

A Place to Call Home:

Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

Update

YEAR 5 HALFWAY TO TEN

APRIL 2014



Homeless Commission

Hal Danchilla, Chair
Jim Taylor, Vice-chair
Deborah Coulter
Linda Hughes
Neil Irvine
Carman McNary
Elexis Schloss
Anne Smith
Archbishop Richard Smith
Mark Stanley
Ralph Young
Jay Freeman, Executive Director

Year 5 Highlights

- ✓ **2,178 permanent homes** secured for **2,909** people who had been homeless.
- ✓ **80%** of formerly homeless persons have **secured housing** in the private rental market.
- ✓ **84%** of the people housed have **retained their housing**.
- ✓ **466 newly constructed units** have been completed.
- ✗ In Year 5 use of Edmonton's **emergency shelters** increased significantly.
- ✓ **Government funding** for homeless supports was frozen for Year 5 but an increase is planned for Year 6.
- ✗ **Funding for rent supplements** and construction of new affordable housing units is falling behind.
- ✓ *Welcome Home* matched **85 community volunteers** with 55 newly housed Edmontonians to provide companionship and community supports.

Threats to 10 YR Plan

As a community we are failing to deliver permanent supportive housing for the most vulnerable homeless Edmontonians.

Lack of affordable housing in the city.

In-migration into Edmonton in record numbers.

Failure in prevention: we're seeing far too many new faces at the shelters – too many Edmontonians still becoming homeless.

Year 5 Successes

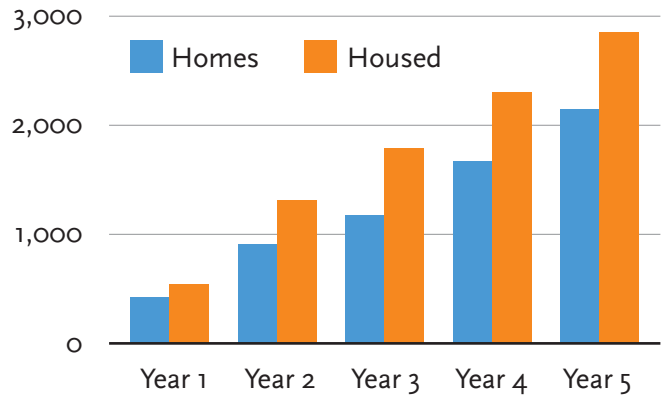
More Edmontonians were housed and supported: the graph (right) shows the cumulative numbers.

Outreach services: assertive outreach services have been expanded in scale and scope. In addition to providing a homeless person with food, blankets and clothing, assertive outreach connects that person to a Housing First team and access to permanent housing.

24/7 outreach services are now provided by Bissell Centre’s 24/7 Mobile Assistance Program.

Further developments on coordinated intake: Homeward Trust’s coordinated intake position now:

- Provides access and information to people and community partners about housing first and related services
- If a person is eligible, refers that person to a Housing First team for assessment and intake – or other services
- Coordinates vacancies in interim housing and permanent supportive housing for Housing First team participants.



Government of Alberta funding for support services: this funding was frozen in last year’s budget, but was increased by 27% in the proposed budget for Year 6. This should allow services to be expanded to better keep pace with demand.

Scattered housing approach: the 10 Year Plan advocates for clients to be housed as much as possible where they want in the city. Most choose not to live in the inner city. As of January 31, 2014 86% of clients were housed outside of the inner city neighbourhoods of Boyle Street, McCauley, Central McDougall and Queen Mary Park.

Housing First teams

Intensive Case Management

YMCA, *Homeward Bound*
 Bissell Centre, *Homeless to Homes*
 Boyle Street Community Services
 Hope Mission, *Rapid Exit Program*
 Jasper Place Health & Wellness
 Bent Arrow, *Nikihk*
 E4C

Assertive Community Treatment

Boyle McCauley Health Centre,
Pathways to Housing
 DiverseCity Housing

Rapid Rehousing

George Spady, *LiHFT*
 E4C, *Shelter Exit Team*

Permanent Supportive Housing

Mustard Seed, *Westwood Manor*
 George Spady, *Baba Manor*

Specialized Referral Outreach Services

HUB Housing Support Services
 George Spady, *CAT*

Italics - indicates program name

BEYOND THE NUMBERS - STORIES OF HOPE

George's story

George lives in permanent supportive housing, in his own apartment where he can cook and which he keeps clean and tidy. He can read, watch TV, do his crafts – the things he loves to do. And he's becoming healthy. Every week, an Occupational Therapist visits to talk about his physical and mental health, to make sure he's taking his meds. And a nurse visits, to help George out with his diabetes.

