

2009-10

Report to the Minister

Alberta Secretariat for
Action on Homelessness

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
A PLAN FOR ALBERTA: ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN 10 YEARS



Presented to the Honourable Jonathan Denis
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs

Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness – 2009-10 Report to the Minister



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness would like to thank the community-based organizations in each of Alberta's seven major cities for inviting participants, organizing sessions, and hosting the Secretariat so that it could gather the input that informed this report.

The support provided to the Secretariat by Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs throughout the development of this report is gratefully acknowledged.

The Secretariat would also like to thank those community members and representatives from all levels of government who shared their experiences and perspectives regarding the first year of implementing *A Plan for Alberta*. Their astute insights and comments have shaped this document and the Secretariat's resulting advice to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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For an electronic copy of this report, please visit:
www.housing.alberta.ca/Alberta_Secretariat.cfm/asah-2009-10-ar.pdf

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Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness
2430, 801-6th Avenue SW
Calgary, AB T2P 3W2

August 5th, 2010

Dear Minister,

It is our privilege to present the 2009/10 annual report for the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. This annual report was prepared under the direction of members of the Secretariat, in accordance with the laws of the Province of Alberta.

This annual report summarizes the key activities undertaken by the Secretariat during the past year. As part of those activities, the annual report includes the Secretariat's conclusions and advice in relation to the progress and ongoing implementation of *A Plan for Alberta*.

As you will read in the body of the report, the first year of the Plan has been successful and instructive. Community-led housing first programs have moved over 1,700 homeless Albertans into permanent housing with supports – a number that far surpassed first year targets and expectations. It is clear that the province's shift to a housing first approach is working.

While these early results are encouraging, there are challenges ahead. In particular, there is an urgent need for the Government of Alberta to pay heed to strategies in the Plan concerning prevention of homelessness. Prevention is an essential component of the Plan because the goal is to end homelessness in Alberta not for ten years, but permanently.

The issue of youth homelessness in Alberta is of great concern, and requires the attention of the Government of Alberta, in partnership with the communities that are harbouring homeless youth.

So far, the implementation of the Plan by the Government of Alberta has been dutifully led by Housing and Urban Affairs. As you know, ending homelessness requires addressing barriers within complex and interdependent public systems that impact people's access to permanent housing. That is why the Secretariat encourages other ministries who have a role in ending homelessness in Alberta to adopt housing stability outcomes in their accountability frameworks and performance measurement tools.

Overall, the Secretariat is pleased to report that at the end of year one, the 10-year provincial plan is on track to achieve its goal of ending homelessness. Alberta is currently the only province committed to ending homelessness, and the Plan is receiving national recognition and accolades. The Secretariat also acknowledges the strong support provided by the Office of the Premier for *A Plan for Alberta*. This is a resourced plan, and because of this, Premier Stelmach has demonstrated that the Plan is an important priority for the Government of Alberta. It's continued commitment to this bold objective will help build a better, stronger Alberta.

Respectfully submitted,



Wayne Stewart
Chair, Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness
(Retired May 2010)

BACKGROUND

Alberta's Plan to End Homelessness

At the direction of Premier Ed Stelmach, who recognized that the growing number of Albertans who were at-risk of becoming or currently experiencing homelessness was an unacceptable situation, the creation of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness (the “Secretariat”) was announced on January 23, 2008.

The Secretariat was given the responsibility for developing Alberta’s strategic plan to end homelessness. *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, (“the *Plan*”), was released on March 16, 2009. When the Government of Alberta accepted the *Plan*, it became the first province in Canada to state publicly its intention to end homelessness.

Central to the provincial plan is a fundamental shift in Alberta’s approach, which has relied on emergency shelters for those experiencing a housing crisis. This new direction means moving away from *managing* the problem because, despite the dedication of all those working within the system, this approach does not solve the problem of homelessness. Instead, the *Plan* provides a road map for *ending* homelessness. It includes strategies to achieve housing stability for those already in crisis by employing a housing first philosophy, and it outlines the courses of action that will prevent Albertans from falling into homelessness in the years to come.

All Albertans will benefit from ending homelessness in our province because it will result in cost-saving opportunities for taxpayers. Evidence indicates that an emergency response system that relies on shelters and publicly funded services such as hospitals and policing, is more costly to public systems than providing housing with supports to homeless individuals.¹ We also know that if we continue to employ the traditional approach, the number of homeless individuals and families in Alberta will very likely continue to grow.

“Housing First is a client centered approach to ending homelessness that provides access to safe and permanent housing while offering support services to maintain housing stability.”

