

The City of Red Deer and Red Deer & District Community Foundation

The City of Red Deer Housing and Homelessness Assessment Report

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Executive Summary

Recent economic changes and the subsequent impact on the local community, the housing needs and the homeless situation have indicated the need to re-visit previously developed strategies. The focus of this study has been the examination of current and future housing needs and support services, as well as the identification of existing gaps and anticipated programs and services to be developed in response to these gaps.

The purpose of the study is to provide the City of Red Deer and the Red Deer District and Community Foundation with up-to-date information of current and future housing needs and to identify current and future gaps between existing programs and services. The resulting information can be used in evaluating and targeting the housing needs of the city's residents in line with the City of Red Deer's 10 Year Vision and Framework for Ending Homelessness by 2018 and the 5 Year Implementation Plan for housing and homelessness strategies.

Specifically the study was designed to examine housing demand and supply in Red Deer and support services that are available. Gaps, trends, anticipated housing needs and support for various sub-populations were also examined. Emerging from this examination will be a set of policy recommendations for addressing current and future anticipated housing and homelessness needs in the city.

Data collection was guided by the key areas identified for investigation - that is housing demand and supply, support services, gaps, trends and anticipated need, and policy recommendations. Data sources included relevant federal, provincial and city documents and reports as well as representatives of organizations that provide services and supports to the homeless in Red Deer.

The final section of the report presents policy recommendations for addressing current and future anticipated housing and homelessness issues in Red Deer. In total, 12 recommendations were provided, and are intended as points for discussion with policy makers, government officials and program and service providers.

Introduction and Background

Introduction

While there are no precise statistics on the extent of homelessness in Alberta, it is estimated that there are 11,000 homeless in the province and with very diverse needs that go far beyond the need for housing.¹

The way that homelessness is defined can have tremendous implications on the perceived extent of the problem and the way homelessness is addressed. Homelessness, for example, can be characterized in terms of the range of housing conditions where absolute homelessness is only a small component in the overall problem². Homelessness can also be categorized, as in *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*³ in terms of the time one has spent without housing, such as terms like **chronic** and **transient** homeless. The term, “chronic homeless” refers to people who have been homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. Additionally, a person must have been sleeping in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation.

“Transient homeless” refers to those persons who are homeless for less than one year and have fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In addition to homeless families, The Plan for Alberta also recognizes a population of “employable homeless” citizens - those persons who do not suffer from any major barriers to employability but who require assistance to find permanent housing and move to self-reliance.

The complexity of the homeless population increases when one also takes into account the large number of “hidden” homeless, largely comprised of women, youth and families, who avoid systems that serve the homeless population, and the many other Albertans who spend more than 30% of their income on housing and are “at risk” of becoming homeless.

The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, in its *Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, noted that homelessness is a complex problem with no single solution but ending homelessness

¹ Provincial estimates from The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. (October 2008). *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*.

² Marie-Chantal Girard, Determining the Extent of the Problem: the Value and Challenges of Enumeration. Canadian Review of Social Policy, Vol. 58, 2006, p. 104 as cited in Defining and Enumerating Homelessness in Canada.

³ Ibid

requires moving away from the current approach of managing the homeless population to focusing on housing and moving the homeless to more self-reliance. The Alberta Secretariat also noted that failure to shift from the current approach will likely result in a growth of the number of homeless individuals and families in Alberta from approximately 11,000 to more than 21,000 over the next ten years.

In order to implement such an approach, it is important to not only re-house the homeless, but to respond to the underlying factors that have contributed to their homelessness. This requires understanding the nature and complexity of homelessness in one's community and developing an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to provide different levels of support to ensure that a person, once housed, is able to move to self-reliance and therefore less vulnerable to future episodes of homelessness.

The Plan to End Homelessness

Red Deer is a city of approximately 90,100 people making it the third largest city in Alberta and among one of the fastest growing mid-size cities in Canada. As with other cities in Alberta and across Canada, the City of Red Deer has witnessed an increase in both the number of homeless and the complexity of the homeless population.

The City of Red Deer has recently undertaken a number of initiatives to respond to issues of housing affordability and homelessness. In 2006⁴, a study was commissioned by the Red Deer Housing Committee to better understand issues of homelessness in the City. In 2008, the community of Red Deer completed the development of its ten year plan to end homelessness, *Everyone's Home*, which outlined the vision and framework to end homelessness by 2018. In 2009, the subsequent, *Every One's Home: Red Deer's 5 Year Plan Towards Ending Homelessness*, presented specific strategies, action steps and targets for meeting the goals and achieving the vision of ending homelessness.

Goals to End Homelessness in Red Deer by 2018

Goal 1. Red Deer has sufficient housing options to meet diverse and changing needs of our community members.

Goal 2. Individuals and families in Red Deer have access to support services whose primary focus is on maintaining housing or finding permanent housing.

