Each Additional Child Add	$ 56	$ 56	$ 56

Notes:

The Core Essential Table assumes all children are under 12 years of age. For each dependent child 12-19 years of age in a household unit designated in the expected to work or working or the not expected to work categories add $33.

Core shelter benefit, Effective November 1, 2008

Core Shelter Benefit (monthly amounts)			
	ETW	**NETW**	**Learner**	**Social Housing Shelter**
---	---:	---:	---:	---:
Single Adult	$ 323	$ 323	$ 323	$ 120
Childless Couple	436	436	436	193
Single Adult With				
1 Child	$ 546	$ 546	$546	$ 212
2 Children	566	566	566	260
3 Children	586	586	586	317
4 Children	606	606	606	377
5 Children	626	626	626	437
6 Children	646	646	646	496
Each Additional Child Add	$ 20	$ 20	$ 20	N/A

Couple With				
1 Child	$ 575	$ 575	$ 575	$ 262
2 Children	595	595	595	317
3 Children	605	605	605	377
4 Children	625	625	625	437
5 Children	645	645	645	496
6 Children	665	665	665	555
Each Additional Child Add	$ 20	$ 20	$ 20	N/A

Notes:
Households in Social Housing with more than 6 children do not receive an additional amount.
Households residing in Social Housing receive Social Housing rates regardless of Household Unit Type.

Single person in Alberta
$583/month or $6,996 per year on Income Support.
$1188/month or $14,256 per year on AISH.

Single parent with one child in Alberta
$889/month or $10,668 per year on Income Support.
$1188/month plus $100/month for each dependent child on AISH or $15,456 per year.

Earnings exemptions

Alberta	Income Support Single Employable	Persons with Disabilities
	$230 net income + 25% of earnings over $230 for singles	$400 net income + 50% exempt over $400 to a maximum of $1500 (50% exempt to a maximum exemption of $950 a month)

4.4 Experience in comparison with other provinces

Earnings Exemptions

Province	Income Support Single Employable	Persons with Disabilities
British Columbia		$500
Alberta	$230 net income + 25% of earnings over $230 for singles	$400 net income + 50% exempt over $400 to a maximum of $1500 (50% exempt to a maximum exemption of $950 a month)
Saskatchewan	$50 + 25% of next $600 Maximum $200	$200 + 25% of next $500 Maximum $325
Manitoba	$200 plus 30% of net monthly earnings over $200	$200 plus 30% of net monthly earnings over $200
Ontario	50% exemption from all net employment earnings	50% exemption from all net employment earnings
Newfoundland and Labrador	The first $75 ($150 if you require supportive services) plus 20% of net month earnings over the first $75	
Quebec	$200 per month	$100 per month

Sources:
Alberta Seniors and Community Supports, Employment Income – AISH (DS1488 2009/04)
http://www.seniors.alberta.ca/aish/tipsheets/EmploymentIncome.pdf
Alberta Works Financial Benefits Summary, Effective August 1, 2010
http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/AWonline/emp0433.pdf
Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services: Saskatchewan Assistance Rates, April 1, 2011
http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/SAP-rate-card.pdf
http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/PUBLICAT/bcea/pwd.htm
Manitoba Ministry of Family Services and Community Affairs, Employment and Income
Assistance Facts http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/eiafacts/employment_income_other.html#top
Manitoba Ministry of Family Services and Community Affairs, Employment Income - Persons
with Disabilities http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/eiafacts/income_disabilities.html
Ontario Works Act, 1997, Section 49.1
http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_980134_e.htm
Ministry of Ontario Community Social Services, Ontario Disability Support Program - Income
Support Directives November 2006

British Columbia - Employment Supports
- If people **leave assistance for employment**, they **keep their designation** and **maintain their medical assistance**. If they return to BC Employment and Assistance, they **do not have to reapply** for disability status to re-establish their eligibility for assistance.
- The Ministry of Social Development introduced the Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities that focuses on developing a broad range of **new skills training services**

and **employment-related programs** to assist persons with disabilities into the labour market and to improve their employment outcomes.
BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development, September 22, 2008, Ministry Fact Sheets, Persons with Disabilities.
http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/pwd.htm.
http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/2004/pwd.htm

Manitoba - Employment Income - Persons with Disabilities
People enrolled as persons with disabilities can get **help with** the following **work-related expenses**:
- Work Clothing: $23.90 per month if at least 80 hours worked; OR $11.95 per month if less than 80 hours worked.
- Work Transportation: The cost of a full monthly bus pass if at least 80 hours worked per month, OR one-half of the cost of a monthly bus pass if less than 80 hours worked per month.

When you have employment income:
- You may not have to report your earnings each month if they are less than $200 per month.
- You may have to pay rent and utilities yourself instead of having EIA pay them directly.
- If your income is enough to meet your needs, you may no longer qualify for assistance. You should continue to report your income, as you may be eligible for some **continued support after leaving EIA for work,** such as health benefits or help with rent.
- Get Started! – provides you with a **single payment when you leave income assistance for work** to help cover the work related expenses. The amount of the benefit is $325 for persons with disabilities.
- Rewarding Work Health Plan **–** single parents and persons with disabilities may receive **health benefits**, including drug, dental, and optical benefits, **for 24 months after leaving EIA for work**.

Employment and Income Assistance Facts for Persons with Disabilities, Manitoba Ministry of Family Services and Community Affairs.
http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/eiafacts/starting_a_job.html

Ontario – Ontario Disability Support Program Income Support
- Can **claim child care and disability-related work costs as deductions from earnings** before Income Support is reduced.
Ministry of Ontario Community Social Services, Ontario Disability Support Program - Income Support Directives November 2006, Section 38 of the ODSP Regulation

Ontario Disability Support Program recipients and eligible members of the benefit unit may receive up to **$500 in any 12-month period in order to assist them with the start-up costs** related to employment or an approved employment activity. Eligible expenses associated with accepting or changing employment include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Appropriate work wear.
  - Tools and equipment.

- Grooming costs.
- Transportation costs.
- Licensing fees, association costs.
- Eyeglasses (including lenses and frames) can be purchased or repaired for dependent adults.
- Any other item that, in the opinion of the Director, is a necessary work or training related expense.

Ontario Disability Support Program - Income Support Directives, Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services
http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/social/directives/directives/ODSPDirectives/income_support/5_3_ODSP_ISDirectives.aspx

Quebec - Social Assistance and Social Solidarity Benefit Indexation

- Among the measures provided for in the Government Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion is the **annual indexation of social assistance** and **social solidarity benefits for five years**, beginning January 1, 2005.
- On January 1, 2011, benefits will be indexed by 1.27%, i.e. the rate used to index the Québec personal income tax system.
  Quebec Social Assistance Program and Social Solidarity Program, January 2011
  http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/publications/pdf/sr_dep_montant_prestations_en.pdf

Quebec - Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion

The purpose of this second generation of measures is to place Québec among the most **inclusive and just societies,** one where **economic self-sufficiency and personal fulfillment are within the reach of all.** To bolster this society-wide project, the Action Plan is structured around four thrusts:

1. Review our standard practices and make regional and local communities key players in the decision-making process.
2. Acknowledge the value of work and foster the self-sufficiency of individuals.
3. Support the income of disadvantaged individuals.
4. Improve the living conditions of low-income individuals and families.

The **Work Premium** has been extended for the next five years. The amounts issued are **indexed annually to cost-of-living increases**. For example, in January 2010, a Work Premium amount of up to $533 for single individuals, $824 for childless couples, $2284 for single-parent families and $2942 for couples with children could be granted. Québec households with low incomes or modest means receive some $320 million annually thanks to the Work Premium.

For persons with disabilities or individuals with a severely-limited capacity for employment who often face more challenging obstacles in attempting to enter the labour market, the Adapted Work Premium provides for a maximum premium of $1025 for a single individual, $1520 for a childless couple, $2847 for a single-parent family and $3377 for a couple with children.

The Supplement to the Work Premium (refundable tax credit) encourages long-term social assistance recipients to return to work. They may receive $200 a month for a maximum of 12 months after they re-enter the workforce.

In December 2009, the Québec government announced that the minimum wage would be $9.50 an hour as of May 1, 2010. The minimum wage will continue to be reviewed annually. Note that revision of the minimum wage (based on the purchasing power of salaried workers, their contribution to collective wealth, the ability of businesses to compete, and employment and work incentives) now takes into account the effects of the minimum wage on poverty and low income. This new method of analysis evaluates the effects of minimum wage increases on a number of low-income individuals and families and on the low-income cut-off using the Market Basket Measure.

Extend eligibility for the claim slip to Social Solidarity Program recipients
Currently, due to easing of conditions in 1997, last-resort financial assistance recipients who have a severely limited capacity for employment continue to qualify for the claim slip, making them **eligible for free dental and pharmaceutical services and access to certain special benefits for a period of up to 48 months when they no longer qualify for financial assistance** because of their earnings. However, gross earnings or, in the case of a self-employed worker, net earnings, cannot exceed $1500 the first month or for a maximum period of three consecutive months.

Since the right to keep the claim slip is an incentive for Social Solidarity Program recipients to enter the job market, thereby fostering the economic participation of as many individuals as possible, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale will amend the regulation governing the Social Solidarity Program so as to **abolish the maximum threshold of $1500** applied to work income as a requirement for eligibility for the claim slip, which will mean broader access to free services for persons with a severely limited capacity for employment when they get a job.

Automatic annual indexation of last-resort financial assistance benefits
Since January 1, 2009, the benefits of last-resort financial assistance recipients have been indexed annually. This measure, in response to citizen concerns, among other things, will contribute to **safeguarding the purchasing power of all last-resort financial assistance recipients.**

Compensate for tax hikes and public fee increases with a Solidarity Tax Credit
Announced in the 2010-2011 Budget, the new **refundable tax credit for low-income households or households of modest means** is an expression of the government's will to mitigate the effect of tax increases on less affluent Québeckers.

The **results** thus far include **improved income for individuals and families, better access to affordable housing, a more sustained effort to foster success in school,** and **greater support for people striving towards employment.** These results show that **poverty can be made to retreat through unified action by all civil society partners.**

Quebec's Combat against Poverty: Government Action Plan for Solidarity and Social Inclusion, 2010-2015, Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, Gouvernement du Québec
http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/publications/pdf/ADMIN_Plan_de_lutte_2010-2015_en.pdf

Newfoundland - Moving into the Workforce

- You may be eligible for **additional funding to assist with certain expenses** when going to work.
- You may be eligible for a **job start benefit** of $250 (if you have dependents) or $125 (if you are a single person).
- You may qualify for an **earnings supplement**. Certain exemptions will be allowed which will decrease the amount of earnings considered, and therefore increase your supplement. These exemptions include:
    - The first $150.00 a month for a family; $250 if you or someone in your family requires supportive services, plus 20% of your earnings balance.
    - The first $75.00 a month for a single person; $150 if you require supportive services, plus 20% of your earnings balance.
    - Expenses such as transportation and child care.
- If a health plan is not available from your employer, you, your spouse and dependent children are eligible to receive a **drug card for a full six months after leaving the Income Support program for employment**.
- Your income will not be considered until you have been working for **30 days**.
- You are required by law to report any changes in your financial circumstances to your Client Services Officer.
  Moving into the Workforce, Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, November 2009
  http://www.hrle.gov.nl.ca/hrle/income-support/movingintoworkforce.html

5. Support to complete the application process

5.1 Issue

- People who **do not understand the application process may not apply for supports** to which they would be entitled. Individuals applying for Income Support and AISH often have difficulties dealing with processes and systems due to physical and/or psychological problems. Low literacy is another factor. As a result, people who could be receiving benefits either do not attempt the application process or withdraw partway through.

- In one mental health unit at an acute-care hospital, providers reported that an Income Support Worker used to come in to help patients start the application process but that position was cut. The public system is designed to assess eligibility and provide supports to those who qualify but is not set up to help with the application process.

5.2 Level of change and mandated department for this issue

The allocation of resources to assist individuals with the application process is a **procedure**-related issue, coupled with a **service gap**. Alberta Employment and Immigration, Alberta Seniors and Community Supports and Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs all have programs that involve, directly or indirectly, application processes and are therefore considered important players for seeking solutions.

5.3 Clarification

Income support and AISH information officers can answer short questions about the application but do not help individuals work through the application. The expectation is that applicants will seek help from others.

5.4 Experience in comparison with other provinces

British Columbia – Homeless Outreach

- British Columbia established a Homeless Outreach Protocol which directs staff to "**expediently connect clients to Income Assistance … quickly getting clients the income supports needed to secure housing**". Through a survey, 93% of community respondents said the outreach project had improved access to income assistance for homeless individuals. Individuals with histories of homelessness have negative associations with most government offices and often need support navigating the IA application process.