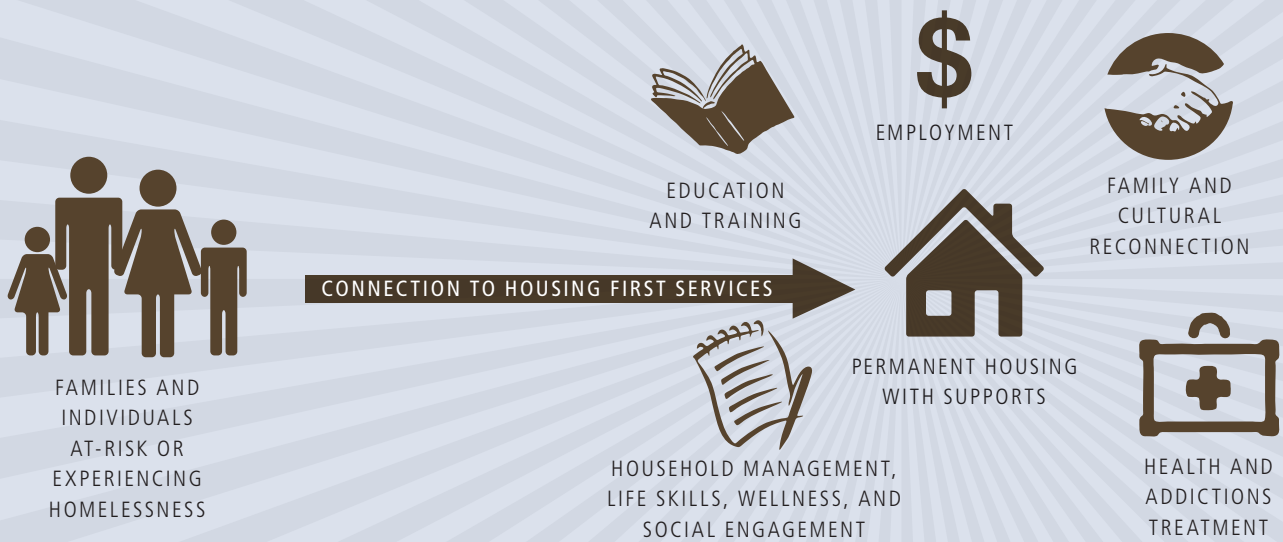
¹ Study on Cost of Homelessness in Calgary, RSM Richter Inc. , (2007). “The Cost of Homelessness: Analysis of Alternate Responses in Four Canadian Cities,” prepared for the National Secretariat on Homelessness by S. Pomeroy, (2005).

Implementing A Plan for Alberta

A key principle of the *Plan* is the recognition that we all have a responsibility to solve this seemingly entrenched social problem. It requires co-ordination and co-operation among every level of government, service providers, and citizens, including those experiencing homelessness. The Government of Alberta, communities and homeless-serving agencies work together to implement the strategies of the *Plan*.

In the first year of the *Plan*, the Government of Alberta committed \$100 million in capital funding to develop housing units for the homeless, and provided \$32 million in operating funding to housing first programs, to assist homeless Albertans in becoming permanently housed.

Action on homelessness is led by communities. Each of Alberta's seven largest urban centres has a multi-year plan to end homelessness, which is consistent with the policy directions in Alberta's *Plan*, is endorsed by the municipal government, and addresses the unique aspects of homelessness within the community. In each city, a designated community-based organization (CBO) leads the implementation of the local multi-year plan. CBOs partner with local service agencies and determine how operational funding received from Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA) is allocated within the community.