Goal 3. Through awareness, healthy relationships, increased capacity and good communication, Red Deer will end homelessness.

⁴ As cited in *EveryOne's Home: Red Deer's 5 Year Plan Towards Ending Homelessness*.

Goal. 4. Red Deer has effective data systems and knowledge of homelessness to support effective decision making.

The Purpose of the Study

Recent economic changes and the subsequent impact on the local community, the housing needs and the homeless situation since the development and release of these two plans have indicated the need to re-visit these strategies. The focus of this study has been the examination of current and future housing needs and support services, as well as the identification of existing gaps and anticipated programs and services to be developed in response to these gaps.

The purpose of the study has been to provide the City of Red Deer and the Red Deer District and Community Foundation with up-to-date information of current and future housing needs and to identify current and future gaps between existing programs and services. The resulting information is to be used in evaluating and targeting the housing needs of the city's residents in line with the City of Red Deer's 10 Year Vision and Framework for ending homelessness and the 5 Year Implementation Plan for housing and homelessness strategies.

Specifically the study was designed to examine housing demand and supply in Red Deer and support services that are available. Gaps, trends, anticipated housing needs and support for various sub-populations were also examined. Emerging from this examination will be a set of policy recommendations for addressing current and future anticipated housing and homelessness needs in the city.

Methodology

Data collection was guided by the key areas previously identified for investigation - that is housing demand and supply, support services, gaps, trends and anticipated need, and policy recommendations. Data sources were limited to relevant federal, provincial and city documents and reports as well as representatives of organizations or key informants that provide services and supports to the homeless in Red Deer. No program or service-specific evaluation data were utilized to inform this study, however, such information could provide additional insights into the current and future housing needs as well as current and future gaps between existing programs and services.

Data collection took place between November 1, 2010 and January 14, 2011, with the majority of key informant interviews being conducted in person or by telephone between November 22 and December 17, 2010. Interview data have been presented in aggregate form and when specific comments were provided, they were done so without identifying individual participants.

The Findings

The assessment was conducted and the findings presented according to the key areas identified for investigation, with a final section prepared to provide policy recommendations. Accordingly, this section of the report is divided into four sections that include:

1. An examination of housing demand and supply in Red Deer.
2. An examination of support services in Red Deer.
3. Identification of gaps/trends/anticipated housing needs and support for various sub-populations.
4. Policy recommendations for addressing current and future anticipated housing and homelessness needs in Red Deer.

1. Housing Demand and Supply

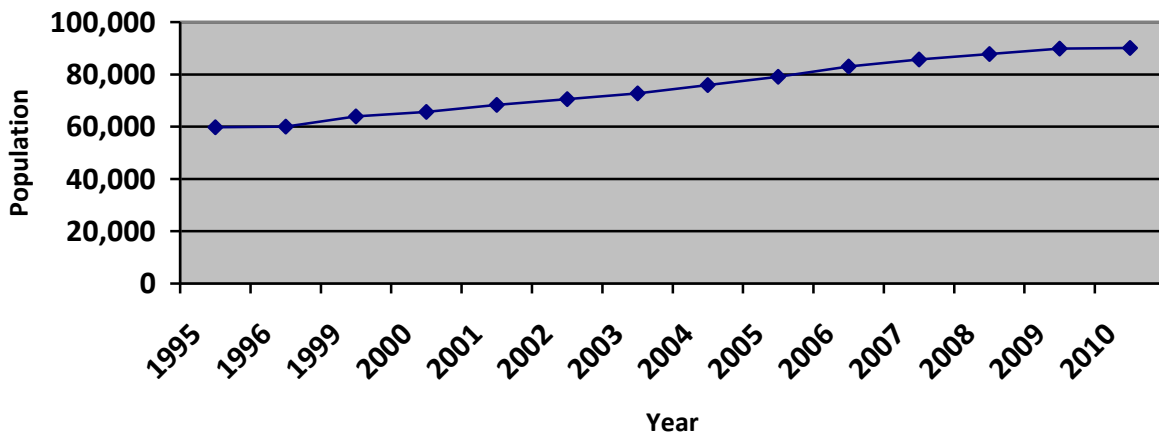
This section of the report presents an up to date inventory and in-depth analysis of housing demand and supply in Red Deer.

Factors Affecting Housing Demand

One aspect of the assessment included the evaluation of the demographic, socioeconomic and other factors affecting housing demand. The evaluation included but not limited to population and household growth, migration patterns, labour force trends, income and earnings, the structure of the local economy, local tax structure and community amenities.

According to the annual census conducted by the City of Red Deer, the population change between 2009 when the 5 Year Plan was published and 2010 is approximately 0.2% or 193 people, making this the second lowest population increase since the census began in 1995 (no data was provided for 1997 - 1998).