- Outreach workers and community impact survey respondents highlighted that reliance on **phone-based access** to Income Assistance **creates barriers for homeless individuals** attempting to connect to income supports.
  "What has been effective is clients being able to access [the outreach worker], not an automated/telephone service. The individuals we support often cannot negotiate any service without direct assistance." Community impact survey respondent

  Project Highlight Report, CMHA BC Income/Homeless Outreach (n.d.)
  http://www.cmha.bc.ca/files/OutreachProjectHighlights.pdf

British Columbia - Key Application Issues - Eligibility Requirements

Income Assistance Payment – Same Day Service
- Shelter Information forms are to be processed immediately with security deposits and shelter issued on the same day.
- Shelter payments should be made direct to the landlord to ensure the continuity of housing after discussion with the client.
- When outstanding documentation (e.g., proof of two-year independence, required ID) from the Stage 2 eligibility interview is subsequently submitted, ensure the application process is completed, an eligibility determination is communicated, and clients are provided the applicable assistance in a timely manner.
- Medical Service Plan coverage is to be provided. If applicant is accompanied by a BC Housing Outreach Worker, the Outreach Worker will assist the client to connect with doctors to get Medical Reports or PWD application completed.

Articulate requirements clearly - Reporting and follow up to be explained to client, including:
- Medical Report – where the client has a drug, alcohol or mental health condition and does not have a physician, other health professionals may be contacted for the same information, e.g., addictions counselors, social workers, mental health workers, street nurses, substance intervention workers. The supervisor can waive the requirement for a Medical Report in exceptional circumstances (e.g., client with mental health issues is reluctant to see a health professional).
- Identification requirements – closed offsite files often have required ID. Clients without the required ID can also proceed with the "Client Identification Process"

File and Caseload Management
- All files where the client was accompanied by a BC Housing Outreach Worker will be placed on caseload identified by HOM (Homeless Outreach Program).
- BC Housing Outreach Worker must be notified for follow up when clients in the Homeless Outreach Program are not returning to the ministry office for income assistance. A proactive approach to finding or reconnecting the client is optimal.
Homelessness – BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development Homeless – Application Protocol, February 9, 2009,
http://www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online_resource/program_administration/homelessness/procedures.html

Ontario - Recommendations following participatory research project
- **Increase the availability of accessible up-front supports and support workers to assist applicants in navigating the application process.**
- Mandate and train Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program workers to educate and support their diverse clients in accessing all the income supplements that they are entitled to.
- Create a simple brochure with a checklist of all available supplements and eligibility requirements, and make this brochure available to all Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients.

Homelessness – Diverse Experiences, Common Issues, Shared Solutions: The Need for Inclusion and Accountability (2008). Izumi Sakamoto, Erika Khandor, Aisha Chapra, Tekla Hendrickson, Julie Maher, Brenda Roche & Matthew Chin, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto.
http://www.streethealth.ca/Downloads/SharedSolutions.pdf

Ontario - Barriers in the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- Homeless people face major barriers to accessing health care providers.
- Homeless people cannot navigate the overall ODSP application process without help.
- With the right help, homeless disabled people can get the ODSP benefits they need and are entitled to. A pilot project in Ottawa is based at a drop-in centre for homeless people. With funding from the City of Ottawa, a full-time staff person works with disabled individuals to navigate all aspects of the ODSP application process, including accessing identification and getting medical appointments and assessments.

Recommendation: That the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services increase accessibility to ODSP applications and the application process for homeless and vulnerable people in the following ways:
- By making ODSP **workers available in person on the telephone** and in local ODSP offices when an applicant first inquires about an ODSP application
- By providing ODSP **workers in accessible spaces** that homeless people can access across Toronto on a regular basis (e.g., once a week)
- By creating standards of practice that ensure that ODSP workers are **proactive in explaining the ODSP application process clearly to potential applicants**.
  Failing the Homeless: Barriers in the Ontario Disability Support Program for Homeless People with Disabilities (June 2006). Sarah Shartal (Roach Schwartz and Associates), Laura Cowan (Street Health), Erika Khandor (Street Health) and Beric German (Street Health)
  http://www.homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/Failing%20the%20Homeless%20FULL%20REPORT_FINAL.pdf

Region of Peel, Ontario – Ontario Works Client Services
- Each client will have a **caseworker who will meet with them on a regular basis to review financial eligibility**, discuss short and long term employment goals, discuss other services available to them, and provide referral services.
  Our Services, Ontario Works in Peel
  http://www.peelregion.ca/ow/ourservices/client-services.htm

United States – Common changes that can be requested as a reasonable accommodation
- **Outreach** Notifying the disability community before opening the Section 8 [Section 8 of the United States Housing Act authorizes the payment of rental housing assistance to private landlords for low income households] waiting list and accepting applications; Providing training on the Section 8 application process to the disability community and other interested parties.
- **Completing and submitting a Section 8 Application** Allowing applications to be mailed or faxed; Providing applications in Braille, large print, or other alternative formats; Providing assistance with completing the Section 8 application; Allowing applications to

be dropped off at the Public Housing Authority by a friend, family member, advocate, service provider, etc.; Visiting the applicant's home in order to allow him/her to complete the application; Allowing additional time to submit an application.

- **Waiting List Management:** Allowing a secondary contact person to be listed on the application and sending copies of all Public Housing Authority correspondence to both; Allowing previously incomplete applications to be added to the list, even if the list is now "closed"; Allowing applications discarded during the "update" process to be reinstated to the list in its original position.

- **Screening and Verification:** Making exceptions to screening criteria regarding criminal histories, past rental histories, or credit histories based on mitigating circumstances; Providing extra time to gather documentation of eligibility.

   Section 8 Made Simple: Using The Housing Choice Voucher Program To Assist People With Disabilities, Ann O'Hara & Emily Cooper, (June 2003). Second Edition, Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. , Boston.

   http://www.tacinc.org/downloads/Sect8_2ndEd.pdf

6. Meet the requirements to apply for and access housing

6.1 Issue

People **need an address to access rent supplement** for the purpose of providing contact information, meaning they may have to sign a lease before they are approved for a subsidy. People require **government-issued photo identification** to receive government rent supplements and social housing. Photo identification is often stolen, damaged or lost among people with unstable housing.

6.2 Level of change and mandated department for this issue

The decision to require an address is a **practice** issue. The requirement for government-issue photo identification is a matter of **procedure**. Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs is the mandated department and its management bodies oversee practice decisions.

6.3 Clarification

Policy documentation

Background on rent supplement program

- Effective April 1, 2009, the rent shortfall component of the Homeless and Eviction Prevention Fund (HEP Fund) was transitioned to a housing program called the Direct to Tenant Rent Supplement Program under the department of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA). This program is managed on behalf of HUA by local Housing Management Bodies located throughout the province. For information on the Direct to Rent Supplement Program, please visit Direct to Tenant Rent Supplement.
  Frequently Asked Questions, Alberta Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
  http://housinguat.alberta.ca/HEPF_FAQs.cfm

- Direct to Tenant Supplement program is a subsidy paid directly to an eligible tenant to assist with their rental costs. It is delivered by local housing operators (management bodies) located in various areas throughout the province. The subsidy is based on the difference between 30 percent of a household's income and an agreed upon market rent, to a maximum subsidy established by the housing operator.

- Applicants must meet the *Core Need Income Thresholds* and citizenship requirements. The priority for assistance is based on assisting those in greatest need first.
  Direct to Tenant Rent Supplement Program, Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs
  http://www.housing.alberta.ca/direct_to_tenant_rent_supplement_program.cfm

Requirement for an address and government-issued photo identification

- Individuals can submit an application for a rent supplement without an address, but they need to have an address before the management body will approve a rent supplement. The rationale is that the management body needs to have the rent figure in hand before they can assess a supplement.
- Government-issued photo identification is required to apply for rent supplements. The Ministers of Service Alberta and of Housing and Urban Affairs announced a new program on October 7, 2010. The program is designed to make it easier for homeless

people to obtain government identification by being able to use government-funded homeless shelters and service agencies as addresses. The cost of the photo ID will be $12.
- Government-issued photo identification is required for every family member over 18 years of age to apply for social housing.

6.4 Experience in comparison with other provinces
- In Alberta, 2008 Bissell Centre launched a pilot project, Freemail, in 2008, setting individuals up with voice messaging that can be accessed from any telephone. This was particularly helpful for people applying for employment or looking for housing. Voice mail messaging removed the stigma of having messages vetted through a social agency.
- Starting in October 2010, homeless people gained access to the same government identification cards as ones issued to those who don't have a driver's license. The card costs $12.30, and can be partly paid for by Alberta Employment and Immigration on an individual basis. Staff at Alberta shelters and agencies that help the homeless are trained to confirm the identity of their clients and help them obtain cards through an Alberta registry office.
- Starting in July 2011, Boyle Street Community Services will host the Edmonton ID Storage Bank to hold the original identification for people choosing to have it securely stored, in combination with other adult outreach support. Other agencies will continue to assist people in the process of acquiring identification.

Manitoba – Application for social housing
- **Proof of Identity**
  You and your co-applicant must provide photo identification with your signature when you submit your application. If you do not have photo identification with a signature you can submit two of the following:
    - Birth Certificate
    - Social Insurance Card
    - Commemoration or Certificate of Canadian Citizenship
    - Manitoba Health Card
  An application for housing (n.d.), Manitoba Housing and Community Development
  http://www.gov.mb.ca/housing/pubs/mha_application.pdf

York Region, Ontario – Identification Clinics
- The Regional Municipality of York Region in Ontario operates six **Identification Clinics** that provide the following **mix of support services** at no fee.
    - Assist clients in completing the application forms (i.e., birth certificates, SIN cards, Canadian citizenship cards).
    - File and pay for applications on behalf of the client.
    - Provide a mailing address for clients when necessary.
    - Deliver identification to clients.
    - Provide individual support when necessary.
    - Connect individuals with other services such as housing, food resources, and financial supports.
    - Provide the client with an opportunity to store their identification in a Safe Bank.

Housing Help Centre and ID Clinic serving York Region, The Affordable Housing Committee of York Region
www.housinghelpcentre.org/about.html

Toronto – Identification Safe program
- Toronto's Street Health agency runs Identification Replacement and Identification Safe programs. Street Health's ID Safe program offers people a **safe and secure place to store their identification and related documents** to **ensure people have continued access to needed services**. Funded by the Federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative.
  - ID is stored securely, both physically and confidentially.
  - ID information is provided to other individuals or organizations only with the client's consent.
  - Storage protocols meet the requirements of Ontario's privacy legislation.
  - Protocols are set up with service providers so clients do not have to show original identification documents.

  ID Safe, Street Health
  http://www.streethealth.ca/IDSafe.htm

Peel – Requirement of an address to apply for social housing
- The Region of Peel (Ontario) Application for Subsidized Housing includes a section to allow for alternate contact information: An **alternate contact** is a person who can speak for you about your application, such as an interpreter, a relative, a friend, or a caseworker in an agency. Please provide an alternate contact if you are hard to reach or if you do not speak English. An alternate contact can help to make sure that you keep your application up to date and keep your position on the waiting list.
  Region of Peel (Ontario) Application for Subsidized Housing
  www.peelregion.ca/housing/social/path-forms-resources/v-08-117.pdf

United States –Reasonable accommodation
Reasonable Accommodation is a term that is used in the United States as part of their national housing strategy. Section 8 Made Simple provides a description of the areas Public Housing Authorities are required to incorporate flexibility in their policies and procedures to accommodate special needs.
- **Outreach** Notifying the disability community before opening the Section 8 waiting list and accepting applications; Providing training on the Section 8 application process to the disability community and other interested parties.
- **Completing and submitting a Section 8 Application** Allowing applications to be mailed or faxed; Providing applications in Braille, large print, or other alternative formats; Providing assistance with completing the Section 8 application; Allowing applications to be dropped off at the PHA by a friend, family member, advocate, service provider, etc.; Visiting the applicant's home in order to allow him/her to complete the application; Allowing additional time to submit an application.
- **Waiting List Management:** Allowing a secondary contact person to be listed on the application and sending copies of all PHA correspondence to both; Allowing previously incomplete applications to be added to the list, even if the list is now "closed"; Allowing

applications discarded during the "update" process to be reinstated to the list in its original position.

- **Screening and Verification:** Making exceptions to screening criteria regarding criminal histories, past rental histories, or credit histories based on mitigating circumstances; Providing extra time to gather documentation of eligibility.
  Section 8 Made Simple: Using The Housing Choice Voucher Program To Assist People With Disabilities, Ann O'Hara & Emily Cooper, (June 2003). Second Edition, Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. , Boston.
  http://www.tacinc.org/downloads/Sect8_2ndEd.pdf

7. Prevent evictions and penalties while living in social housing

7.1 Issue

People may have their **rent raised if the management body suspects there is an additional tenant** or may be **evicted for 'wrong-doing'** with the appeal coming after the person has been removed. If they **win the appeal,** they go **back onto the waiting list.**

- Tenants perceived that rent is raised, without notice, if suspected of having another tenant not listed on the lease agreement. The social housing authority indicated that notice is always given and that they have a protocol of making telephone contact and sending three letters prior to an eviction, with the intent of preventing homelessness.