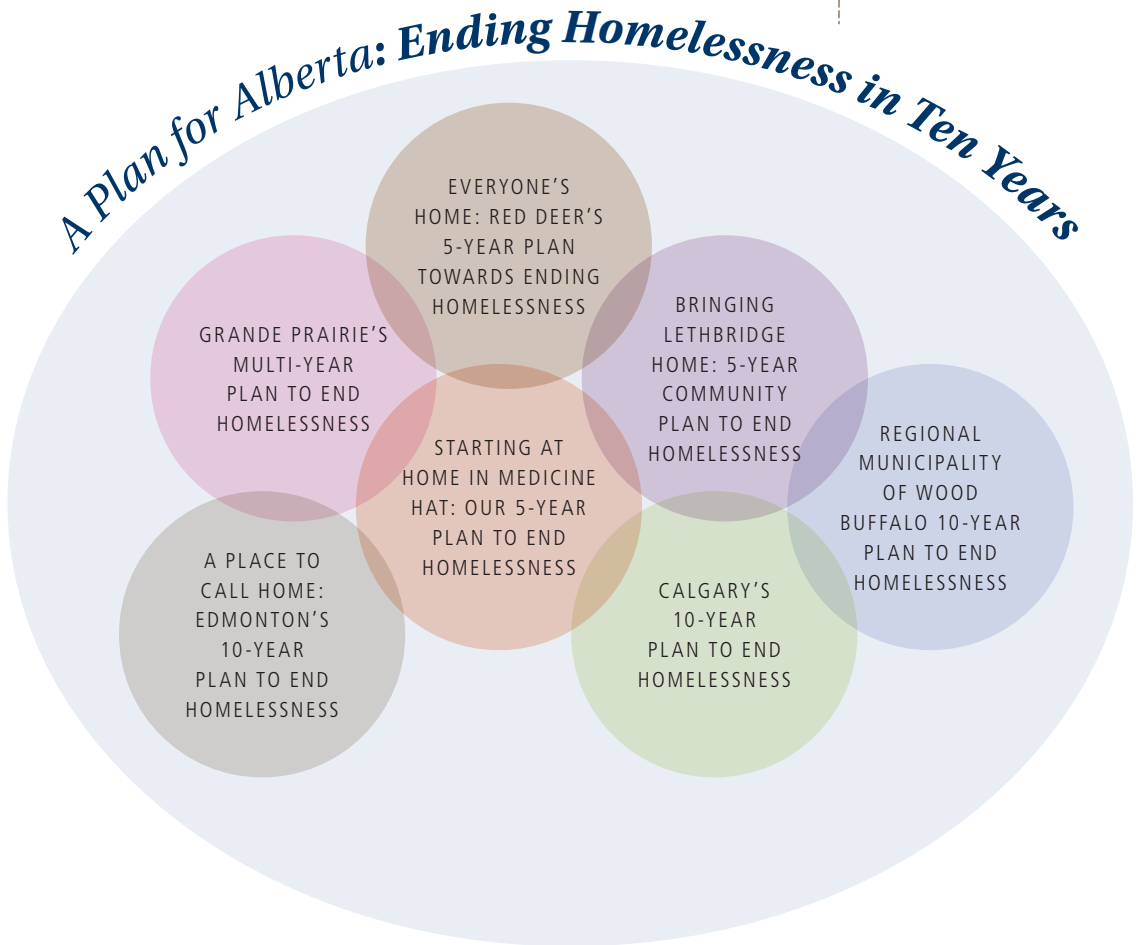
About the Secretariat

The Secretariat is a public agency of the Government of Alberta, and is accountable to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs and must comply with the *Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act*, (once proclaimed into force, expected in 2010).

The Secretariat monitors the implementation of *A Plan for Alberta*, regularly reports to the public on progress, and provides advice to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. This includes advice regarding strategic directions that will advance the objective of ending homelessness in Alberta, and potential revisions to the *Plan* that may be required.

Secretariat Members, April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010

- Wayne Stewart**, Chair (July 2009 – May 2010)
- Steve Snyder**, Chair (January 2008 – June 2009)
- Jean Wilkinson**, Vice Chair (January 2008 – December 2009)
- Linda Black** (January 2008 – December 2009)
- Leonard Blumenthal** (January 2008 – December 2009)
- Robb Campre** (August 2009 – July 2011)
- Jane Manning** (January 2008- May 2012)
- Susan McGee** (CBO Representative; April 2009 – March 2011)
- Dr. Gayla Rogers** (January 2008 – May 2012)
- Dr. Pam Thompson** (January 2008 – January 2011)
- Robin Wigston** (Ex-Officio Member)



PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Ending homelessness...

Providing permanent housing for homeless Albertans.

Housing and Urban Affairs's 2009-10 Target: 1,000.

Number of individuals housed: 1,779.

The Secretariat's yearly report to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs provides an accounting of the Secretariat's activities of the past year. It also serves as the vehicle through which progress assessments and strategic advice are provided to the Minister. In addition to yearly reports to the Minister, the Secretariat will provide mid-year updates on the progress of *A Plan for Alberta*.

This report offers a systemic assessment of the implementation process. It is one tool of many that will guide the successful implementation of the *Plan* in the coming years. Performance evaluations conducted by HUA through its data collection process, input from other ministries, and the on-going support of the Premier and the Government of Alberta are all important components that will be necessary to achieve the goal of ending homelessness in Alberta.



2009-10 KEY ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Consultation with Community Partners

The Secretariat undertook a series of community consultations in the seven largest cities from May through October 2009. Consultations with CBOs, homeless-serving agencies, and members of the public were used to introduce and raise awareness about *A Plan for Alberta*. This served as an opportunity for the Secretariat to gather initial community feedback. The Secretariat offered advice and assistance to communities as they proceeded with developing and refining local multi-year plans to end homelessness, and to ensure their alignment with the provincial plan.

Launch of the Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium

The Secretariat maintains direct responsibility for implementing strategy #3 of the *Plan*, regarding the establishment of a provincial research arm. Secretariat members determined that a consortium model would be most appropriate, which will engage community and academic leaders to develop a provincial research agenda that is driven by local priorities.

The Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium (AHRC) was initiated in 2010. It builds capacity to co-ordinate and conduct research that supports the objective of ending homelessness in Alberta. AHRC activities will inform the implementation of the *Plan* in the coming years.



Affordability...

The average rent for all apartment unit types in Alberta was \$937 per month in April 2010.

Source: "Rental Market Report, Alberta Highlights." Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Spring 2010.

Chronic homeless...

A person or family is considered chronically homeless if they have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Building Capacity to Deliver 'Housing First'

The Secretariat supports community leadership development and skill building within the homeless-serving sector. Capacity building activities undertaken in 2009-10 included:

- ◆ Holding a housing first in-service and workshop for Government of Alberta staff to educate participants about the housing first approach and its implications for service delivery. Participants also explored ways of aligning the work of ministry business units to be consistent with the housing first approach.
- ◆ Holding a *Coaching for Success Through Community* workshop for Housing and Urban Affairs staff who work with community partners to implement the *Plan*. Two of the *Plan's* fundamental principles are that it is client-centred and community-driven. Workshop participants explored how to reflect these principles in practice.
- ◆ Financial support for the provincial housing first conference in November 2009. This conference was attended by representatives of the homeless-serving sector from across Alberta, to build knowledge and exchange information about housing first approaches to program delivery.
- ◆ Financial support for five participants from smaller communities to attend the University of Calgary certificate program *Working with Homeless Populations: Basic Skills and Practices*.

Providing Strategic Advice to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs on the Implementation of A Plan for Alberta

To gather feedback specifically related to progress achieved during the past twelve months, the Secretariat undertook a series of consultations in Spring 2010. This involved a series of stakeholder meetings, facilitated by the local CBO, in the cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge and Red Deer.

Secretariat members and staff met with representatives of local CBOs, municipal governments, and strategic planning bodies that play a role in implementing the multi-year plans to end homelessness. While membership of these bodies varies in each community, they typically include:

- ◆ service providers from homeless-serving agencies;
- ◆ academics and/or researchers having an interest in homelessness;
- ◆ representatives of the municipal, provincial and federal governments;
- ◆ individuals with personal experiences of homelessness; and
- ◆ community members-at-large.

The Secretariat also consulted with representatives of HUA directly involved in the implementation of strategies in *A Plan for Alberta*.

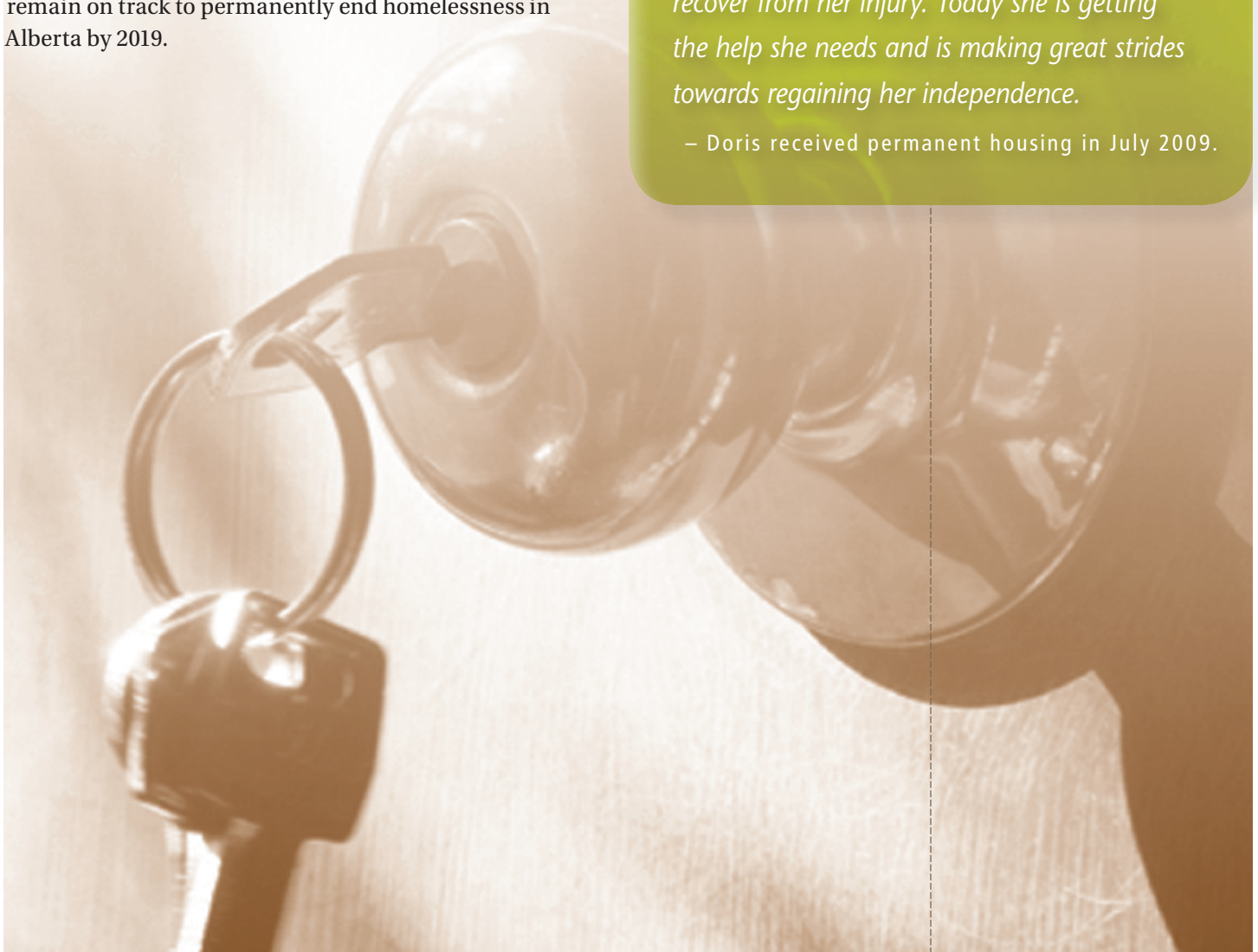
Stakeholders were asked about their experiences during the first year of the *Plan*, and the degree of success realized. Stakeholders also identified implementation challenges that will need to be addressed over the coming years.