City of Red Deer Population Growth



The *Red Deer & District Community Foundation Vital Signs 2010* report noted the following:

- The unemployment rate in Red Deer was 7.3% in 2009, compared with 6.6% for the province as a whole.
- Regular Employment Insurance benefits increased by 246.5% between 2008 and 2009, from 491 individuals in 2008 to 1,701 in 2009. While total Employment Insurance beneficiaries, that also includes maternity and sick leave, self-employment and work sharing programs, increased by 96.5%.
- According to income data from Statistics Canada for 2009-2010, 17.2% of persons employed in Red Deer earned less than \$12 an hour (the provincial average is 13.7%).
- According to the latest Canada Census (2006), 11.3% of Red Deer's population lived on incomes below Canada's Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO). As assessed by the Statistics Canada Low Income Measure (LIM), 13.3% of families could be considered as living in poverty.
- Food Bank usage - food hampers contain enough food for between 5 - 8 days, with each family eligible to receive hampers a total of six times in a 12 month period. In 2009, the Red Deer Food Bank distributed 7,123 food hampers, representing a 64% increase from the previous year.
- One of the effects of the economic downturn was that housing became more accessible as vacancy rates increased by 56% between 2008 and 2009, to 3.9%.

- The median sale price for a home in Central Alberta as measured by MLS decreased by 7% in April 2009 from a year earlier, from \$284,000 to \$263,000.

Drivers of Housing Demand

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Conference held recently in Calgary (November 23, 2010) provided an analysis of both drivers of housing demand and housing market supply. The economic analysis indicated the following:

- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation noted that the Alberta economy has improved since 2009, and is expected to continue to improve through 2011.
 - Alberta retail sales have increased since 2009 and the trend for 2011 appears to be continuing to rise (source: Statistics Canada cited by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation).
 - Daily world oil demand while declining in 2009 has been increasing in 2010 (source: OPEC cited by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation). Similarly, in 2009, crude oil prices which were at the lowest point since 2004/2005, began to rise in 2010. It is anticipated that crude oil prices will continue to rise in 2011 (source: Statistics Canada cited by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation).
 - Alberta rig drilling activity for 2010, while remaining lower than the average for the decade, has increased from 2009 levels (source: Canadian Association of Oil Drilling Contractors, cited by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation).
- Alberta migration and labour market trends are expected to improve from the declines witnessed in 2009.
 - Total net migration to Alberta, which declined in 2009, is anticipated to rise in 2010 and 2011 (source: Statistics Canada cited by Canada Mortgage and Housing).
 - While the economic growth in Canada is being led by other provinces, it is anticipated that Alberta's economy and employment will also improve (source: Statistics Canada cited by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation).
- Statistics Canada forecasts that Red Deer City will experience significant growth in employment from 2009 levels (estimated at approximately 20% increase) before declining slightly.
 - Significant job gains will increase demand for new homes from 2009 levels.

- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation estimates that demand for rental housing in Red Deer will continue to rise, reducing the vacancy rate from 2009 levels of approximately 9% to less than 7.5% by 2011.
- It is anticipated that lower vacancy rates will cause rents to increase slightly from 2009, but will not increase to pre-2009 levels.

Housing Availability

The description of housing availability includes market and non-market affordable housing inventory, the condition of housing stock, vacancy rates, and types of units.

The 2009 and 2010 City of Red Deer census information provides the following description of available dwellings.

Dwelling Count by Structure

Dwelling Structures	2009	2010
Single Detached	20,101	20,558
Suite in Single Detached	879	930
Manufactured Home	1,157	1,165
Duplex/Semi Attached	2,921	3,001
Fourplex/Triplex	1,247	1,246
Townhouse/Rowhouse	3,604	3,689
Apartment	7,603	7,894
Collective Dwelling	62	63
Other	132	139
Total	37,706	38,685

Housing Market Outlook

In its presentation of the analysis of the housing market in Red Deer, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation provided the following summary forecast (source: CMHC, CREA, Central Alberta Realtors Association, CMHC forecast cited by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation).

Red Deer Forecast Summary, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

	2008	2009	2010 (forecast)	2011 (forecast)
New Home Market				
Single-Detached Starts	367	333	410	415
Multi-Family Starts	205	164	270	265
Total Starts	572	497	680	680
Resale Market				
Total Sales	4,214	3,770	2,900	2,950
Total Average Price	\$278,040	\$264,417	\$270,000	\$273,000
Rental Market				
Apt. Vacancy Rate (all units)	4.4%	9.2%	8.7%	7.4%
Average 2-Bedroom Apt. Rent	\$876	\$850	\$840	\$845

The following key points were noted:

- Lower inventory of single-detached homes will result in an increase of construction, with prices of these homes increasing slowly
- As was highlighted previously, job gains will lift demand for new homes over the next year.
- Rental vacancy rates have increased steadily since 2006, when the vacancy rate for Red Deer was approximately 0.5% to a high of 9.2% in 2009. It is estimated that an increase in demand for rental property over the next year will reduce vacancy rates and impact rents.