- A tenant can be evicted or dropped from a benefit if suspected of wrong-doing. They receive eviction notices for situations they find to be beyond their control.

- The tenant is considered 'guilty until proven innocent' if the decision is appealed. In the case of social housing, tenants who are successful in their appeal go back into the cue and assessed anew, based on the point system. The right to access a dispute resolution process and appeal are not well known to tenants.

- If a tenant has pests, they are not allowed to move to another unit until the pests have been eliminated.

- When people who have been homeless move into public or private housing on their own, and away from a substance addiction, they often get lonely. Some return to a shelter to find company. The people they know who come to visit may still be using drugs or alcohol. Their presence may trigger the individual to start using again or lead to disturbance and eviction.

- While hospitalized, a person can lose shelter and have nowhere to go when discharged.

7.2 Level of change and mandated department for this issue

Decisions about penalties and eviction are **practice** issues. Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs is the mandated department and its management bodies oversee practice decisions.

7.3 Clarification

- If a tenant in social housing is suspected of having an additional person living in the unit, tenant is contacted and asked to relay circumstances before rent is reassessed. Increase is back-dated if the additional person has been living there for a period of time.
- Reasons for eviction are non-payment of rent, disturbing neighbours, interfering with rights of landlord or other tenants, damage to property, illegal activities, failure to verify income, providing false information, over-housed but not willing to transfer. Person is placed on the waiting list according to priority, based on points.

7.4 Experience in comparison with other provinces

Toronto - Analysis of Evictions

- A review of data for 30,000 units in Toronto Community Housing (the former Metropolitan Toronto Housing Corporation) indicated that while **Notices of Termination are sent out to a relatively large proportion of tenants** in this portion of Toronto Community Housing's portfolio (estimated at 18% in 2003), **only a handful of tenants leave** after receiving a Notice of Termination (19 in 2003).
- Tenants reported that a **repayment plan** with their landlord, **help negotiating with their landlord, a better understanding of the eviction process** and **access to a loan for arrears** are all types of assistance that would have helped them avoid being subject to an eviction application.
- The stated **intent of the Policy on Eviction Prevention** is: "to **evict as few tenants as possible for not paying rent**". "*TCHC is committed to keeping evictions for not paying rent to a minimum. Many people living in TCHC housing have nowhere else to go for secure, permanent housing. TCHC recognizes this and commits to working with tenants to ensure that eviction is the very last resort.*" This policy relates only to evictions due to arrears.
- Before filing an application with the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal, staff are to make themselves available for a **face-to-face meeting** with a tenant. As well, efforts to collect rent and to support a tenant facing eviction are to be continued after an application has been filed with the Tribunal as well as through the legal process.
- The policy outlines several intervention strategies including:
  - Negotiating a repayment agreement – have up to three months to repay arrears.
  - Working with other organizations to arrange budget counseling and other support.
- The most common way that individual cases were resolved was as a result of arrears being paid. Furthermore, **when tenants are evicted**, they have almost a **50% chance of being re-housed** (because they pay back their arrears).
  Analysis of Evictions Under the Tenant Protection Act in the City of Toronto, The Non-Profit Housing Sector (March 2004). Linda Lapointe, Lapointe Consulting Inc. in association with Sylvia Novac for the City of Toronto Shelter, Housing and Support Division Community and Neighbourhood Services Department.
  http://www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/evictions_nonprofithousingsector.pdf

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation – Study of eviction prevention initiatives
CMHC Research Report identified 32 Canadian eviction prevention initiatives.
- 12 initiatives focused primarily on providing **information and advice**; 5 programs offered **conflict resolution and mediation services**; 1 provided **legal representation**; 11 provided **emergency financial assistance** (including rent banks); and 3 **offered third-party financial management,** or **trusteeship-style programs.**
- The average cost of each eviction to tenants was $2,234. Landlords indicated that the costs of each eviction averaged nearly $3,000 for social housing landlords, and close to $6,600 for private sector landlords. **Landlords preferred financial trusteeship, rent subsidies, and emergency financial assistance**. Information and legal representation for tenants were viewed by landlords as least effective.
- The **top success factors in preventing evictions** identified by agency survey respondents included **direct outreach, early intervention,** and **offering multiple and**

complementary services. **Landlords preferred programs** which rely on **payments made directly to landlords** from agencies delivering eviction prevention programs.
Cost Effectiveness of Eviction Prevention Programs (November 2005). Research Highlight, Socio-economic Series. Project Manager: Anna Lenk, Consultant: Acacia Consulting & Research, Housing Research at CMHC, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.
http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/64906.pdf?fr=1309401238182

Canada – Social Housing Reform Act and Tenant Protection Act
Finality of internal review decisions
- The fact that there may be a right to an internal review of a decision does not mean the tenant has an effective means to dispute a decision. There is a significant difference between an internal review and an appeal to an independent decision maker. Though an internal review may satisfy the requirements of procedural fairness, it does not necessarily satisfy the requirements of natural justice.
- To satisfy the requirements of natural justice, and given the serious implication of the decisions made by a social housing landlord, as a matter of public policy disputes regarding social housing subsidies should be subject to review by an impartial arbiter.

Interpretation that respect human rights law and constitutional values is preferred
1. Human Rights Code
- Subsection 2(1) of the Ontario *Human Rights Code (Code)* provides that: Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to the occupancy of accommodation, without discrimination because of …. the receipt of public assistance. A rent subsidy is a form of public assistance and recipients are protected from discrimination by the *Code*. A determination that the Tribunal has no authority to consider the merits of a tenant's dispute to an arrears eviction where a rent subsidy has been revoked undermines the security of tenure protection afforded to a group of tenants who are identified by a prohibited ground of discrimination under the *Code*. (Pg. 49)

2. Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- The Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed that an interpretation consistent with the values in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Charter)* must take preference over an interpretation that would run contrary to those values.
- The Nova Scotia Court of Appeal has recognized that persons who qualify for public housing are disadvantaged within Canadian society both by virtue of their status as public housing tenants and because of their identification with other prohibited grounds of discrimination, including gender and family status. The Ontario Court of Appeal has recently recognized the receipt of social assistance as an analogous ground of discrimination under s.15 of the *Charter*. An interpretation that the Tribunal does not possess the jurisdiction under the *TPA* to review a subsidy dispute if an arrears of rent application is inconsistent with a public housing tenant's right to equal benefit of the law without discrimination.
Decisions Adverse to a Household, Protecting social housing tenants under the Social Housing Reform Act and the *Tenant Protection Act*: *Revocation of RGI assistance and Subsequent Evictions for Arrears of Rent* (2003). Toby Young and Bruce Best.
http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/curp/Decisions.pdf

8. Accessing social housing with a criminal record

8.1 Issue

- People with a criminal record within the past five years are not allowed into social housing in Edmonton. This becomes a problem when these people cannot afford private market rental housing and wind up in untenable shelter or living on the street, endangering their health or life, or return to criminal activity out of desperation and frustration.

- As an example, women who have been working on the street for survival often have been involved in offences not related to potential safety concerns within a housing community and problems with poor credit.

8.2 Level of change and mandated department for this issue

This is a **practice** issue determined by safety and security decisions of a local housing management body. Alternative approaches to alleviate security concerns could remove a barrier to housing for people with criminal records. Although Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs is responsible for the social housing program, the practice is determined locally and is implemented by the arm's length social housing management body.

8.3 Clarification

- All household members, 18 years of age and older, who are applying for housing managed by Capital Region Housing Corporation (i.e. Community Housing, Affordable Housing, Market Rent Housing) will be required to pass a Criminal Records Check with the Edmonton Police Service. We pay for this service and will make the arrangements for you to complete the necessary forms at the time you are offered a rental unit. Our housing is part of the City of Edmonton Crime Free Multi-Housing Program.
Capital Regional Housing Corporation Housing & Subsidy Application – Instructions
http://www.crhc.ab.ca/PDF/AffordableHousingApp.pdf
- Capital Region Housing looks at criminal record for the last five years. Individuals are not eligible if convicted of a violent crime, solicitation, drugs, pedophilia or weapons, or has outstanding warrants or court dates.

8.4 Experience in comparison with other provinces

British Columbia – Community Justice
- People who are homeless face a number of challenges in daily living, many of which may result in **minor charges or infractions**. **Community courts quickly administer justice and solutions** for community crime.
- A pilot project in the Downtown Eastside directs offenders to community supports and services designed to prevent future crimes from occurring. The Downtown Community Court redirects people to independent stable living and reduces costs and overcrowding in the traditional justice system.
- The Court is a partnership between the Ministries of Housing and Social Development, Health, Attorney General, and Public Safety and Solicitor General as well as various agencies.

Housing Matters BC, Putting Housing First: Progress and Achievements on British Columbia's Provincial Housing Strategy, 2006-2008
http://www.housingmattersbc.ca/docs/housingmatters.pdf

Ontario
- The policy for criminal records in Ontario specifies criminal activities related to provincial housing services only and **limits the time frame to convictions within the past 2 years**.
  Rent-Geared-to-Income Guide, Social Housing Administration, City of Hamilton, Updated September 19, 2005
  http://www.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/94E22E6B-2EBD-4311-88F4-2335F479D939/0/RGI_GuideForSocialHousingAdmin.pdf

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Common private sector practice that excludes people with criminal backgrounds are significant. CMHC noted the **double-bind these restrictions create for individuals coming out of correctional facilities**. Landlords can legally discriminate against prospective tenants based on criminal history. Greater flexibility in the assessment of criminal histories would prevent all or most chronically homeless individuals being excluded from the opportunity to access adequate and appropriate housing.

- "In terms of housing in the private rental market—although this represents the largest stock of available housing—**ex-prisoners have very limited possibilities** due to lack of resources and to the fact that, in most provinces, landlords can legally discriminate against those with criminal records. High-quality private sector housing is, therefore, largely "off limits." Furthermore, halfway houses are only for those on conditional release, supportive housing is in short supply, and subsidized housing has long waiting lists. As a result, ex-prisoners tend to live in substandard private housing, such as rundown rooming houses in high-risk neighbourhoods."
  Housing Options upon Discharge from Correctional Facilities, Research Highlight – Socio-Economic Series, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, January 2007
  http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/65340.pdf?fr=1309323228218

United States – Reasonable accommodation
- Reasonable accommodation is a term that is used in the United States as part of their national housing strategy. **Section 8 Made Simple** provides a description of the areas Public Housing Authorities are required to incorporate flexibility in their policies and procedures to accommodate special needs.

- If a person with mental illness is denied access based on past criminal history (e.g., the applicant was arrested for loitering and disorderly conduct last year when not taking medications), the applicant can ask that the [authority] disregard the criminal history in light of mitigating circumstances related to the disability. This request could be "reasonable" if the applicant is now receiving supportive services for medication management. When applicants are denied, it is important to meet with the [authority] and present any information or mitigating circumstances that may change the decision.

Section 8 Made Simple: Using The Housing Choice Voucher Program To Assist People With Disabilities, Ann O'Hara & Emily Cooper, (June 2003). Second Edition, Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. , Boston.
http://www.tacinc.org/downloads/Sect8_2ndEd.pdf

Proposed Approach to the Housing Support Services Hub Qualitative Research Project
Systemic Barriers to Housing
April 23, 2009

Starting assumptions

- Community advocates and public policy-makers/delivery agents can agree that people should be able to move toward stable housing and independence that maximizes their full potential. Policies that create unintended, unnecessary consequences compromise people's ability to move forward. Action to improve policies will yield benefits for individuals and families as well as service providers.

- Discriminatory practices and the quagmire of procedural barriers complicate or stand in the way of people moving toward stable housing and relative independence. These are the primary systemic barriers the Hub team identified in the barriers section of the service log.

- Broad systemic barriers include the inadequate supply of affordable housing[1], particularly rental housing, for people with limited incomes, and inadequate support services, especially for people dealing with addictions and mental health issues.

  The need for more affordable housing and 'wrap around' support services, has been documented with recommendations in several reports over the past four years, including *A Place to Call Home, Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* (City of Edmonton, January 2009), the *Alberta Housing Coalition Position Paper* (February 2009), *It's Time to Step Up, Recommendations to Address Rental Housing Issues in Edmonton* (Edmonton Social Planning Council, September 2008), *Options for Affordable Housing* (Alberta Housing Coalition, 2005), and the *Edmonton Community Plan on Housing and Support Services* (Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing, 2005-2009).