In the course of its consultations, the Secretariat consistently heard a number of themes regarding progress of the *Plan*. This input, combined with the knowledge, observations and expertise of Secretariat members, has informed the Secretariat's advice to the Minister included in the following pages.

Overall, it is clear that 2009-10 has been a successful and educational year. Communities are more confident that an end to homelessness in Alberta is achievable, and encouraging successes have been realized very early into the *Plan*. However, it is equally clear that some very real and pressing issues will need to be confronted if communities and the Government of Alberta are to remain on track to permanently end homelessness in Alberta by 2019.

Because of a brain injury, Doris lost her job and became homeless. Through a Housing First program in Edmonton, she met with a caseworker who helped her find an apartment. Her caseworker also put her in touch with the community resources that would help her recover from her injury. Today she is getting the help she needs and is making great strides towards regaining her independence.

– Doris received permanent housing in July 2009.



A PLAN FOR ALBERTA: FIRST YEAR PROGRESS AS ASSESSED BY THE SECRETARIAT FOR ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS

Communities have housed more homeless people than expected.

Shelter usage has declined from 2008 to 2009.

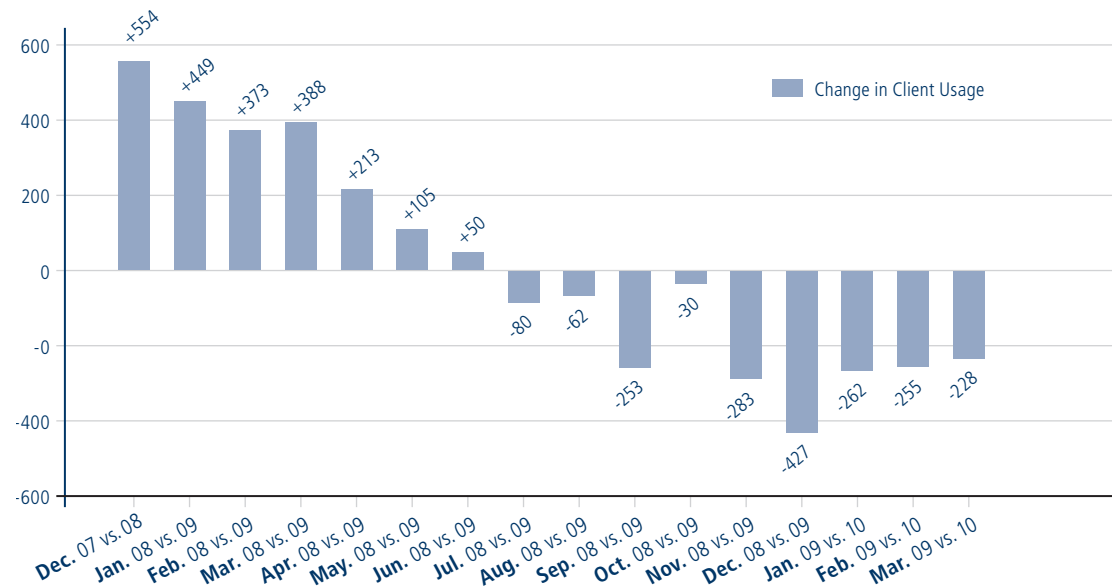
Housing first efforts are changing the lives of citizens.