The Need for Specialized Housing

The long term plan for Red Deer is to dramatically reduce the number of persons depending on emergency shelters or emergency room beds by increasing the number of affordable and specialized housing units in Red Deer. The following is a general description of the housing options being offered in Red Deer.

Affordable Housing: Households are in core housing (or affordable housing) need if they cannot find somewhere to live that is in reasonably good condition and is big enough for their household without spending more than 30% of their income. Most affordable housing is targeted to people who have core need income threshold or have been identified in the core need income threshold population. These thresholds have been gauged by the Province through looking at rental rates in individual communities. This housing opportunity can be achieved by a household whose gross income is less than 65 percent of area median income, spending no more than 30 percent of that gross income on rent or mortgage. This housing opportunity should be safe, quality and accessible.

Subsidized Housing: A form of subsidy provided for low-income social housing, based on financial need of individuals or families. Private landlords may voluntarily enter into a contract in order to provide affordable housing options. The landlords will then designate specific units for low-income tenants. The rent for these units is capped at 30% of the tenant’s income, and the landlord receives the remaining rent through supplements. Thus the landlord collects the full-market rent, while providing a long-term affordable housing option. Other models of subsidized housing exist in which the funds are transferred directly to the tenants and the tenants manage the funds themselves.

Below Market (funded): 30% Below Market: Non-market housing provides housing solutions for those individuals who are unable to afford market rents. Rents are based on the tenant’s ability to pay rather than on market rates and rent is set at 30% of income. **10% Below Market:** Landlords have received grants from funding sources as part of the grant conditions. Rents must be at least 10% below market rate. Tenants need to be identified in the core need income threshold population.

Secondary Suites: Any self-contained dwelling unit that includes a kitchen, bathroom and sleeping accommodation contained within a principal dwelling. These Secondary units increase the stock and access to affordable housing while taking advantage of existing infrastructure.

The Red Deer & District Community Foundation released its first community report on housing and homelessness on November 23, 2009. The report identified housing-related statistics for Red Deer, including the following:

Affordable Housing Stock	2,420
Individual Rent Subsidies	785
Housing First Units	48
Shelter Beds	127

EveryOne’s Home: First Community Report on Housing and Homelessness developed a list of housing and support services that help homeless and at-risk individuals and families in Red Deer (it was noted that the list was not “exhaustive”). The following is a presentation of the Housing Services and Shelter spaces identified. A brief summary of the key services being provided was developed to augment this list.

Housing Services	
Piper Creek Foundation	A total of 618 subsidized housing and supportive living units for seniors. (3 lodges containing 190 individual rooms and 25 couples suites; 6 buildings with 354 self-contained subsidized suites - 30% of tenants’ gross monthly income; 49 suite building at below-market rent - Conwood Senior’s Housing).

Red Deer Housing Authority	Provides subsidized housing units for families and a rent supplement program for persons who are unable to obtain adequate housing because of income or disability. The Authority currently manages 300 community housing units, 9 suites for physically disabled, 10 suites for people with schizophrenia and 8 family handicapped units in Red Deer. The Authority provides approximately 600 rent supplements.
Potters Hands Development Ltd.	A total of 103 affordable housing and below-market units. A joint venture of Potters Hands Development Ltd., which owns the building, and the Red Deer branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), which manages it and operates the related support programs, The Buffalo provides permanent housing for 40 formerly hard-to-house; a mixed-use 39 unit apartment building built in 2003 for lower-income people who are experiencing mental illness, and includes live-in and outreach support; 24 one and two-bedroom below-market units for lower-income households and people with disabilities.
Lovella Society	Mentored apartment complex providing supportive housing for 7 tenants.
Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing	Total accommodation for 101 to 121 individuals. Permanent 23-bed "dry" shelter; "housing first" facility offering 24 hour support for up to 8 individuals living with persistent mental illness, health concerns and/or addictions; 20 bed mat program providing overnight shelter for people under the influence of drugs or alcohol; 20 bed detoxification centre; and "Winter Inn" emergency shelter for 30-50 individuals.

Several organizations were specifically identified in *EveryOne's Home* as providing shelter space in Red Deer. These include:

- Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing (Winter Inn emergency shelter for 30 - 50 individuals coordinated by Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing and rotated between with 4 downtown churches (St. Luke's Anglican Church, Potters Hands, Salvation Army and Seventh Day Adventist Church).; 20 bed mat program providing overnight shelter for people under the influence of drugs or alcohol).
- Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter (36 bed emergency accommodation).