  Therefore, to add value, we suggest that this research report focus on the systemic barriers created by discriminatory practices and procedural policies, a portion of which will link back to the inadequate supply of housing and the shortage of support services.

- Front line workers who advocate for individuals and families and who directly deliver public programs have first hand knowledge and stories of challenges created by systemic barriers. They can also convey success stories. Directors and managers, more directly engaged in the process of trying to influence policy change, need the appropriate tools in hand to articulate the need. People working in the housing sector in other provinces may have experience to share that has reduce comparable barriers. The product of this research can become one of those tools and can be used to open dialogue with decision-makers.

- A participatory process with the member agencies will increase the relevance and usefulness of the inquiry, and lay the groundwork for a constructive dialogue between the field of community practice and policy-makers/delivery agents.

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[1] **Definitions (*No place like home,* City of Edmonton, 2009)**
- Long-term supportive housing: includes on-site supports for clients with complex needs, so they can live as independently as possible.
- Supported housing: support services are not on-site, but can be brought to clients if necessary.
- Social housing: for low-income households requiring on-going rent subsidies.
- Affordable housing: for low-income households, who typically won't need on-going support services or subsidies.

Proposed Approach

The following research project components are included in the detailed steps below:

- Through stories, document the systemic barriers (discrimination and procedural barriers, in particular) emerging from the experience of front line staff, [individuals/families] and community housing organizations.
- Develop a case study that exemplifies the impact of the systemic barriers, the supports required to remove the barriers and the gains achieved for one individual or family. Compare the potential return on social investment if the systemic barriers had not been present.
- Gather background information on the rationale for the existing policies (i.e. from provincial and municipal departments and agencies).
- Tap the experience of other cities and provinces that have found ways to eliminate, avoid or improve similar systemic barriers.
- Bring learning back to the member agency directors as it evolves and equip stakeholders with a tool that supports dialogue and policy change.
- Facilitate dialogue among appropriate players to discuss the findings and explore alternatives.

Proposed steps

1. Identify member agency representatives who want to participate in the Advisory Committee for the research project. Present the proposed approach to the committee. Draft and confirm a set of guiding questions for Executive Directors of member agencies, front line workers in the member agencies and policy-makers/delivery agents. (April)

2. Invite member agency Executive Directors to offer feedback on the proposed focus and approach, to articulate the kind of final document they would find most useful (format and content), and to identify front line workers in their organization who can best convey systemic barriers through stories or examples, to participate in the first round of interviews. (May)

3. Conduct a first round of interviews with one or two front line workers in each of the 14 member agencies to gather stories and pull out the systemic barriers. (June)
   - Through your experience/stories/examples, what policies have you seen that have prevented individuals and families from achieving relative independence that maximizes their potential?
   - What are reasonable alternatives for how the system could respond?
   - Who else should we be approaching? [The 'snowball technique' will reveal other key informants.]

4. From the first round of interviews, identify a list of recurring systemic barriers and exemplary stories.

5. Use the list of recurring systemic barriers and exemplary stories as the basis for conducting the second round of interviews to deepen the exploration and confirm if the list is complete and representative. Identify the barriers that occur most frequently. Interviews for the second round will include member agency staff, community housing organizations and other key informants beyond the member agencies. (July- August)

6. Facilitate small group discussions (within and/or across agencies) to explore solutions in response to the barriers that occur most frequently. (August)

7. Either in conjunction with #6 or separately, conduct one-to-one interviews and go to existing groups to discuss first hand experiences, among individuals and families, with the identified barriers. Ask for input on what would have made these situations easier. [Appropriate placement of this step??] (August)

8. Develop a case study that exemplifies the impact of the systemic barriers, the supports required to remove the barriers and the gains achieved for one individual or family. Compare the potential return on social investment if the systemic barriers had not been present. (July-August)

9. Conduct one-to-one interviews with government and public agency staff and managers, as appropriate, to explore the rationale for the policies that are (possibly unintentionally) creating barriers to achieving relative independence. Departments and programs include Alberta Employment and Immigration, Municipal Affairs and Housing, AISH, Alberta Health Services, Capital Region Housing, City of Edmonton and Homeward Trust. (July-August)

10. Review the literature and program examples in other cities and provinces that have found ways to eliminate, avoid or improve similar systemic barriers. (July-August)

11. Bring learning back to the member agency Executive Directors as it emerges. Develop a strategy with the directors for dialogue with decision-makers and delivery agents within government and public agencies. (Ongoing)

12. Facilitate dialogue among appropriate players to discuss the findings and explore alternatives. (September)

13. Develop a final 'document' (and, if desired, alternative formats, e.g. PowerPoint presentation for the use of the Hub and member agencies) that captures the learning. (September)

Side note:

No Place to Call Home – Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness named six systemic barriers: poverty, no home, no job – no job, no home, mental health and addictions, lack of affordable housing, family violence and discrimination.

Hub Systemic Barriers to Housing
Sorted by Practice, Procedure, Policy and Service Gaps

Practice Issues	Department
1. Rent raised by Social Housing body, without notice, if they suspect you have another tenant. [Clarification: Notice is provided.]	Alberta Employment and Immigration (AEI)
2. Some service providers focus on strict interpretation of the rules while others focus on serving people and trying to make benefits work in their favour (creative).	AEI
3. Have to be homeless to qualify for emergency housing in a hotel.	AEI
4. Emergency housing in a hotel is sometimes covered and sometimes not.	AEI
5. Limitations on third party payments; individual has to give consent; once consent is withdrawn, cannot use third party payment option.	AEI
6. If a person has pests, may not be able to get rid of them but not allowed to move to another unit until pests have been eliminated.	Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA)
7. Social Housing body removes person from wait list for housing if they qualify for subsidy.	HUA
8. Need an address to apply for social housing or supplement (may have to sign lease and gamble); [Clarification: Individuals can submit application without an address but it will not approved without an address and rent statement.]	HUA
9. Evicted or dropped from a benefit if suspected of wrong-doing – guilty until proven innocent (e.g. Social Housing, Child Tax Benefit – ex-spouse may be using address even though no longer a resident) [Clarification: Called, three letters sent, investigation to prevent eviction if at all possible.]	HUA

Procedure Issues	Departments
10. Workers do not know (or do not act on knowledge) that they can fax a bank which would allow a person to cash a government cheque, even without a bank account or official ID.	AEI
11. Only medical notes from doctors are accepted to prove need for additional financial support ('detrimental to the person's health').	AEI
12. AISH waiting lists to process applications (3-6 months).	AISH - Seniors and Community Supports (AISH)
13. Require official ID to cash a government cheque.	AEI, AISH
14. Difficult to access workers because workers have enormous caseloads. Relationships will be lost with move to call centre.	AEI, AISH
15. Need an advocate to help with forms, understand benefits, work through appeal process.	AEI, AISH, HUA
16. Need government-issued photo identification to apply for housing or subsidy (cost, complex process) [Clarification: Required to receive supplement but not to apply.]	HUA
17. Criminal record makes person ineligible for social housing.	HUA

Policy Issues	Departments
18. Insufficient amount to cover rent and any other expenses that arise (transportation, telephone, cable, recreation – holistic needs).	AEI
19. Income Support [formerly Supports for Independence] claws back money received while waiting for Employment Insurance to begin (for intervening months); [Clarification: Income Support provides retroactive coverage for intervening months.]	AEI

20. Work income disqualifies individual from support; can't afford rent or have to rent in a place that is not conducive to staying clean and dry.	AEI
21. Assistance figures have stayed the same while cost-of-living has gone up.	AEI
22. Reduced support – Hep C and HIV special diets now combined (was $72 – now $36).	AEI
23. Cannot rent a house with rent arrears. [private market]	AEI, HUA
24. Can only apply for damage deposit every 3 years (may have to move for safety, increase in family size).	AEI, HUA
25. Can't pay security deposit over time, on a repayment plan.	AEI, HUA
26. While hospitalized, individual can lose shelter and have nowhere to go when discharged.	AEI, HUA
27. Rent shortfall cap leaves people with insufficient funds to cover rent.	AEI, HUA
28. Damage deposit assistance from government falls short of what is required.	AEI, HUA
29. Decisions made before consultation takes place. Community not consulted before new policies and programs are rolled out.	AEI, HUA
30. When people living on the street move into housing, requires one-to-one support.	AEI, AISH, HUA
31. Eligibility for benefits reviewed even if your condition is chronic.	AISH
32. Some AISH clients can't earn allowable amount to supplement income.	AISH
33. Female equivalent of Urban Manor does not exist – women are vulnerable.	AISH, HUA
34. Shelters are often full and turn people away. With children, harder to find shelter space.	AISH, HUA

35. Have to change programs/workers at age 65 (continuity issue).	Alberta Health Services (Mental Health), AEI, AISH
36. Social housing wait list for housing is two years long.	HUA
37. Even if clean and dry, people get lonely – only people they know are using. Triggers or create noise and evicted.	HUA
38. When assessed for eligibility for subsidy, income from SFI for housing allowance is considered an asset even though it falls far below rent costs.	HUA
39. Time for processing subsidy applications (6-9 months) – may have to sign a list and then wait 6-9 months for approval and top-up.	HUA
40. More vacancies than last year but rents still high.	HUA
41. People are further behind than they were before HEP was introduced because rents have remained high.	HUA
42. Landlords have 10-30 days to return damage deposit. Leaves person without money to put on next damage deposit for first month. Told to go to a shelter.	HUA
43. Employment income counts against benefits but insufficient to cover rent.	HUA
44. Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness vs. barriers to accessing or remaining housed (inconsistent).	HUA
45. Social housing authority overwhelmed by added responsibility for rent supplement applications.	HUA
46. Private landlord may be providing supportive housing but doesn't meet code requirements for a non-family residence.	City of Edmonton
Not allowed to maintain camps in river valley; shelters inhumane; not wanted on urban benches and lawns – hard to provide outreach support when people have to keep moving	City of Edmonton

47. Age restrictions, before (social housing body) and after 18 (Terra, ICYHP, YES), limit access to housing support programs. [Clarification: No age restriction before age 18 for Capital Region Housing]	HUA
48. Housing First not answer for everyone – some people need help for a toothache or a broken bone, or basic living skills – we don't ask people what they need.	HUA
49. When parents with dependent adults have to move into care for themselves, creates stress for adult child who requires access to appropriate housing and support.	HUA
50. People who hoard need one-to-one help.	HUA
51. Outreach support insufficient.	HUA
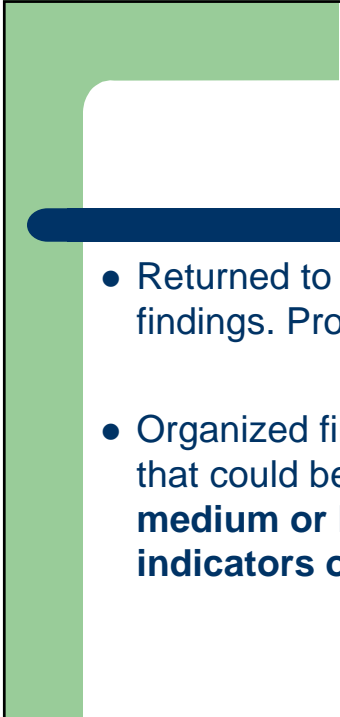
Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative
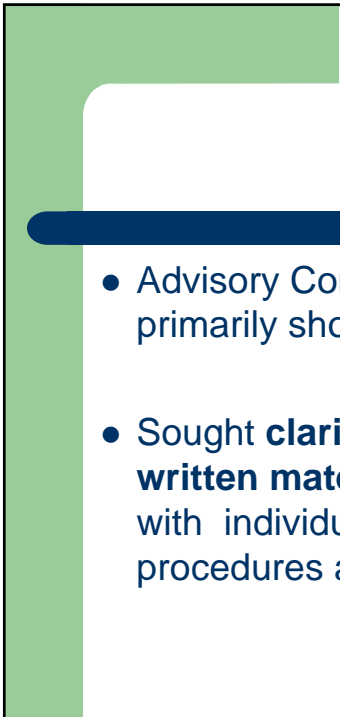
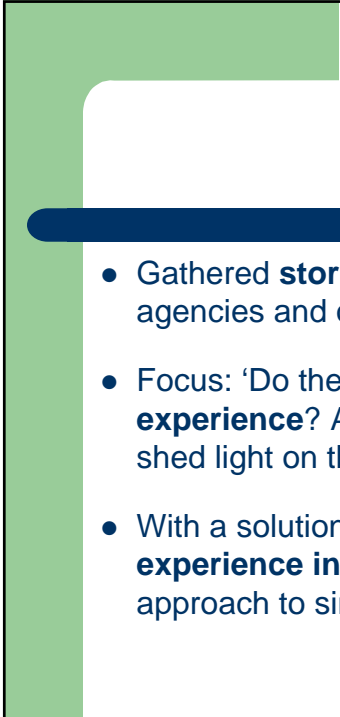## An exploration for the Housing Support Services Hub

Ann Goldblatt and Roxanne Felix,

Consultants, May 19, 2010

Process

- Reviewed **Hub team's identified systemic barriers.** Created themes.
-
- **Interviewed** primarily **service providers** in the Hub member agencies.