1,779 Homeless Albertans have been Successfully Housed

In the first year of *A Plan for Alberta*, 1,779 homeless Albertans were provided with permanent housing and supports.² Many of these individuals were considered to be chronically homeless.

Communities have realized early and remarkable success by applying the housing first approach. In fact, all seven cities met or significantly exceeded their first-year targets for housing homeless individuals and families in their communities. These tangible results speak volumes about the viability and effectiveness of the housing first approach.

Year over year change in client usage of HUA funded shelter spaces



In this first year of the *Plan*, considerable focus was placed on housing those considered to be chronically homeless. These are individuals who have lived on the streets for many years – sometimes decades – and who face numerous challenges such as addictions, mental health issues, disabilities or other serious health issues.

Under Alberta’s old approach to homelessness, these individuals were often considered to be beyond our ability to help. Strategies now being employed by communities are targeting these Albertans, getting them off the streets, offering them renewed hope, and empowering them to achieve a greater level of self-sufficiency. Our collective efforts of the past year demonstrate that the concept of housing first works.

² As reported by Housing and Urban Affairs.

Communities are learning more about the extent and depth of youth homelessness in Alberta, and how it can be an especially desperate situation for those of 16 and 17 years of age.

Homeless youth are extremely vulnerable and face a number of challenges when seeking assistance to exit homelessness. Both government and community systems and supports can be difficult to navigate and no single ministry or community agency is solely responsible for youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. In order to prevent these youth from becoming Alberta's future chronic homeless, it is vital that government and community work together to improve access to the supports required by these young Albertans.

Communities are Mobilizing to End Homelessness

Multi-year plans provide the structure and objectives that guide our collective efforts to end homelessness.

Over the course of developing local plans, partners have come together around a shared goal and common approach, that being housing first. As a result, new forms of collaboration and partnerships have emerged that are characterized by ongoing dialogue and the development of creative approaches to seemingly entrenched community issues.

The energy and activity around developing and commencing multi-year plans has also led to a higher profile for homelessness within communities. Awareness has increased among business owners, non-profit organizations and residents about the existence and nature of homelessness in their communities.

Local efforts to end homelessness have also been buoyed by strong support among the broader public. Community leaders have championed multi-year plans, and municipal governments have provided support to enable their implementation.

While this is encouraging, it must also be remembered that Alberta is still at the outset of a 10-year strategy. There remains much work to be done, and the Government of Alberta can and should celebrate early successes, while confronting misconceptions people may have about those individuals in our communities who fall into homelessness. Engaging in a dialogue with Albertans about why ending homelessness in our province is a benefit to everyone will be key to maintaining our strong momentum.

Formerly Homeless Albertans Require Access to Mainstream Services to Maintain their Housing Stability

Now in the second year of the *Plan*, communities' homeless serving networks are attempting to house additional homeless Albertans, while continuing to support existing housing first clients. This state of affairs is straining community capacity and could potentially hinder on-going progress.

Youth homelessness is a serious issue in the province.

Plans to end homelessness have provided focus to community and provincial efforts.

Local awareness and support have been increasing.

Ending homelessness has begun in earnest.

Formerly homeless Albertans are having difficulty connecting to the mainstream systems that are necessary to maintain their housing stability.

Housing first programs are a bridge between homelessness and housing stability. The intent is to move individuals and families out of homelessness and connect them with mainstream systems that are accessible to all Albertans, such as addictions treatment, and employment/training services, and mental health services. Some housing first clients may need to access these systems on a frequent or ongoing basis.

Some communities face challenges in effectively connecting clients with mainstream systems. This can be a serious barrier, considering that the majority of homeless Albertans self-report mental health issues.³

Mainstream systems therefore play a crucial role in the overall success of the housing first approach. Access to mainstream systems need to be improved so housing first networks of care can continue to assist additional homeless Albertans achieve permanent housing.

Financial assistance for housing is an example of where access to mainstream systems is important for long-term success.

Despite fluctuations in vacancy rates, housing continues to be financially out of reach for many housing first clients, especially those in low-skill, minimum wage jobs and those utilizing income support programs. Many communities note that access to housing supports is challenging for certain clients; the clients therefore remain reliant on housing first supports, inhibiting the capacity to provide housing to those still living in emergency shelters and on our streets.

Communities will enhance their capacity to assist additional homeless Albertans if they can effectively connect existing housing first clients with housing supports.

The Government of Alberta has exercised impressive leadership and strong support for the implementation of provincial and local plans. Much of this support has been focused on increasing the availability of permanent housing with supports, and housing chronically homeless individuals.

Going forward, it is vital that the Alberta government extend this same leadership in improving the coordination of provincial systems and the accessibility of provincial assistance programs.