Life wasn't always like this. George lived on the streets for over 30 years. He has a mental illness. That, combined with his experience as a homeless person, meant that he had an out of control hoarding problem. He was evicted from his first Housing First apartment because his hoarding habit led to bed bugs. George's diabetes was also out of control – he'd never been able to eat properly or take his meds on the streets, and he had no idea how to begin to do either. He couldn't sleep in his bedroom – he'd move his bed to the balcony where he felt more comfortable. George needed more intensive supports to stay successfully housed.

In permanent supportive housing George's support team is gradually helping him adapt to a new life: he's learning about meal planning, how to shop, how to use his kitchen. The 24/7 care offered means that his support workers can gently encourage him to minimize his hoarding. He can't let go altogether, so he agreed with his support workers to keep it to 2 closets for his hats. George's delusions mean he won't drink tap water and so becomes dehydrated: his support workers took him to buy bottled water. He's now sleeping in his bedroom.

As a young man George went to university; lived in Ontario and the US. The details of how he ended up on the streets are few. But now, thanks to permanent supportive housing and his support team, George, at 66, can finally live happily and healthy.

Jeff's story

Jeff shouldn't be alive today. Over a decade ago he was brutally assaulted and robbed. As a result, he sustained brain damage, and, eventually, became homeless. Life became a downward spiral of deteriorating health, drugs and alcohol. Jeff would end up in emergency several times a week – because of his brain damage, he would lose his balance and fall hurting himself badly; he had open sores on his legs; he had scabies and lice. And he would regularly overdose. Because of his level of intoxication, Jeff was considered high risk in the shelter he stayed at. Jeff's life didn't seem worth living; he often talked about suicide.

Last fall Jeff moved in to permanent supportive housing. He has a team of support workers who've helped him make this major transition. Together, they picked out second hand furniture for his apartment, including a huge picture of 2 eagles, which Jeff loves. Together, they go shopping for groceries, helping Jeff understand how to eke out the money he has until the end of the month. Every day someone pays him a visit to chat about how things are going. Jeff's bathing regularly, washing his clothes, figuring out daily living.

Most importantly Jeff's health is improving. He and his support worker chose shoes with ankle support to keep him steady on his feet. He visits his doctor every 2 weeks. He's no longer using intravenous drugs. His drinking has decreased. His mental health has improved dramatically. Jeff has learnt how to smile. He feels part of a community that cares, where the residents share what they have and watch out for each other; where the support workers are there night and day if he faces a crisis.

Jeff no longer visits emergency. He's not even hanging out at his old haunts downtown. What does Jeff like most about his new home? His best friend in the world lives just 2 blocks away – like Jeff successfully building a new life off the streets.

Letter to our Stakeholders

In many ways steady progress is being made in implementing the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. As we mark the half-way point 5 years in, a total of 2,909 Edmontonians have received homes of their own and the supports they need to stay successfully housed - 728 in the last year. Housing First service providers and community agencies talk about enhanced cooperation and collaboration. Together they feel that they are offering the right services which are making a real difference in people's lives.

However, the effort to end homelessness will stall unless we address several serious issues.

The first is capacity. We've been pointing out for several years that the Housing First program is more often than not operating at capacity. That situation has now been exacerbated by high numbers of people coming to Edmonton looking for work and eventually finding themselves homeless. We see the result in the record high numbers of people in our shelters over the last winter. The only feasible long term solution is to do a better job of preventing homelessness – putting in place the measures that will ensure people don't become homeless in the first place.

Secondly, for the Plan to succeed in ending chronic homelessness, we need more permanent supportive housing. Homes for people like George and Jeff who will need ongoing supports, who have trouble living independently. While this is the socially right thing to do, it's also fiscally responsible. Before moving into permanent supportive housing Jeff visited emergency at least 4 times a week. That's expensive. An analysis of the Pathways to Housing program puts the cost avoidance for acute hospital care for each person in permanent supportive housing at \$35,609 – compared to the \$25,395 investment per person. There are also other savings, in policing, justice, shelter and ambulance costs.

What can you do to help end homelessness in Edmonton? A lot. Firstly - if you come across a homeless Edmontonian who is obviously in trouble, call 211 and ask for a mobile assistance unit. The new 24/7 Mobile Assistance Program is there to provide immediate assistance to homeless people and help subsequently connect them with Housing First. Secondly – find out more about permanent supportive housing; talk about the impact it has on people's lives – that it can, quite literally, save lives; and understand the reality of what permanent supportive housing means for the surrounding community. Then spread the word - become an advocate for a solid solution to an intractable social problem. Thirdly – volunteer at one of the inner city agencies or for *Welcome Home*. You'll meet our city's heroes – those who survive homelessness and the people who serve them.

Finally, the Edmonton Homeless Commission is recommending a major re-think of the Plan to End Homelessness. Some strategies need to be changed to make them consistent with emerging realities; others need to be updated to reflect new best practices in ending homelessness.