- Asked to consider their **practice experience** and **identify concerns** related to **policies or 'rules'** that create **unintended consequences.**

- Returned to the **Hub team** to discuss findings. Provided clarity on some items.

- Organized findings into a set of **49 barriers** that could be addressed in the **short, medium or long term**. Barriers are **indicators of concern.**

- Advisory Committee **prioritized 8 barriers** – primarily short-term – to investigate further.

- Sought **clarity** on the 8 barriers through **written material** and **some consultation** with individuals with knowledge of policies, procedures and practices.

- Gathered **stories** through Hub Council member agencies and other social service providers.

- Focus: 'Do these 8 **reflect** your **practice experience**? Are there **other concerns**?' Wanted to shed light on the **impact** of these barriers.

- With a solution focus, looked for **comparable experience in other provinces** to learn about their approach to similar issues.

- Presented **highlights** of the findings to the **Hub Council.**

- Planned a series of **preliminary, informal discussions with interested individuals in four ministries** related to the priority issues … action underway, opportunities for dialogue.

- Planned **forum** - findings, opportunities for dialogue.

Voices represented

Round One

- 19 people from 12 Hub member agencies

Round Two

- 9 people from 4 Hub member agencies
- 21 people from 8 non-Hub member agencies

49 people from 20 community agencies

- Received input from 4 representatives of Capital Region Housing Corporation and 1 from each of AISH and Income Support, for clarity on some issues.

Met with three ministries
- Alberta Health and Wellness - 2
- Alberta Employment and Immigration - 4
- Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs – 3
- Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

16 people from 6 public agencies

Limitations

- Exploration did not inquire about **positive or negative** experiences. Focused on difficulties.

- Advisory Committee **selected 8 priority barriers** from the list of 49. Did not go back to Hub Council member agencies to verify.

- Investigation into 8 primarily **relied on document review**. Each could be investigated to understand the context in depth.

Findings

- Identified barriers are observations and perceptions based on community practice experience

- Some match government perspective

- For others, information and experience may be different from the intentions or actual rules

- Rules may have changed

	Limited resources	Problematic rules	Experiences interacting with systems	TOTAL
Short term	0	11	4	15
Medium term	11	4	6	21
Long term	11	0	2	13
	22	15	12	49

Access to housing

Documentation

- Photo identification costly and complex. Often lost or stolen. (Action underway)

- Challenged to complete application forms; literacy, language, culture and cognitive factors. Time-consuming for agencies. May drop out and miss benefits.

Access to housing

Eligibility

- Criminal record

- Perception: require an address to apply for social housing (only need a contact).

- Removed from cue for social housing if the person qualifies for direct rent supplement; market rent increases are a concern.

- Perception: under 18, not eligible (not limited).

Access to housing

Access to emergency shelter

- Shelters often full and have to turn people away; especially difficult for adults with children.

- Have to be homeless to qualify for emergency housing in a hotel; inconsistencies in the availability of coverage for the cost of staying in a hotel.

Access to housing

Rent supplements

- Perception: Need an address to apply for rent supplement; problematic to sign a lease without assurance (contact info required).

- Perception: Photo ID required to apply for rent supplement (required to receive supplement but not to apply).

Rent supplements (continued)

- Can apply for damage deposit every three years; may be safety issues or an increase in family size.

- Perception: Income support considered an asset but falls below private market rental costs (income support is an allowance; no points).

- Work income can disqualify an individual for rent supplement; affordable units not conducive to staying clean and dry.

Access to housing

Limited resources

- Social housing authority overwhelmed by added responsibility for rent supplement applications; affects access to info and supplements. Wait list six to nine months.

- Rent shortfall cap and damage deposit funds insufficient to cover rent.

- Social housing wait list is two years long.

Capacity to maintain housing

- Perception: Rent raised without notice if suspected of having an extra tenant (notice provided).

- Perception: A tenant can be evicted or a person dropped from a financial benefit if suspected of wrong-doing. Can appeal if evicted; if person wins appeal, goes back into cue (called, three letters sent, investigation to prevent eviction if at all possible).

Capacity to maintain housing

- Unable to move within social housing until pests have been eliminated.

- Moving from homelessness into public or private housing can be lonely; some return to shelter for company. People they know may still be using; may trigger relapse or lead to disturbance and eviction.

- If hospitalized, can lose shelter with nowhere to go upon discharge.

Outreach support

- Do not want to be in shelters but not legally allowed to maintain camps in the river valley; not wanted on benches and lawns. Difficult to provide outreach support if person has to keep moving.

- Prior to housing, some first want help with other immediate needs, e.g. toothache, broken bone; not asked what they need first.

- From street to housing, require one-to-one support (Housing First model).

Access to income and adequate income to meet basic needs

- With income support, insufficient income to cover rent, transportation, telephone, cable and recreation.

- Assistance rates have stayed fairly stable while cost-of-living as gone up.

- Money from income support to cover waiting period taken back once EI begins.

Access to income and adequate income to meet basic needs

- Landlords have 10 to 30 days to return a damage deposit; can leave a person without money for next damage deposit and needing to go to a shelter.

- Individuals require government-issued photo ID to case a government cheque; some workers do not know or pass along info that form can be faxed to back to allow cashing without a bank account or photo ID.

Adequate income related to physical and mental health

- Only medical notes from physicians are accepted to prove the need for additional financial support related to physical and mental health.

- Support for special diets for people with Hep C and HIV combined, reducing total by half; not notified in advance.

- Eligibility for long-term disability benefits reviewed annually, including chronic conditions.

- Some on long-term disability cannot earn the allowable amount to supplement their incomes.

Access to services

- Workers with large caseloads difficult to reach.

- Relationship-based practice compromised by shift to call centre model within local income support offices; challenge for person with mental health issues to change worker at 65.

- Service gaps: female equivalent of Urban Manor; support for people who hoard; support for dependent adult children of aging parents.

Cross-ministry issues

- Multiple issues cross ministries.

- Includes issues related to accessing and maintaining housing, i.e. need for income, social support and the opportunity to develop skills for self-advocacy and learning how to apply rules.

- Applies to with service providers and requirements to access benefits.

Emerging issues

Access to housing / Access to social housing
- Documentation
- Eligibility
- Emergency shelter
- Access to rent supplements
- Limited resources as a barrier to housing and supplements

Capacity to maintain housing
- Expectations, social needs, medical issues, outreach support

Income
- Access to income and adequate income to meet basic needs
- Adequate income related to physical and mental health

Access to services; resources and relationship-based practice

Feedback on the Hub Forum

- What **worked well for you**?

- What could have been **improved**?

- What do you see as **next steps** to advance community / government dialogue as joint problem-solving on systemic barriers to housing?

Proceedings
Hub Systemic Barriers to Housing Forum

May 19, 2010
Edmonton, Alberta

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The Housing Support Services Hub hosted a forum on Systemic Barriers to Housing on May 19, 2010. The forum drew 75 participants, including representatives from the three levels of government and from community organizations. Each of the four presentations is included as an attachment.

1. Purpose of the forum
Tanya Tellier, Team Leader, Housing Support Services Hub
Ann Goldblatt, Consultant

The purpose of the forum was to share the findings from the scan of systemic barriers and to pool ideas on current and potential models for joint problem-solving between community and government. The planning committee wanted to look at sustainable mechanisms for addressing the emerging issues rather than try to resolve specific issues at this forum.

The starting assumptions behind the focus on strengthening the dialogue between community and government as a means of joint problem-solving were as follows ...

- The experience of community organizations involved in front line service delivery is that some public policies, procedures and practices have unintended consequences for the people they serve.
- An accumulation of similar experiences points to challenges that need further investigation and dialogue between community and government. Some consequences could be avoided or remedied and there is an opportunity for forward thinking.
- Traditionally, communities come to government and lobby to change one policy at a time. Government officials consider the input and may or may not make changes, given other contributing factors. With the next issue, the process begins again.
- Both community and government players have constraints and accountabilities (people accessing services, funders/'taxpayers', decision-makers).
- The Hub sees the need for effective and sustained community/government dialogue to jointly develop solutions. This may involve strengthening existing structures or developing new opportunities. This is discussion at a more systemic level than case by case problem-solving.
- Community and government want to arrive at mutually responsive policies, procedures and practices, with less confrontation and better use of limited resources, leading to positive outcomes for the individuals and families affected.
- We can build on other experience where this kind of dialogue has already been tried.

Hence, rather than assume that a new entity is needed to address the emerging issues, the planning committee sought to identify existing opportunities. The intent is to avoid duplication and only create a new community /government body if there is a gap.

2. How does government make decisions? At what level? What role does the community play? - PowerPoint presentation attached
Vasant Chotai, Consultant

Vasant provided an overview of the process that the Alberta government uses to make decisions, the political and economic factors that feed into those decisions, and the role of the community in the process. He distinguished the levels at which policy, procedure and practice decisions are made. While there are constraints for departments responsible for making decisions and for communities responding to demand, Vasant emphasized that the role of the community is critical in identifying concerns and bringing forward ideas about required changes. People who access public services turn to community workers with their issues when faced with systemic barriers.

3. Systemic Barriers to Housing process and findings - PowerPoint presentation attached
Ann Goldblatt and Roxanne Felix, Consultants

Ann and Roxanne presented the results of the scan of systemic barriers conducted between April 2009 and April 2010. The scan involved conversations with a total of 65 people. Hub member agencies, primarily front line staff, identified the initial set of 49 barriers. The barriers were clustered into short, medium and long term issues. From the 49, eight were selected by an Advisory Committee as priorities. These issues were explored to clarify the 'rules' and look at examples from other provinces addressing similar matters. Through preliminary discussions with three provincial ministries, we looked at ways in which these issues are already being addressed and opportunities for joint problem-solving between government and community.

The eight priority issues are identified below while the presentation includes a thematic analysis of the full set of 49 barriers:

- Requirement for proof of need by physicians to qualify for medical supplements.
- Impact on individual relationships by using call centres or changing workers.
- Need for sufficient outreach support to help people establish and maintain stable housing.
- Allowable amount of employment income to supplement income support.
- Difficulties understanding the application process which may mean that individuals do not apply for supports to which they would be entitled.
- Requirement to have an address to receive a direct-to-tenant rent supplement (a calculation based on rent).
- Perceptions on eviction from social housing.
- Criminal record as a factor to enter to qualify for social housing.

4. Models of ongoing community / government dialogue
Presentations were made on two models of community / government dialogue, one involving meetings between a single ministry and community and the other involving cross-ministry representation and community. The presentations addressed the process and the lessons learned.

4.1 Strategic Alliance – Speaking notes attached
Susan Morrissey, Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council
Laurette Morris, Director, Strategic Policy and Supports, Alberta Employment and Immigration

4.2 Leadership Advisory Circle – PowerPoint presentation attached
Kourch Chan, Chief Operating Officer, E4C

5. Identify other examples of community / government dialogue - past experience, in place or planned - and lessons learned from experience

What other experience have you had with ongoing community / government dialogue for the purpose of problem-solving? What lessons can be learned from those experiences?

In 11 mixed small groups, participants identified a range of examples of community /government dialogue, offering descriptive information and insights. The examples are first listed in alphabetical order, with a summary of the insights, followed by the participants' descriptions and lessons learned for specific examples.

5.1 Examples identified (in alphabetical order; details follow)

Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs	HUB Model
Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs Deputy Minister	Intake Housing Team
	Military Family Resource Centre
Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs Intergovernmental Affairs	Old Strathcona Area Admin Council
	Orenda House Advisory Committee - Bent Arrow team
Alberta Mentoring partnership	
Alberta Non-Profit Voluntary Sector Initiative	Pandemic Planning
Alberta Residential Tenancy Advisory	Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth (SAARICY)
Critical connections	
Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness	
	Safe Communities Initiative - REACH
Edmonton Social Planning Council	St. Albert Family Working Group
Family and Community Support Services, Spruce Grove - five ministries	Temporary Residential Services
	Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness
Families First Edmonton	Wichitowin Circles - Housing
Healthy Kids Alberta	Vibrant Communities
Homeless Connect	
Housing First, Homeward Trust	

5.2 Summary of insights (based on recorded notes)

Rationale for community / government dialogue
- It's not good for either sector to work in silos (government, community organizations).
- We need each other; collaboration is needed to influence change.