Greater Attention Must be Placed on Prevention Strategies

Remaining on track to end homelessness in 10 years will depend in part on ensuring more Albertans do not become homeless in the first place.

An essential component of *A Plan for Alberta* is strategies aimed at aggressively preventing homelessness from occurring. Preventive assistance needs to be available, adequate and accessible. Provincial systems – such as the health, corrections and justice systems – must introduce measures that will prevent discharging individuals into homelessness.

³ According to data collected by Housing and Urban Affairs.

Financial assistance for housing will be required for some as they move to independence.

Provincial leadership will be essential for continued success.

Preventing further homelessness is critical to the Plan's success.

Some programs are underway. The Secretariat acknowledges the support of the multi-ministry Safe Communities Initiative to divert people into permanent housing. Expanding these efforts across Alberta will contribute to the successful fulfillment of the *Plan's* objectives.

During the first year of the 10-year plan, an implementation focus was understandably placed on rapidly housing those Albertans who were already homeless. This work must continue.

However, it is time for the government to place greater attention on strategies in the *Plan* aimed at preventing further homelessness from occurring.

Cross-Government Recognition of the Value of Housing Stability Among Albertans is Essential

Over the past year, cross-ministerial efforts intended to improve policy coordination and reduce barriers to ending homelessness have taken shape. This work is having an impact on those experiencing homelessness.

For example, HUA is collaborating with Service Alberta to reduce personal identification barriers faced by homeless individuals and families. This will help homeless Albertans access the supports they need to leave homelessness and achieve stability.

HUA and Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW) have collaborated to enable homeless individuals obtain Alberta health care cards so they can access health services, to which all Albertans are entitled. To date, 320 homeless Albertans have had their health care coverage restored, as reported by Housing and Urban Affairs.

The cross-ministry Social Based Assistance Review, (SBAR), represents a significant shift in how social-based assistance is delivered to vulnerable Albertans. This client-centred approach means citizens will not have to understand the Government of Alberta's structure in order to access services for which they are eligible. Those experiencing homelessness, or those who are at-risk of homelessness, will benefit from improved accessibility to GOA services, which is a future outcome of the SBAR initiative.

Local and regional offices of Alberta government ministries are also actively engaging with CBOs, homeless-serving agencies and other partners in their communities to support the implementation of multi-year plans to end homelessness. Leadership and planning bodies in each community regularly include representatives from Alberta government ministries. The outcomes of such collaborations are alignment of mutual priorities, and streamlining of processes.

Prevention strategies in the 10-year plan need to be implemented.

Cross-ministerial initiatives have resulted in progress.

Ministries are collaborating at the local level.

Alberta government ministries and agencies planning tools should include outcomes related to housing stability.

It is important to remember that the 10-year provincial plan is not the responsibility of HUA alone. It is the plan of the Government of Alberta. Many government ministries and agencies have roles to play in supporting the implementation of provincial and local plans. It is a reality that ending homelessness requires the participation of departments beyond the one mandated to provide housing solutions.

To facilitate this change of focus from managing to ending homelessness, the Secretariat encourages those GOA departments that serve Albertans who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless to incorporate housing stability outcomes in their planning tools and accountability frameworks. The success of the *Plan* is dependent on a holistic and comprehensive approach.

Honouring the Community-Driven Spirit of the Plan will Yield Effective Results

Provincial support for the plan has been strong.

There is broad recognition on the part of CBOs, homeless-serving agencies and municipal governments that strong financial support from HUA has been instrumental in achieving positive results this past year.

This is a resourced plan, and it is having a real impact on the lives of thousands of Albertans.

Clarity is needed regarding roles and responsibilities of local and provincial plans.

Consistent with the community-led spirit of the provincial plan is the need for community input to inform the plan's implementation. It makes sense for provincial decisions to align with the directions of local plans.

For instance, decisions around capital funding for housing units can be made most effectively if they benefit from community input. CBOs can share valuable knowledge about local issues, challenges and community relationships.

Similarly, community input into decisions around operating funding for housing first programs will help optimize the allocation of limited resources. Decisions informed by communities build trust and sustain the legitimacy of the provincial plan.

Building Our Knowledge will Enhance Results

Data collection will help inform future implementation.

A Plan for Alberta was designed as an evidence-based plan. A major focus of the plan is around collection and use of meaningful and reliable data to inform future decisions and actions. Significant achievements were made during the past year in regards to gathering and developing better information about homelessness in Alberta.

Consensus was reached among HUA and the CBOs on a single data collection plan. Communities are now collecting standardized data from all agencies providing housing first programs, using consistent definitions and methodology.

The Alberta Homelessness Research Consortium has the potential to inform how the *Plan* is implemented in the coming years. Launch of the AHRC has been eagerly anticipated by CBOs, homeless-serving agencies and the Alberta government.