- Youth and Volunteer Center - 49th Street Youth Shelter (8 bed facility).
- Youth Winter Inn Emergency Inn (10 bed facility).

2. Support Services

Being effective at responding to the housing and support needs of the homeless population and those at risk of becoming homeless requires interventions being designed to respond to the unique circumstances and needs. Some people find themselves homeless as a result of job loss, a hospital or prison stay or some other change in their personal situation. For these individuals with fewer barriers to living independently, the focus must be on rapid re-housing and connecting these people with those supports necessary to move from temporary shelter to permanent affordable housing.

Prevention services can also be considered as a means of providing short term assistance to these individuals and intervening before they become homeless. For those individuals who are able to live independently, but find themselves at imminent risk of becoming homeless, short term financial assistance to make essential household payments and other temporary support services, can ensure that persons remain housed.

Other individuals who cycle in and out of homelessness or are chronically homeless often suffer from serious physical illness or other disabling conditions, such as substance abuse disorder, mental illness, developmental disability. For this group, addressing re-housing needs must be coupled with responding to the need for intensive supports and treatments.

Red Deer has a range of supportive services designed to assist individuals and families to secure and retain permanent housing, such as outreach and housing placement and to prevent housed persons from becoming homeless or returning to homelessness. The following “Supportive Housing” and “Drop In and Support Services” provides a more comprehensive list of services that are currently available in Red Deer.

Supportive Housing	
Central Alberta’s Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing	A housing department that helps tenants find accommodations and provides ongoing support. As noted previously, permanent 23-bed “dry” shelter; “housing first” facility offering 24 hour support for up to 8 individuals living with persistent mental illness, health concerns and/or addictions; 20 bed mat program providing overnight shelter for people under the influence of drugs or alcohol; 20 bed detoxification centre; and “Winter Inn” emergency shelter, coordinated by Central Alberta’s Safe

	Harbour Society for Health and Housing and rotated between with 4 downtown churches (St. Luke’s Anglican Church, Potters Hands, Salvation Army and Seventh Day Adventist Church), for 30-50 individuals.
Schizophrenia Society of Alberta Red Deer & Area Chapter	Through partnerships, provides supported housing options (3 residences offering supportive affordable housing - 7 tenant residence previously mentioned, a 25 bed facility, and a 10 unit apartment) for persons with schizophrenia or other mental illness. Lovella Centre - residence for 7 tenants; Kentwood Place - 25 bed psychosocial rehabilitation recovery transition home for persons previously hospitalized with severe mental illness; Rosewood Manor - 10 unit affordable supportive housing apartment for persons with schizophrenia who can live independently.
Canadian Mental Health Association (in partnership with Potters Hands)	Working with Potters Hands Developments Ltd., Canadian Mental Health Association manages the 40 unit Buffalo Housing First Program and operates the related support programs for the formerly hard-to-house people who may have experienced long periods of homelessness.
Potters Hands Development Ltd.	As noted previously, Potters Hands Development Ltd. has worked in partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association to offer supportive housing and “housing first” programs.
Catholic Social Services	Long term residential option for children and youth who have intense and complex needs. Currently, the Residential Program includes 19 homes housing 3 individuals in each home.
Alberta Health Services	In partnership with Extendicare, Alberta Health Services (AHS) recently opened A 280-bed continuing care facility for seniors with diverse health needs. AHS has worked with developers to build more housing for persons with addictions and mental health issues (Convent Park - 95 affordable housing rental units with 23 designated for people with mental illness (1 bedroom and bachelor suites). Outreach through mental health and addictions; Riverside Meadows is a 39 unit apt. complex with units designated for people with mental illness; Gaetz Avenue Suites 2 2 bedroom apartments supported by Addictions and Mental Health. Also the previously mentioned Kentwood Place in partnership- in conjunction with Schizophrenia Society of Alberta Red

	Deer & Area Chapter.
Central Alberta Women's Outreach Society (Julietta's Place)	Julietta's Place is a 10 unit affordable housing facility with rents 20 - 25% below market levels and occupants will be able to stay up to 18 months. The residence includes four 3-bedroom units, four 2-bedroom and two 1-bedroom units, each partially furnished.