We're half way through one of the boldest social ventures our city has ever undertaken. Ending homelessness in Edmonton has become a model of how to work towards an ambitious goal and work towards making it real. But there are still 5 years left to go – and hundreds of homeless Edmontonians to house. Together, we must remain focussed and tackle the very real challenges ahead.

Hal Danchilla

CHAIR

EDMONTON HOMELESS COMMISSION

Jay Freeman

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

EDMONTON HOMELESS COMMISSION

Upcoming Challenges

Capacity: In-migration is overwhelming rapid rehousing efforts. Between July 2011 and July 2013 in-migration levels were higher than during the economic boom of the mid 2000s.

Many of the Housing First teams are full, cannot accept new clients, and are often struggling to meet the needs of existing clients.

Permanent Supportive Housing: in Year 3 the Homeless Commission conducted a study of Edmontonians who are homeless and have intensive needs. The study concluded that the Housing First model should include a permanent supportive housing option – homes for people who may never be able to live independently because of the acuity of their needs: Edmontonians who are severely mentally ill, are coping with addictions and complex physical health issues. That need still exists. We will not end chronic homelessness in Edmonton until we are able to adequately provide permanent supportive housing.

Graduating Housing First: clients are generally expected to graduate after 1 year in the Housing First program. For some, this may be a reasonable expectation. For others, it isn't: they may require a spectrum of on-going supports, they may require some services for a little longer, or they may never be able to live completely independently. The Plan to End Homelessness, and funding models, must take these varying needs into consideration.

Also, Housing First graduates have to meet very specific criteria in order to qualify for the Graduation Rental Assistance Initiative program. Some don't, and are therefore at risk of falling back into homelessness.

Shortage of affordable housing and high rents: over the last year vacancy rates in Edmonton declined to the second lowest levels on record: 1.4%. At the same time rents rose much faster than inflation: rents are at an all-time high for all sizes and types of rental accommodation. Capital Region Housing Corporation provides affordable housing or rental assistance to low and modest income households: there are up to 2,000 qualifying households on its wait list. Moreover, in Edmonton in 2011, 41.5% of renters paid more than 30% of their gross household income on shelter costs.

Lack of prevention: shelters in the city regularly were operating well over their funded capacity last winter. Clearly, far too many Edmontonians are becoming homeless. We can do a better job at catching people before they fall – intervening with minimal intervention at the right time, before that person or family needs many more resources to get rehoused.

NIMBYs: over the last year we have seen the importance of good communication with communities when planning non-market housing – particularly permanent supportive housing. Plans go awry when that foundational conversation is not in place. For our plan to succeed we need every community to play its role, and in order to do that Edmontonians need good information – the facts about permanent supportive housing – and a robust consultation process that sees community partners involved early in the process.

YEAR 5


Goals


Targets


Strategies

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

By 2011 all people living on the street or in public places will have been given the option of permanent, supported housing.

 **7 Housing First teams** do intensive case management; 2 Assertive Community Treatment teams assist high needs clients; 2 teams offer specialized supports to all Housing First clients; 1 team supports clients discharged from the McCullough Centre.


 **3 assertive outreach programs** operate in the city, facilitating referral to a Housing First team and permanent housing.


 **Develop Aboriginal capacity:** the 1st Aboriginal Housing First team has been so successful, consideration now being given to a 2nd focused on Aboriginal families.

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

By 2012, secure 800 supported housing units, in partnership with private landlords

By 2014, develop 1000 units of permanent supportive housing.


 **2,178 existing housing units secured**, 69% of which are in the private rental market throughout the city.


 **72 permanent supportive housing 20 transitional supportive housing.**
Total in first 5 years: 466 new units

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

By 2014, decrease the average length of stay at an emergency shelter to less than 7 days.


By 2012, decrease the number of sheltered homeless to 2006 levels.


 Hope Mission's Rapid Exit program, the Break Out Recovery Community based in the Herb Jamieson Centre and the Hope Mission all serve to **transition shelter clients into permanent housing.**



 During winter of 2013-14 **shelters operated consistently above funded capacity.**

4 Prevent people from becoming homeless


By 2014, reduce the need for emergency shelter capacity by 50%.


 Create a **Housing Link** to connect people in crisis housing 24/7: the new 24/7 Mobile Assistance Program is up and running

 Ensure people who are homeless are able to receive **provincial income supports:** those in Housing First program receive income supports.

 **Expand training programs** to build employment skills
 Enhance the **Rent Supplement Program:** funding has decreased, but application has broadened.

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

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

 Homeward Trust continually improves its ability to **measure progress.**

LEGEND

 **Target Exceeded**

 **Strategy Developed**

 **Strategy Under way**

 **Strategy Not Met**