- Community organizations have opportunities to bring forward issues and make statements of concern that government is not always free or allowed to do.
- Helps front line people to overcome barriers.

Relationships and power dynamics
- Most important lesson learned: relationships matter.
- It's about relationship and willingness to take down barriers.
- Premise is that it is a shared responsibility to meet community needs.
- Need for shared responsibility.
- People who were there wanted to be there.
- Equal playing field.
- People left their agendas at the door, open to sharing.
- Stereotypes prevent discussions from occurring.
- Building relationships to navigate systems on an informal level. Informal networks.
- Personality is key/inter-personal more significant than inter-agency.
- People with the passion – staff turnover – new priorities.

- Relationships – willingness to assume ownership and step outside of power position, without defensiveness. "Innovative creative solutions to be explored."
- Lessons learned – get people to leave their position of power at the door.
- Recognize levels of power, power differentials. Do training.
- Government has to be very careful not to assume that they have the power.
- Important to have a strong facilitator who can recognize power dynamics and offer opportunities in a number of different methods for all to give open input. Important to not assume there is a level playing field.
- Part of collaboration is trust. There have been past negative experiences in collaboration when data is shared within the group and then shared inappropriately by one of the partner members.

Participation
- Ensures a voice from both government and community.
- Lack of formal process to involve stakeholders.
- Mix of non-profits, private sector and government.
- Ministries are talking amongst themselves more than in the past to address various issues.
- Intend to have discussions with service providers and to have a "citizen-centred" approach. Us/them philosophy needs to be changed.
- Housing is not just a housing issue. This is not just a housing concern for Housing and Urban Affairs. More ministries need to be involved; need to get buy-in by other affected ministries. E.g. Children's Services, Employment and Immigration, Justice, Corrections, etc. Don't put all money into one ministry as others will abdicate and distance themselves as not responsible. Top three issues identified by Alberta Employment and Immigration - housing, childcare and transportation - are interrelated.
- Absence of Health in the dialogue on housing.
- Good balance of sectors represented however limited representation by private sector.
- In rural areas, there are all kinds of examples of collaboration, because you have to collaborate; we are all part of one community.

- Include Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. Use interfaith communities more. Use Welcome Wagon and social opportunities. Value added by building trust, representing all stakeholders including segments in need of support, collaboration, reflection.
- These are big issues; on the one hand, need people with authority but on the other, these individuals may not have front-line service providers' knowledge.
- Getting to build relationships with the other agencies but, with front line providers, doesn't provide access to the next level of government.

Addressing issues effectively
- Keep it focused.
- Not good to have a one time meeting; conversation will likely not continue.
- Informs government to ensure that sector is viable.
- Also helps government to be more efficient, outcome focussed.
- Key players look at crisis situations at one table.
- Addresses specific issues, such as discharges, and prevention for those "at risk".
- Services could be streamlined.
- Shared learnings.
- Keep asking, even if the first person you talk to says no.
- Policy changes cannot just be based on one-sided feedback; both negative and positive points need to be brought forward.
- Incremental changes.

Process elements that support joint problem-solving
- Really key to have a clear understanding of goals, roles and responsibilities, skills everyone brings. Terms of reference are key.
- Make sure goals are the same, that we HAVE the same goal.
- When issues of conflict arise – address them immediately.
- Start with a particular project or issue, not something general.

Resource elements that support joint problem-solving
- Funding – money to back up partnership/collaboration (e.g. SAARICY is not funded).
- Funding – reason to sit at the table.
- Critical Connections – funded - minute taker – agencies see it as a valuable group.
- Money given to FCSS – one time project for 3 years – funding no longer available
- Need resources.
- Grant opportunities when you get the ministers involved.
- Contribute to resolving gaps without new resources.
- Challenge – assumption that having government at table equals money.
- Lesson learned – put it "out there" that there are no dollars.
- Not always about cash flow, but must consider services in-kind such as supports, staffing, etc.

Capacity to influence policy change – challenges and opportunities
- Advocacy – people with money not at the table.
- Funding from non-government sources creates different kinds of opportunities.

- Community agencies face limitations in using funds for advocacy initiatives. Lies outside of funding parameters. Difficulties identifying issues and taking action. Ability and comfort in giving funders constructive feedback perceived as 'biting the hand that feeds you'.
- E.g. Coalition for Equal Access to Education is apart from any other organizations – mandate not confused.
- Clear line between what is appropriate for the funded agency – limited to what you can say or do in terms of advocacy. Saying it as a group – not an organization/agency. Can see why lines are drawn.
- MLA Reps are sitting at the table of Critical Connections; better to invite MLA staff rather the MLA as administrative political representatives. Provides built- in advocacy.

- Community members need to identify the problem and work with municipal representatives; there they have the most influence. Municipal government does have a lot of power and they take time to talk to people. We should look at bringing municipal and local levels into this discussion.
- We also have to remember that non-profits can make a lot of change if they get influential people on their boards to open doors. For example the Alberta Quality of Life Commission deliberately solicited people like Lois Hole and Doug Roche to sit on their board, and of course, the ADM came to their presentations.
- We should also look at partnering with the research sector (e.g. with university).

- Funding-driven focus/directives.
- Lack policy/objective base at federal, provincial and municipal levels. Successes are not based on targets because targets are not set. Leads to gaps in accountability, responsibility, benchmarking and monitoring.

5.3 Examples and insights (descriptions and insights for specific examples, based on recorded notes)

Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs
- Constantly evaluating programs.
- Looking at accountability and transparency, ensuring that needs are met.
- Delivery mechanism: communication with service deliverers.
- Issues are brought forward by service deliverer, HUA responds.
- Funding is an issue.
- Ten Year Plan created many committees to address various points.

Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs Deputy Minister
- Two times per year stakeholder meetings.
- Modeled on Strategic Alliance.
- By invitation to key stakeholders and broader community.
- 15 people: asked for advice, information to be taken forward.

Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs Intergovernmental Affairs
- Intent is to work cross-ministry. Need for shared responsibility and resources. I see an absence of Health and resource partnerships.

Insights
- Need for shared responsibility and resources – I see an absence of Health; resource partnerships are needed.

Alberta Mentoring partnership
- Between 25 non-profits and 9 ministries to increase mentoring for non-profits across the province.
- For children and youth in communities.

Insights - challenges – lessons learned
- Good balance of sectors represented however limited representation by private sector.
- Challenge – assumption that having government at table equals money.
- Lesson learned – put it "out there" that there are no dollars.

Alberta Non-Profit Voluntary Sector Initiative
- Government representatives, senior managers or higher, non-profit EDs
- Policy issues, HR issues.
- Recent initiative: Funding Principles, Funding Practices.

Insights - value
- Informs government to ensure that sector is viable.
- Also helps government to be more efficient, outcome focussed.

Alberta Residential Tenancy Advisory
- From this body came a resolution process, a step below the courts.

Insights - Elements of success
- People who were there wanted to be there.
- Mix of non-profits, private sector and government.
- People left their agendas at the door, open to sharing.
- Shared learnings.

Critical connections
- 12 stakeholders with mutual clients; front line staff, services; not broad information.

Insight
- Keep it focused.
- These are big issues; on the one hand, need people with authority but on the other, these individuals may not have front-line service providers' knowledge.

Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness
- Brought recognition to issues and started process of changing systemic issues. HUB is a good example of bringing people together to look at complexities and move beyond.
- EDs – transition to frontline workers – some management

- Shift – organizations primarily focused on joint advocacy – now education, frontline workers, bringing forward barriers and issues – taking action – talking to right people in government

Edmonton Social Planning Council
- Important to have the right people with the right knowledge base.
- Not widely known who participates.

Family and Community Support Services, Spruce Grove area meetings with five ministries
- Included Culture, Housing and Justice, etc.
- Purpose: hear what serious issues residents were facing – valuable!
- People felt they were being heard.
- Gave sense of government obstacles.
- Not good to have a one time meeting; conversation will likely not continue.

Insights – lessons learned
- Grant opportunities when you get the ministers: Spruce Grove – only community with an ongoing team regarding issues; involves key players who look at crisis situations.
- Services could be streamlined. FCSS working with Child and Family Services.
- "Critical connections" – getting to build relationships with the other service providers in agencies but doesn't provide access to the next level of government.

Families First Edmonton
- Partnership example with Alberta Employment and Immigration, where broad based collaboration occurs.

Healthy Kids Alberta
- Expanded benefit to low income moms.

Homeless Connect
- A good example of change related to services, involving 54 government, service agencies and businesses.
- Provides one stop shopping.
- Good example of the City of Edmonton and provincial government working together.

Housing First under Homeward Trust
- Reduces barriers for homeless people.
- Can build on Housing First.
- Eliminates a huge population of people who are just surviving.
- Initiative changes how those at risk can get housing supports.
- When HEP fund transferred to CRHC, dropped a lot of clients.
- Workers have direct contacts at AEI.
- Some fast-tracking of those with highest need.
- Contract with Job Corps: furniture bank, moving.
- Team leads meet bi-weekly; EDs meet monthly – inform at local and provincial level; work with Provincial Secretariat.
- Problem solve from own experiences.

- Networking opportunity for Aboriginals.
- Grappling with photo identification issue as a result.
- Need to build trust first, e.g. Aboriginals – homeless people in parkland.
- Sustain supports to ensure housing continues – not lost – house and supports – 3 – 5 hours/week in Housing First is not enough.

Insights - lessons learned
- #1 relationships matter,
- #2 keep asking, even if the first person you talk to says no.

HUB Model
- Good example of agencies working together. Initially province came.
- Coordinating to meet needs of homeless population. Interesting partnership.

Military Family Resource Centre

Insights
- Get people to leave their position of power at the door.
- Recognize levels of power differential, do training.
- Government has to be very careful not to assume that they have the power.
- Important to have a strong facilitator who can recognize power dynamics and offer opportunities in a number of different methods for all to give open input. Important not assume there is a level playing field.

Intake Housing Team
- A team internal to the City of Edmonton but includes all those different departments in the City that are involved with homelessness (Strategic Services, Community Services, including Parks and Recreation, Landlords and Tenant Board, etc.).

Old Strathcona Area Admin Council
- Has been going for ten years or so. Involves community leagues, historic foundations, etc.
- Communication, advocacy initiatives – outreach worker. Has helped with Boyle Street Community Services panhandling initiative.

Orenda House Advisory Committee Bent Arrow team
- Involves Alberta Works, Alberta Children and Youth Services, Beat cops, Income Support workers, Bent Arrow senior manager and resident manager.

Pandemic planning
- Experience ramping up for pandemic. Crisis – urgency-focused efforts. Collaboration can happen quickly and effectively.
- Limitation when there is only one ministry working with community on an issue when more ministries need to be involved.

Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth (SAARICY)

- Led by Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Issues for immigrant and refugee youth – 20 to 25 stakeholders
- Large group
- Focused agenda items
  - Transportation Loan issue – refugees – paying up to $10,000 – youth work – sub-group gotten together with city council – reduce loan
  - Youth ID issues – kicked out of house – nothing to get support they need – lots of people – but needs to lead to something/working groups
  - Important to have a purpose.
  - Transportation Loan – don't want to eliminate it – others have paid – rather that it be reduced ($4000, no interest)

Safe Communities Initiative - REACH
- Dialogue between Integrated Services and community – preventative. Need groups like community-league, with funding.
- Report involved – potential for more
- Important for being community-based

St. Albert Family Working Group
- St. Albert family working group with non government agencies, differing Alberta Health Services groups, City representation (20)
- Get together once a month.
- Working to determine gaps and how to meet needs. Goals determined and sub-committees work on them.

Insights - lessons learned - value
- About relationship, willingness to take down barriers and contribute to resolving gaps without new resources.
- Premise is that it is a shared responsibility to meet community needs.
- Equal playing field.

Temporary Residential Services
- People brought together to look at unsafe living arrangements.
- Created rental supplements for working poor with outreach position provided by United Way.

Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness

Insights - lessons learned - value
- Ensures a voice from both gov't and community
- Addresses specific issues, such as discharges, and prevention for those "at risk"

Wichitowin Circles - Housing
- Building relationships with Aboriginal community – where is the representation when 40% homeless are Aboriginal? (e.g. Wichitowin Circles – Housing)

Vibrant Communities

- Community organizations and government representatives at the table
- Low income issues / working poor / poverty
- Successful initiatives include "Making Tax Time Pay" and a direct mail-out from Canada Revenue with an application package for Child Health Benefit.

Gap in collaboration - Discharge planning
- Just government now but plan to bring in the community.