Drop-In and Support Services	
Berachah	Berachah Place is part of a coordinated approach with other ministries and organizations in Red Deer to provide round the clock assistance to those struggling with homelessness and addiction.
Central Alberta Women's Outreach Society	Drop in education and support to women involved in abusive relationships; Outreach workers provide support, information and referrals to individuals and families who are in search of affordable and safe housing.
Coordinated Community Outreach Team: Canadian Mental Health Association, Red Deer Native Friendship Society, Central Alberta Woman's Outreach Society, Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing	The CCOT includes staff from 4 agencies working in partnership to provide support to individuals and families who are without housing, experiencing a housing crisis or requiring assistance to keep their housing.
Red Deer Housing Team: Canadian Mental Health Association, Red Deer Native Friendship Society, Central Alberta Woman's Outreach Society, Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing, Central Alberta AIDS Network Society	These five agencies work with the chronic and episodic homeless to place them into housing and to provide follow-up support for up to a year once housed (Housing First Model).
Loaves and Fishes Benevolent Society	This ministry offers a variety of services to the community including the supper meal, daily lunches for 172 children in 25 local schools. Loaves and Fishes also provides transportation for people who need access to medical services, food and clothing hampers as well as pick up and drop off services for special events.
Nightreach Team: Central Alberta AIDS Network Society	Outreach workers assist people and increase referrals to addiction support programs; emergency support provided to street persons between 6 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. on weekdays and from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. on weekends

Potters Hands Development Ltd.	Potters Hands Development Ltd. operates a soup kitchen and a fellowship or church in downtown Red Deer. Breakfasts are provided to more than 150 people 7 days a week. Lunches are also served 2 days a week, and 1 supper each week.
Red Deer Native Friendship Society	In partnership with Women's Outreach, Canadian Mental Health and Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing, provides services to individuals or families experiencing homeless, or who are at risk of homelessness.
Salvation Army	One of the 4 downtown churches (St. Luke's Anglican Church, Potters Hands Development Ltd., Salvation Army and Seventh Day Adventist Church) providing the Winter Inn shelter program.
Schizophrenia Society of Alberta Red Deer & Area Chapter	Works with other non profits to provide a variety of supported housing options to individuals with schizophrenia or other related severe and persistent mental illnesses.
Seventh Day Adventist Centre	Another of the 4 downtown churches providing the Winter Inn shelter program.
Shining Mountains Living Community Services	Shining Mountains provides supported homes for individuals and families coming out of treatment, rehab and/or at risk of homelessness.
Street Ties Youth Outreach	Run by Parkland Youth Homes, the program is designed to help homeless teens access needed services and other supports.
The Road Home, Family Services of Central Alberta	Provides educational housing support services for families with children under the age of six years.

Also identified were a number of organizations in Red Deer that specifically offer support services to the Aboriginal and Multicultural Communities. That list includes the following:

- Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association
- Central Alberta Diversity Association
- Central Alberta Refugee Effort
- Shining Mountains Living Community Services
- Red Deer Native Friendship Society
- Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing

Organizations in Red Deer that provide health services to homeless people include the following:

- Central Alberta AIDS Network Society (Turning Point)
- Red Deer Primary Care Network-Street Clinic
- Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing

Organizations that specifically target supporting persons with mental illness, including the homeless population, include the following:

- A Gathering Place
- Alberta Health Services – Mental Health and Addiction
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Schizophrenia Society of Alberta Red Deer & Area Chapter
- Red Deer Primary Care Network - Street Clinic

What Service Providers Had to Say

Information provided by representatives of organizations that provide services and supports to the homeless in Red Deer informs this section of the report. Persons were asked to consider what factors they believed were affecting housing demand and supply in Red Deer as well as the factors affecting housing needs. The following was noted:

- Several interviewees noted that the most recent economic boom resulted in a large number of people arriving in Red Deer for employment. Many of these individuals have remained even though the economy recently suffered a significant downturn, resulting in a significant number of people who are unemployed or underemployed in the Red Deer area and unable to afford rent and the other costs associated with living in the city.
- It was also noted that while the inventory of available rental units has increased and rents have declined slightly, rents remain beyond the ability to pay for most of the individuals served by the agencies contacted for this study.
- Some service providers have noticed clients, both single individuals and couples, having a very high debt load. *“A lot of our clients have car loans, leases, etc. and are paying off things at the same time that they are trying to rent an apartment.”* It appears that the economic downturn put many people in a situation where the lifestyle they enjoyed previously was no longer affordable, placing them in a position where their limited savings were being exhausted to cover existing debt, with bankruptcy and homelessness becoming a new reality. Finding the money for the first month rent and damage deposit now becomes a barrier to accessing housing.
- Service providers also suggested that the lack of affordable housing could be addressed with secondary suites but the lack of “legal” basement suites, and that requirement for access to subsidies was hindering access to this affordable housing option.

- It was noted that accessing housing by individuals under 18 years of age presents additional legal and system barriers.
- Some key informants also believed that the proximity of Red Deer to larger centres of Edmonton and Calgary and rural communities has resulted in migration from these areas of the province in order to access the *“more readily available”* supports and services. However, only anecdotal evidence was offered to support this assumption.
- Several service providers suggested that one of the factors hindering the efforts to support the homeless population was a lack of understanding by community members. It was proposed that additional efforts must be made to educate the local community about the *“realities of homelessness”* in Red Deer.