Communities expect to benefit from the results of research on issues around homelessness. There is a need for research to remain practical, topical and useful to policy makers and those involved in program and service delivery. Research priorities should be established with the benefit of community input, so that the knowledge Alberta builds about homelessness can be effectively translated in communities to improve work approaches, deploy best practices and enhance results.

The shift in philosophy to a housing first approach is accompanied by a shift in operations within the homeless-serving sectors. CBOs have recognized and are responding to the need for enhanced training of front-line workers who work directly with homeless individuals and families. This is helping bring about the cultural and operational changes required to effectively implement housing first approaches.

The University of Calgary certificate program, *Working with Homeless Populations: Basic Skills and Practices*, has been of great benefit to agencies across the province. Communities indicate they would like to make further use of the University of Calgary certificate program. At present, the program is only available in Calgary, creating a barrier of distance for many potential attendees. Given the level of interest in the program, it makes sense to explore alternative methods of delivering the program, such as through videoconferencing or in partnership with regional colleges.

Such training will need to continue over the life of the 10-year plan, recognizing that staff turnover will occur in homeless-serving agencies.

Having good data is the first step in understanding how our efforts are having an impact. Understanding how to better measure and manage an integrated system of care is the next step. Homeless Management Information Systems have proved critical to successful implementation of ten year plans in other regions. Lessons from these regions indicate that such systems are essential for understanding if their plans are succeeding or not. If the *Plan* is to succeed, the Government of Alberta must have a means to examine province-wide system integration, which is well beyond programmatic outcomes that are related to a limited number of strategies within the *Plan*.

As the *Plan* moves out of the first stage of re-housing homeless individuals and families, toward resolving systemic issues that will keep Albertans stably housed, despite whatever personal trauma or issues they must address, employing a tool to track and evaluate provincial-wide success will become a critical need.

Communities expect to benefit from research on homelessness.

Continued investment in training is essential.

A tool to track and evaluate province-wide success is critical.



CONCLUSION

The first year of Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness has been one of learning, adaptation and success.

Communities and homeless-serving agencies have begun to make the philosophical shift to the housing first approach. All seven cities now have multi-year plans to end homelessness, consistent with the provincial *Plan*. Those working within the homeless-serving sector are learning about the housing first approach and adapting their operations accordingly. Strong leadership and financial support from the Government of Alberta has increased the availability of housing units and assisted communities make early strides in implementing their local plans.

These efforts have enabled Alberta to move 1,779 individuals and families out of homelessness and into permanent housing with supports.

In the course of its activities this past year, the Secretariat heard one message loud and clear from governments, CBOs, homeless-serving agencies and others: the need for sustainability. We must bear in mind that the goal is not to end homelessness in Alberta for 10 years, but permanently.

A new spirit of optimism and energy has emerged across the province in the past year, and stakeholders are united by the common goal to end homelessness. But it is a goal that requires sustained attention, commitment and prioritization on the part of all major partners.

Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness has benefited from the vision, leadership, and support of Premier Stelmach and members of Cabinet. Their championship of the goal of ending homelessness has been a crucial element in this first year of implementation. Maintaining the strong and positive momentum of this first year will be the single biggest challenge of the next nine.

Much work also lies ahead in pursuing the full range of strategies identified in *A Plan for Alberta*. Priority needs to be given to preventive strategies to help at-risk Albertans avoid homelessness. There must be improved alignment between mainstream provincial systems and plans to end homelessness, so that housing first clients can access the assistance they require to achieve greater self-sufficiency.

The community-driven spirit of the plan must continue to be honoured, with all ministries and agencies of the Alberta government working collaboratively – with communities and with each other – to support the goals of provincial and local plans. The Secretariat will continue to play its important role in fostering these collaborative relationships, serving as a mechanism to communicate community perspectives to the Alberta government, and sharing important information and advice.

Alberta is now working from a solid foundation. The plans, systems and structures to help end homelessness have been put in place. Governments, CBOs, and homeless-serving agencies are collaborating in new and meaningful ways. Research and province-wide data collection activities are poised to expand our knowledge about homelessness in Alberta, refine our work, and improve our prospects for success.

At the end of year one, the Secretariat is pleased to report that *A Plan for Alberta* is on track to achieve its bold objective of ending homelessness in ten years.

Bill was an addict and alcoholic for 40 years, and is now living clean thanks in part to the assistance he received through a Housing First program. He is living in an apartment and looking for work. He has also made arrangements to pay his child support debt. Bill credits Housing First with saving his life, as his doctor told him he would likely die if he spent one more winter on the streets.

– Bill received permanent housing in December 2009, following approximately 3 years of homelessness.



ISSN 1923-8126 (PRINT)
ISSN 1923-8134 (ONLINE)