Comments on systemic barriers to housing
- Need to look at wrap-around services, not just housing.
- Three to five hours/week is Housing First is not enough.
- Housing First Support Program needs to be more than for one year – need multi-year funding.
- Principle - Every door is the right door.
- Cannot get official identification with fines.
- Agency coordination and cooperation – same as government, need cross pollination – demonstrated a need for HUB to continue as this model
- Quick fixes – need a team to deal with immediate concerns e.g. access to housing – identification, forms – facilitate (could be a HUB II role). One main game in town for provincial (Capital Region Housing) and City rent supplement programs. Need others.
- Acknowledgement that outreach includes developing relationships THAT TAKE TIME. Do not have unrealistic timeline targets to count/report on successes. These people (who are homeless) are not a number and many, based on their own experiences, have trust issues.
- Need for two stream-focus. Need to provide resources to house people and provide support to do that AND increase income to those populations at the same time in response to honoring needs.
    o Province needs to give priority to income supports
    o Links to need for overall policy at provincial level to guide funding and decision-making.
- At provincial level, dealing with weak legislation, Social Housing Act with restrictive access criteria. Points system creates problems. Have to be in dire straights to access housing. Not oriented to preventing people from losing housing. Social housing concentrates desperate people together rather than integrating.
- Reaction time – problem with top down approach – when government sets the stage and everyone delivering has to compete and vie for dollars
- Need to turn this around to get timely reaction and response to issues at the delivery end, e.g. group that responded to tent city last summer.
- Turn this around through a process that quickly facilitates communication and reaction (up and down). Involves a host of stakeholders – like a SWAT Team approach that can articulate recent upsurging and foreseeable concerns, and vet them quickly to get government response.
- Avenue for receiving input at government level needs to be established. Needs to be operationalized. Useful when rules change so can get a heads up.
- Working Committee – government and agencies and clients – expand on Strategic Alliance approach of Edmonton Social Planning Council (e.g. summer response team).

      Cross-ministry involvement needed as well as City representation (Housing Branch, not just Community Services).

- Useful to gain input by government on proposed changes before they are implemented.

- Need to share resources through the city, removing as many barriers as possible for people who cannot afford access, e.g. Recreation Therapy (Community Linking Committee) jim.koning@albertahealthservices.ca [sp]; Schizophrenic Society. Around since 1994 for mental health clients. Diversity Wellness – inner city program (CathyMclean@albertahealthservices.ca [sp]. South Side fitness. Social connections are the goal of these programs.

6. Identify value added and constraints to community / government dialogue (full group, emerging from small group discussions)

Drawing on the examples discussed in the small groups, participants contributed ideas on the value added by 'community / government' dialogue and the constraints.

Community – Government Dialogue	
Value added	**Constraints**
Progress on issues Connections created were natural – identified place of need; identify where holes are and identified path of least resistance. Opportunities for advice/sharing concerns that don't exist otherwise, especially in a mutually respective atmosphere – a safe place to dialogue. Could lead to a virtual "one-stop" shop for clients. Can create report to demonstrate progress made. ***Relationships and participation*** Develop understanding and trust. Have all groups represented. Can involve politicians in this dialogue, another type of involvement. Build formal and informal relationships – usually related to "navigation" issues. Include other stakeholders: university, look at "Circle of Shared Responsibility", and consult	***Clear purpose*** Needs to have a purpose for dialogue. ***Relationships*** There are power dynamics – need to be clear about this and manage it, i.e. assumptions about government money available or power. Need to be careful what we say – recognize there is sensitivity. ***Participation*** Cross-ministry buy-in. Need "high" level of representation and ongoing meeting is important and needs to be a priority. Need someone at the table with "authority" but who also has knowledge of real issues. Frontline worker needs time to be involved in "policy" issues – managers and funders need to be aware. (i.e. follow-up to advance change) People change and there is potential for the vision to get lost.

Community – Government Dialogue	
Aboriginal community (Urban Aboriginal Strategies of Edmonton with Action Circles), and employers (i.e. Conference Board of Canada report on Social Determinants of Health). ***Sustainable*** Vision spans time and is sustainable. If policies change, they are sustained even if people change.	*Resources and time* Funding always is an issue. Dialogue and partnership takes time. Capacity to develop procedural changes, but policy changes take more time … reaching different levels of government.

7. Map existing opportunities for community / government dialogue on systemic barriers to housing
and
8. Explore the options for strengthening current community / government dialogue or creating new opportunities for dialogue on systemic barriers to housing

Time was somewhat short for the last portion of the morning. A number of initiatives were named as places where the systemic barriers named through this scan either are being discussed or potentially could be addressed. Further exploration will be required to complete this process (see Wrap-Up remarks below).

The initiatives are named in alphabetical order.

Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs - Stakeholders Group
Plan to meet twice a year to provide advice to ministry in terms of housing issues. Just started!

Alberta Non Profit Voluntary Sector Initiative
Led by Alberta Community Spirit. Addressing human resource issues and funding principles. Created a policy subcommittee; we could look at housing. Has been in existence since 2006.

Families First Edmonton
Steering Committee going forward with data from research and one of the goals is to look at how to take learnings and how does it inform policy (knowledge transfer). There is good representation on this committee.

Homeward Trust
Community Planning Committee. Opportunity to share information at community meetings. Can arrange to be invited. Research Committee has opportunities for involvement.

Housing First

ED meetings (monthly) and team lead meetings (bi-weekly) in Edmonton.

Social Based Assistance Review (SBAR)
Involves multiple ministries. Intended to help a client not to "tell their story" many times over and access multiple services in a more streamlined way. Intended to be a time where NGOs will be able to share their input on this initiative.

Ten Year Plan on Homelessness
Cross-ministry – working on documentation as well as links to Boyle Street Services Identification group and another group in Calgary as well as Homeward Trust. Meeting on May 31, held by Boyle Street – Service Alberta proposed policy changes around identification. June 11, community-government and registered agents to talk about personal identification in Edmonton (arranged by Homeward Trust).

Mental Health and Addictions and Housing and Urban Affairs are looking at discharge into community. Opportunities to provide input into this issue.

Questions: Who is involved from community? How do we create a strategic alliance?

Urban Aboriginal Strategies of Edmonton

Vibrant Communities Leadership Council
Still occasionally meeting

Youth Homelessness Cross-Ministry Initiative
Policy considerations that emerged from Housing and Urban Affairs. Support for co-location opportunities for eliminating barriers re: navigation. Cross-ministry website for listing services, age categories and how we can incorporate aspects of Housing First and effective practices into our approach. Nine ministries involved. Community-based conversations around issues that are relevant. Missing access to housing for young women with children.

Broad implications
- Housing is health, not a determinant of health. Should not be at arms length; ensure it is integrated, that health and housing work closely together.
- Must all be at the table to deal with health and homelessness.
- Build on knowledge about utilization of Emergency Rooms at hospitals.
- More movement is needed in this direction. Opportunity for next community plan to be broader and consider all options.
- Opportunity to look at 'multi-barriered' funding programs of Alberta Employment and Immigration. Need to connect and align with related initiatives.
- Need to align City and provincial initiatives.
- Layers of engagement. Need for up and down connections between layers as well as across.

Outstanding questions
- How do we address *prevention* of homelessness?
- Look at initiatives and the issues. See where there are gaps and where there is progress.

Wrap-up remarks and written feedback
Tanya Tellier and Ann Goldblatt

We were pleased with the sizable response to the invitation to this forum, *double* the number expected, and with the mix from community and government.

Participants were asked to provide written feedback on the morning in response to three questions (see below) and to indicate in writing if they would like to be part of an Ad Hoc Committee that will meet to review the proceedings from this forum and recommend 'next steps'. Thank you to all of the people who assisted with planning, organizing, logistics and facilitating!

The proceedings and the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee will be made available to all participants and to those who expressed interest in the forum but unable to participate on May 19.

Hub Systemic Barriers to Housing Forum - May 19, 2010
Written Feedback

What worked well?

Mix of participants
- Good having all community and levels of government involved.
- Good mix at each table.
- Table mix.
- Good mix at table.
- Great mix of people representing various organizations and departments at each table.
- Good mix of people.
- Opportunity to meet people from other agencies (relationship building); assigning tables to facilitate relationship building.
- Bringing diverse groups together in one place, and organizing tables to have mixed representation.
- Meeting in groups. Dialoguing with other service providers/stakeholders.
- Group formed from diverse agencies, government.
- Networking went well.
- Networking.
- Meeting with other organizations
- Discussion.
- Good mixture of stakeholders.
- Broad engagement worked well.
- Meeting staff from relevant agencies who deal with homelessness.

Exchange of information / knowledge
- Great idea to split up agency workers; provided a good opportunity to meet other agencies and share information.
- Community discussion, knowledge of different programs.
- Group discussion.
- Enjoyed the discussion with table members and connections with colleagues.
- Opportunity to hear from all 'levels' of individuals.
- Found out many different initiatives I did not know about.
- Thanks, learned some initiatives I didn't know about before.
- The session was informative.
- Information about action group for betterment of community.
- All worked well – great learning opportunity
- Learning of emerging issues (systemic barriers) and examples of collaboration.
- Lots of information about government and dialogue.
- I enjoyed the round table discussion, a great opportunity for different individuals to share practical experiences.
- Small table discussions happening between community and government agencies. Great to hear from both sides.
- ideas/info regarding coalition groups.

- Reports on research project; example from COARSE
- Examples of positive cross Ministry/agency collaboration i.e. "SETS"
- New knowledge "added value"
- Found out a lot about ongoing structures on community/government dialogue to resolve policy issues.

Structure / process
- Excellent sessions, well-organized, knowledge-based.
- Location, time of day, structured meeting.
- Well organized.
- The forum was well organized and helped to prompt focused discussion.
- One half day is a good amount of time.
- The mix of participants, the facilitation, the clarity of the presentations and tasks.
- Lead discussions.
- Having facilitator at small group session.

Value
- Thank you HUB for doing this research and organizing this meeting. Great job!
- Plenty of positive ideas.
- Whole group discussion and presentation.

What could have been improved?

More time for discussion, for networking
- More time.
- Time too short.
- Did pack so much into a short time which was great – but also a bit overwhelming.
- A lot of information in a short time.
- More time to discuss what agencies/committees are doing.
- More time, more interaction of reps of ministries and NGOs.
- Not enough time for table discussion.
- Timing was a bit hurried – need more time to discuss topics.
- Longer time for small groups.
- Longer – more time to discuss.
- Could have been whole day.
- Too bad we ran out of time to talk about #8.
- Longer break – not much opportunity to speak with others not at my table.

Focus on specific barriers and solutions
- Probably more time allocated to the possible solutions – what kinds of collaboration would be beneficial, how can we establish them?
- More in-depth discussion of each item.
- I thought we were going to address the barriers in this session.

- Perhaps the round table discussion could have been problem-solving around barriers – that may have been helpful.
- Break-out sessions on specific issues; presentations from more organizations involved.
- I think the session went well for its purpose. Future sessions might delve more into the barriers identified, possibly using the 'café' approach to all participants to spend some time in focused dialogue on the various barriers/issues.
- More focus on the positive changes that have taken place since the 10 year plan – Commission and Homeward Trust – all three orders of government.

Focus on issues / more detail
- May have been more helpful to have some background information on the HUB project. Maybe via e-mail before the forum.
- I expected more talk about homelessness or affordable housing.
- There is a lack of support services to prevent homelessness.
- The 'findings' could have been provided in a less reduced form – more detail would have facilitated better discussion.
- Hearing more about initiatives on front line.

Outcome
- No real objective – just discussion. Should have had an idea of how you can add more value by establishing connections with the province and the province being open to establishing a committee.
- Decisions should be made as a conclusion.

Process
- Excellent venue but difficult to hear. Perhaps a panel discussion (Q & A)
- 2 breaks.
- Too small cross section, bigger table.
- More Aboriginal representation at the table
- Some sort of listing of contact people to connect with around some of the projects in place e.g. Aboriginal network; Under 24 Inter-ministry Collaborative Group

No improvements
- Nothing really – good job with the planning and the background work.
- Nothing that I can think of.

Next Steps

More knowledge about who is doing what
- More knowledge about committees (who's doing what) and what areas aren't being covered.
- Maybe a catalogue of what is happening now.
- Present the action plans that are being worked on, i.e. documentation, eligibility. I know there are works in process but where are they at?

- Need a forum (ongoing, regular) to chart the various structures that are working on systemic barriers and the progress. What about the Homeless Commission to do this? [Kourch]
- Examine the focus of existing groups as related to issues; bring back this information to larger group to decide if another group is needed and the structure and composition it should have; I would like a summary of this meeting and to be included in upcoming ones – Loraine Berry, Spruce Grove.
- Ensuring that government is aware of concerns.
- Information re initiatives and resources available - would like to be involved with capacity to maintain housing and prevent evictions.