When asked what are the most frequently identified needs of the targeted population, service providers offered the following:

- Not surprisingly, the most frequently identified need was **affordable, appropriate** and **safe** housing for individuals and families with access to the supports and services necessary to remain housed. For families, as an example, this means ensuring that the neighbourhood has appropriate amenities for children.
- Another frequently identified need of the target population was that clients arrived with a great many complex issues. As one service provider noted, *“it is housing and addictions, mental health issues and domestic violence. The needs are much more complex than they just need housing.”*
- The need for these vulnerable clients to develop a positive relationship with a specific agency and agency staff was repeatedly mentioned. As one interviewee observed, *“we offer a lot of emotional support because they feel safe here. We are not judgmental here. A lot of times they can’t get into another agency.”* The hazard is that agency staff may feel obliged to stretch already limited resources, to move beyond areas of expertise, mandate and funding agreements to meet the divergent needs of vulnerable clients with whom they have developed relationships.
- Supporting the development of *“independence versus dependence”* was identified by one agency staff member interviewed. The concern she raised was that, in some instances, clients were becoming reliant on the supports and services that were offered to them, rather than

planning and cooking their own meals and performing other responsibilities necessary for independent living.

3. Gaps/Trends/Anticipated Housing Needs and Support

This section of the report identifies gaps, trends and anticipated housing needs and support for various sub-populations such as Aboriginal population, persons with disability, and individuals with multiple barriers to housing such as substance abuse and mental illness, homeless youth, women fleeing domestic violence and new immigrants.

Providers were asked to identify the challenges being encountered in meeting client needs. Responses included the following:

- Several service providers observed that while rental units are available, they are often too expensive for clients. Finding affordable and appropriate housing for people was a frequently identified challenge.
- Finding housing for families is extremely difficult, as *“a lot of landlords do not want a family in the unit.”* Other service providers recounted incidents where Aboriginal people moving into Red Deer from nearby reserve communities and ethnic minorities with limited English-language skills had experienced difficulties from landlords when attempting to secure rental units.
- Finding a safe and secure environment for youth who are living on the street or couch surfing and are not willing or are unable to return to their homes was identified. However, it was also suggested that, for some youth, this was a lifestyle choice to avoid limitations being placed on them by their parents, rather than to find a safe and secure place to live.
- Staff members who have been working with the homeless population for a number of years have observed that their clients have increasingly more complex, multiplicity of needs. Homeless clients who are seeking assistance for housing, may also have physical health issues, mental health issues, and addictions issues and require long-term support if they are to remain off the streets and be safe.
- Another of the challenges identified was the sense of despair that the clients bring with them to the agency. *“The attitudes of the people who are coming. They are angry and depressed. They are not able to participate and help themselves because they are so low, they just can’t pull themselves up. They feel so dehumanized. How can they go out and find a place. They need an encourager.”*

- Service providers suggested that there was a need to be better informed about what other agencies could offer to their client group and better able to coordinate access to these services.
- It was also suggested there is a sense of “territoriality” between agencies and difficulties experienced when referring clients to other agencies. *“Agencies say that they will help but clients still seem to have trouble at these agencies getting more than brochures.”*
- Several agencies indicated that their biggest challenge was the sustainability of the organizations themselves. A lack of qualified staff who are willing to work in this field and with clients possessing such diverse and complex needs, a lack of sufficient, timely funding to perform the services and offer the programs that they are mandated to provide, an inability to access funding to provide the additional support being requested by clients but which fall outside of their organizational mandate. One of the more common comments was, *“we are doing our best to help people, but we are not funded for this.”*
- On a related note, agency staff noted that resource limitations have reduced operational capacity of some service providers, putting more pressure on their own agencies. *“There are a lot of agencies who have slowed down on who they serve. As a result, we are getting more referrals than ever before.”*
- It was suggested that one of the challenges that hinder the efforts to address the homeless issues is the stigma attached to homeless persons and a lack of community understanding of the severity of the problem in Red Deer or the complex nature of the causes that result in homelessness. It was further suggested that the development of new programs and housing options are being delayed or stopped by resistance from community members and zoning laws.
- Another of the challenges that was identified is the process of applying for a rent subsidy. It was suggested that the lag time between applying for, and receiving, a rent subsidy was from 4 and 6 months and applications could only be submitted if the client already possessed a unit to rent.

When asked to identify the gaps that exist between the services that are available for homeless individuals and families and those services that are needed, the following was suggested:

- Several individuals identified the lack of attention to, and lack of money and resources being put into prevention. *“We have to wait until they are in crisis before we can help.”*
- It was suggested that services need to respond to the complexities of homelessness and the reasons why individuals and families find themselves, often repeatedly, in homelessness. Understanding and addressing the root causes of homelessness, rather than merely the

consequences, is necessary if the intent is to move from a reactionary intervention and develop a preventive approach.

