

Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness: background questions and answers

Who is homeless in Edmonton?

- 3,079 people were counted as homeless in Edmonton's 2008 Count of Homeless Persons. That's an 18% increase (or 461 people) from the total number counted in 2006.
- 69% of people counted in 2008 were male, 23% were female. Of the remaining 8% (or 253 people), 245 were children and caregivers in families, whose gender was not observed.
- There was a significant increase in the number of families counted in 2008 as compared to 2006 (133 compared to 79).
- There are 125 children living on the street.
- The majority of Edmonton's homeless population are single men between the ages of 31-54.
- Approximately 40% of Edmonton's homeless population identify as Aboriginal.

For more information, please view: [A Count of Homeless Persons in Edmonton October 2008](#)

What is Housing First?

- The basic premise behind Housing First is that people need is a safe, permanent home before they can begin tackling other problems. Under the Housing First model, people are first found a home, and then provided with the wrap-around services they need to successfully stay in their home.
- This is a major shift from the old approach, where people often had to meet conditions such as overcoming addictions, or finding a job, before they were deemed ready for a permanent home.
- Edmonton's agencies have made transformative changes in the past year, as they've adopted this model. They're also increasingly working together, because with Housing First there is no 'wrong door': a person who is homeless can show up at any agency and receive the same services.

How do people find their new homes?

- Clients are encouraged to choose their own homes after viewing several apartments. They then sign their own lease. The Housing First program becomes the client's credit and reference check, and assures landlords that rents will be paid and minor damages repaired. All rents are paid directly to the landlord by third party payment when applicable. Landlords also have a contact to call if issues arise with tenants.
- Edmonton's 10 year plan calls for a year one target of enhancing the Homeless Eviction Prevention (HEP) Fund. The HEP fund's rent shortfall benefit has now been transitioned by the Alberta Government to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' Direct to Tenant Rent Supplement Program. People or families in crisis can also apply for emergency eviction or emergency damage deposit assistance through the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports or Alberta Employment and Immigration.

Where are the Housing First units?

- They are scattered around the city, in both dedicated buildings owned by non-profit providers, and in private-market rental buildings, where no more than 20% of the units in any one building to be set aside for the Housing First program.

What wrap-around services are offered to people?

- Everything from help with overcoming addictions, to learning how to manage money, how to get id, even help with grocery shopping. People are also referred to classes on things like parenting, or drug relapse prevention. Or helped with going back to school or finding employment.

How long can people access these services?

- Indefinitely. Some will need intensive, specialized services for years. Others will need help for a limited time before becoming independent. Housing First plans are tailored to the particular needs of each person being housed.

Does Housing First work for everyone?

- The Housing first model works for most, but not all of Edmonton's homeless. So the 10 year plan provides for other types of housing as well: interim or supportive housing for youth, people with chronic substance abuse problems, persistent mental illness, chronic disabilities or other serious, chronic health issues.

Who is implementing the 10-year plan?

- Edmonton City Council has taken on the leadership role; aligning city programs, policies and funding with the plan.
- The Edmonton Homeless Commission is the champion of the cause; ensuring funding is directed appropriately, engaging support from the community, influencing public policy, setting targets, measuring outcomes and evaluating success.
- Homeward Trust has been appointed to manage coordination of the plan, allocating funding and ensuring training programs are in place to maintain a standard of excellence in program delivery. Homeward Trust is currently developing a Homeless Information and Management System; a data base of standardized information.
- The Province of Alberta has made significant financial contributions toward implementation of Edmonton's 10 year plan.

Will this plan be a cost-effective way of ending homelessness?

Edmonton's Homeless Committee estimates that by 2018, operating costs of this plan will be \$90 million. In comparison, providing emergency shelter for just 40% of Edmonton's homeless population (as we do now), will be more than \$54 million a year by 2018. And shelters make up just a fraction of the overall cost of homelessness. Other costs include emergency room visits, ambulance trips, longer hospital stays and police, court and incarceration costs.

- In 2008 alone, Alberta Health Services estimates health-care costs related to homelessness were \$33 million. Ambulance costs were \$4.7 million.
- The average hospital stay for a homeless person is 28 days (excluding Alberta Hospital). That compare to an average stay of 9 days for a person who has a home. If Alberta Hospital is included, the average hospital stay for a homeless person is 66 days. One day in hospital costs approximately \$1,400.
- If this plan hadn't been implemented, it's estimated there would have been 6,500 homeless Edmontonians by 2018. Each homeless person is estimated to cost the system approximately \$100,000.