Potential collaboration to problem-solve on specific issues
- Maybe we can identify some logical collaboration via the discussions held with government reps as part of the project leading up to the forum?
- Creating groups to explore initiatives/problem-solve and create solutions for groups (gaps).
- Lead agencies need to establish more communications with the parties that are talking to government.
- More opportunities to meet with government/with front line.
- Access to decision-makers that are informed.
- More involvement with community members.
- Broader sharing opportunity. U of A, Municipal, community working group.
- Involving front line workers with government reps to hear how things really work and difficulties experienced; client involvement to ensure services meet their needs.
- Advance – by identifying existing initiatives and their projected time lines.
- Would love to be involved in a regular meeting of government, non-profits, community, involved in homelessness and affordable housing issues.
- Dialogue with stakeholders to reduce/minimize barriers.
- Another opportunity to work with these organizations.
- Engaging government with other parties. Developing a mode of communication amongst groups
- Designated person in each ministry to listen to community concerns and act upon them; meeting of the designated persons with community representative to work on issues.
- Specific topic open to all stakeholders to attend.
- Lots of collaboration!!

Specific issues identified …
- Government needs to respond to the issues presented.
- Initiating more housing first programs.
- NIMBY needs to be addressed.
- Need to deal with prevention, community resistance to non-market housing; sufficient income support without stove piping; regional collaboration.
- Discussion on income – living wage, guaranteed income; relationship between money and rental success.

More action to prevent and solve problems
- There seem to be a lot of 'meetings' but there does not seem to be a lot of action. People with limited income (AISH) fall through the cracks. Needs to be focus on 'prevention' rather than dealing with the results.
- Take action steps – do not just continue to meet.

Observation
- There are so many barriers and the process to getting supports for individuals are so slow and people often give up before they get what they need.

Follow-up to forum
- Suggest a follow-up meeting in a few months to discuss the findings.
- Not sure if anything else needs to be done besides sharing what the various existing groups are doing (summary of results).
- So where are we going from here? No decision arrived at.
- The gap analysis would be good. Also the café style session.
- More workshops like this.
- I would like to see a format like this at a future meeting: So here are the 8 problems identified; what are we as a community doing to work on these issues? Is this starting to work? If not, what do we need to do?
- Not sure – but anything that promotes collaboration.
- Need more time to answer.
- Follow-up – how, if in any way, will this forum impact policies; did it make a difference? are we being heard?

Ad hoc committee – value and interested individuals
- Great idea to go forward with committee to look at 'next steps'.
- Invite participants to join Ad Hoc group as suggested by Ann.
- Joan Baker, YMCA
- Judy Downey, Land Tenant Advisory Board.
- Jay Freeman, City of Edmonton. Have Advisory Committee match barriers with solutions at an organization level. I am willing to participate.
- Sandra Hamilton, Alberta Health Services. Yes I would like to be part of Ad Hoc Group to further discuss issues.
- Bev Hills, SKILLS. I am interested in joining Ad Hoc group.
- Beatrice McMillan, City of Edmonton. I would like to work on logical next steps.
- Continuing: Tanya Tellier, Housing Support Services Hub, Perla Ben Zvi, Canadian Mental Health Association; Kate Quinn, PAAFE

[Informal discussion took place after the meeting with other individuals who will confirm if they are able to participate in the Ad Hoc discussion.]

Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative – Proposed Sustainability Plan
Draft, July 31, 2010
Prepared by Ann Goldblatt, Vasant Chotai, Roxanne Felix
Submitted by Housing Support Services Hub, Edmonton

1. Introduction

The document to follow lays out a proposed 'sustainability plan' for the 'Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative'. The initiative was launched by the Housing Support Services Hub in Edmonton in 2009. It has accomplished its goal of identifying issues, researching related experience on select issues in other provinces and identifying avenues for further investigation and solutions. It has also opened up dialogue between community and government representatives.

Interest in the community remains high to move beyond the phase of naming issues and solutions to actual resolution of the problems. As a guiding principle, resolution should involve both community and government in joint problem-solving, ideally through an existing mechanism.

This sustainability plan provides background on the initiative and a rationale for shifting the leadership of the 'Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative' from the Hub to the Edmonton Homeless Commission. The plan identifies a process, potential roles for the Edmonton Homeless Commission, 'task teams' and the Hub, and budget implications for the City of Edmonton.

1.1 Background on the Housing Support Services Hub

The 'Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative' is a project of the Housing Support Services Hub ("Hub"). The Hub, in turn, is one of the funded initiatives of Homeward Trust Edmonton, supported by Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs. It was launched in 2008 as an interagency strategy to enhance the capacity of 13 member agencies[1] to secure housing, prevent evictions and increase the housing stability of the people with whom they work.

The Hub team offers three core services: coordinated landlord recruitment, inter-agency case management, and trustee and money management services. The work is guided by the Hub Council, a body of member agency representatives. In October 2009, the Hub became one of the Housing First funded initiatives and therefore adheres to Housing First principles in the delivery of services. The focus is on the housing needs of young families and families with large number of children, and individuals with mental illnesses, addictions and concurrent diagnoses.

1.2 Description of the Systemic Barriers Initiative

Early in the Hub's work, it became apparent to the team that systemic barriers are having an unintended negative impact on individuals' and families' ability to access and maintain stable housing. Many of the people served by these agencies are homeless or at high risk of homelessness. With funding from the Community Partnership Enhancement Fund[2] the Hub contracted Ann Goldblatt and Roxanne Felix as consultants in 2009 to document and investigate systemic barriers. The objectives for the project clustered into four areas:

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[1] Housing Support Services Hub Member Agencies: Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Canadian Mental Health Association, Capital Region Housing Corporation, E4C, Edmonton Community Legal Centre, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, George Spady, PAAFE, Schizophrenia Society, WJS, WINGS, YMCA

[2] The Community Partnership Enhancement Fund was an initiative of Alberta Children and Youth Services between 2003 and 2009.

- Identify systemic barriers experienced by service providers in the Hub member agencies.
- Generate a case study to explore systemic barriers in depth with one individual or family.
- Investigate strategies in use to address similar barriers in other jurisdictions.
- Facilitate initial dialogue, based on the findings, between community and government, leading to a mechanism for ongoing joint problem-solving on systemic barriers.

A set of barriers emerged from the scan that was clustered into the following themes:

Access to housing / Access to social housing
- Documentation (photo ID, application forms)
- Eligibility (criteria)
- Access to emergency shelter (coverage)
- Access to rent supplements (criteria)
- Limited resources as a barrier to housing and supplements

Capacity to maintain housing
- Capacity related to expectations, social needs and medical issues
- Outreach support

Income
- Access to income and adequate income to meet basic needs
- Adequate income related to physical and mental health

Access to services
- Adequate resources
- Value of relationship-based practice

At this stage of the project, a third consultant, Vasant Chotai, joined the team to provide his expertise and experience.

The Hub Council expressed an interest in sharing the learning from the project with community agencies and government ministries in a forum to set the stage for joint problem-solving. A 'Systemic Barriers to Housing Forum' was held on May 19, 2010, attracting approximately 80 participants - double the number originally anticipated with balanced representation from the government and community sectors (see Attachment B, *'Systemic Barriers to Housing - Findings – PowerPoint presentation, May 19, 2010*).

To effectively advance the community agencies' interest in influencing systemic change, the Hub Council is seeking an appropriate body to assume a continuing leadership role. During the May 19 forum and subsequent ad hoc committee meetings, the Edmonton Homeless Commission (EHC) emerged as a potential leader, with its mandate to oversee implementation of the City of Edmonton's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.

2. Rationale for Edmonton Homeless Commission as the lead on Systemic Barriers to Housing initiative

The Edmonton Homeless Commission has a mandate to oversee the implementation of the City of Edmonton's Homelessness Plan. The tenets and goals outlined in *A Place to Call Home,*

Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (2009) are consistent with the focus of the 'Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative'.

- *Many of the causes of homelessness are **systemic** (p. 7).*
- *The Plan focuses on chronically homeless people. But the goals and strategies outlined address the **entire homeless population** and **those at risk of losing their homes** (p. 8)*
- *The approach is to **'open the back door'** out of homelessness by **rapidly re-housing people in crisis** and ensuring they are **fully supported**, and to **'close the front door'** through **prevention programs aimed at people at risk of becoming homeless** (p.8).*
- *Provide **permanent housing options** for all **people living on the street** and **in public places** (Goal #1, p. 9).*
- *Ensure an **adequate supply of permanent, affordable housing** with **appropriate supports** for people who are homeless (Goal #2, p. 9).*
- ***Prevent people from becoming homeless** (Goal #4, p. 9).*

The consultants have prepared a table that demonstrates the alignment between the emerging procedure and policy-related barriers and the goals of the City's Homelessness Plan. The largest proportion of barriers aligns with goal #4. The table also shows a relationship between the issues and specific strategies within the respective goals (see Attachment A, *Alignment with City of Edmonton Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness*).

The practice-specific barriers may be most effectively addressed by Edmonton's community/government network, SOS – Shelter Option Strategies.

3. Roles

The Hub has successfully brought the project to this stage where issues and systemic barriers to housing have been identified and resolution mechanisms identified. The consultants, based on the discussion in the preceding sections and input from the Ad Hoc Committee members, recommend that the lead role for the next stage of the 'Systemic Barriers to Housing Initiative' transition from the Hub to the Edmonton Homeless Commission.

In a transition, there are important roles for both the Edmonton Homeless Commission and the Hub. The consultants envisage the following division of responsibilities.

Edmonton Homeless Commission - *Leadership body*
- Oversee the development of a detailed systemic barriers plan toward problem-solving. Consult with Hub and other interested community/government representatives [i.e. the Ad Hoc Committee following May 19 Forum].
- Based on community priorities, form two initial ad hoc task teams (more, if deemed necessary) to address a specific barrier or a cluster of related barriers (see role of task teams below). In consultation with the Hub, SOS members and multi-ministry committees in which EHC is a member, identify appropriate government and community representatives for the task teams.
- Ensure ongoing participation of government and community agency representatives.
- Report on outcomes to the Hub which will inform the community agencies that helped identify the issues.
- Support implementation of systemic barriers plan with required resources (see budget implications below).

Hub - *Liaison to community agencies*

- Consult with Hub member agencies and SOS (Shelter Option Strategies) members to identify priority issues as the basis for forming ad hoc task teams.
- Identify possible community and government members for task teams.
- Consult with Hub member agencies and SOS (Shelter Option Strategies) members as required while work on specific barriers is in progress.
- Bring forward new issues as they emerge to Edmonton Homeless Commission.
- Report Task Team outcomes to agencies (from Edmonton Homeless Commission)

Task Teams – *Ad hoc – focused on specific barrier or cluster of related barriers*
- Comprised of appropriate community and government representatives. Not a decision-making body.
- Flesh out issues. Direct required research to further investigate issues.
- Generate possible solutions.
- Move proposed solutions to appropriate policy-making levels of government for action.
- Contribute input on draft policies/procedural changes.
- Report on outcomes to Edmonton Homeless Commission.

4. Process
The following steps frame a process for addressing the systemic barriers to housing.

4.1 EHC will consult with Hub member agencies and SOS members to identify priority issues, based upon an agreed-upon set of criteria. The priority issues will determine the focus of the ad hoc task teams and guide the selection of the most appropriate community and government representatives to address one or a cluster of related issues.

4.2 EHC, in consultation with the Hub, will develop terms of reference for the task teams and form two initial ad hoc task teams (adding more if deemed necessary). As additional priority issues emerge, EHC will channel issues to appropriate community/government bodies or develop new ad hoc task teams.

4.3 EHC will engage the Hub in taking the practice issues to the network of the SOS. SOS will be asked to devise an appropriate process for resolution. Hub will bring the outcomes of this process to its member agencies and to the Edmonton Homeless Commission.

4.4 If there are other existing partnerships between community and government that can address specific issues (e.g. Strategic Alliance, bringing together community representatives and Alberta Employment and Immigration), EHC will pursue those options.

4.5 The ad hoc task teams will undertake required research to further investigate the identified issues and propose possible solutions. The task teams will consult with Hub member agencies, SOS members and government departments as appropriate. The task teams will take proposed solutions to appropriate government bodies to consider solutions and, if appropriate, draft procedural changes and new policies. Contribute input on draft procedure and policy documents.

4.6 The ad hoc task teams will report outcomes to Edmonton Homeless Commission. In turn, the Hub will report on outcomes to its member agencies.

5. Budget implications

Human resources: Project manager
- Project management.
- Coordinate involvement of and consultation with Hub director and SOS chair. Coordinate formation and support of ad hoc task teams.
- Arrange meetings (e.g. space, refreshments, mileage and parking).
- Undertake research requested by ad hoc task teams.
- Prepare summary reports.

Budget expenses
- Project manager contract/temporary position
- Facility rental (if required)
- Equipment rental (if required)
- Mileage for ad hoc task team members
- Parking for ad hoc task team members
- Refreshments
- Printing/copying documents