- It was suggested that more time was needed to develop a relationship with the client, to develop a sense of trust and safety before engaging in specific service-related discussions.
- One of the “biggest gaps” suggested by one of the persons interviewed *“is the lack of resources for families and a lack of ongoing support services that have the flexibility to meet their needs.”*
- Gaps were particularly identified in the ability of youth, seniors and persons with severe and persistent mental health issues to be able to access appropriate housing and support services in a timely fashion.
- The need for additional drug detoxification space in Red Deer and the need for post-detoxification accommodation was also identified. *“After detox they may still not have a place to stay. If they do get in, there is only a 28-day stay. There is a need for 1-2 year period of stay somewhere.”*
- Additional observations offered by several of the service providers include a gap between the medical needs of their clients and the ability to access necessary medical care, a lack of access to educational programs so that clients can improve their chances of self-sufficiency and independence and a general lack of necessary food and affordable lodging.

When asked what is not working well or hindering efforts at meeting these needs in Red Deer, most of the comments have already been captured in the preceding sections of the report. Suggestions offered to be more successful and, where appropriate, incorporate into the 5 Year Plan included the following:

- Promote interagency collaboration. *“Enhance the communication between agencies to ensure that “we know what each other is doing so we can work together. Open communication avoids a lot of confusion and misinformation for the client. It can also help to avoid gaps and overlaps in service and information.”*
- Incorporate more programs into the Plan that focus on prevention. Allocate more resources for outreach and support services for those persons who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Find ways to educate and engage the broader community so that it becomes part of the solution rather than a barrier to addressing issues of homelessness and poverty in Red Deer. *“We need to educate the public as to what the real problem is. To many people, affordable housing is not a problem in Red Deer. It becomes a very hard sale here because they just can’t see it!”*

- Eliminate the red tape that is encountered when attempting to access services and financial support for clients. This suggestion includes securing provincial funding for *non-status* youth.
- Some people interviewed suggested increasing the amount of affordable housing stock. Others, however, proposed finding innovative ways to subsidize rent for the existing rental housing to make use of the existing stock in Red Deer as vacancy rates are higher than in previous years.
- Develop a better understanding of the underlying causes of homelessness and respond to those issues, rather than merely reacting to the results. As one agency staff member observed, *“what ever put the kid on the mat is still there the next morning. We need to look at what caused the kid to be on the mat in the first place.”*
- It was proposed that the Province of Alberta should be encouraged to be more responsive to unique community needs. One person suggested that, *“by identifying the desired outcomes, the province decides what is important and what is not, what is successful and what is not.”*
- It was proposed that there needs to be evidence gathered about the relative effectiveness of the current programs being offered in Red Deer to address homelessness - to determine what is working well and what is not, and why or why not. In that way resources can be appropriately utilized to most effectively respond to homelessness.

4. Policy Recommendations

This final section of the findings presents policy recommendations for addressing current and future anticipated housing and homelessness issues in Red Deer. In total, twelve recommendations were provided, but these should be considered as points for discussion with policy makers, government officials and program and service providers.

Recommendation 1

There is a need to examine various options to ensure a stock of affordable housing in Red Deer, both now and in the future. This need was highlighted in an article in the Red Deer Advocate (Laura Tester, Red Deer Advocate, May 10, 2010). Gail Parks, a former city councillor, noted the need for a *“long term solution for the hard-to-house and affordable housing”* that enables the city to provide housing to the homeless beyond the current contractual period for the existing privately developed and owned affordable housing units. Both former Councillor Parks and several people interviewed for this study suggested developing a housing foundation *“where it can provide housing in the future.”*

Proposed Action: Establish responsibility for ensuring the stock of affordable housing in the City of Red Deer and clarify the role of the Municipality as well as other stakeholders.

Recommendation 2

The community, including funders, service providers and agencies that work with homeless individuals and families, needs to have a viable data plan in place to accurately capture key data, both on housing needs and wrap around social services. This must include evaluative data on programs and services currently being provided in Red Deer.

Proposed Action: Engage funders and service providers to work together to create a comprehensive city-wide system and address barriers that may impede such a system.

Recommendation 3

Developing a research strategy and program to better understand **why** different groups become homeless is critical to the next steps in the plan for the city. It is important to learn more about the drivers of homelessness in Red Deer before planning next steps in addressing this issue and developing strategies to prevent homelessness for youth, adults and families.

Proposed Action: Develop, with stakeholder groups, agencies, funders, the research/academic community, a research agenda to examine factors underlying homelessness in Red Deer.

Recommendation 4

The fourth recommendation involves examining the overall success of the Red Deer 5 Year Plan. More specifically, it is important to determine if the current homeless assistance system is moving people into housing quickly, if it helps people remain in housing and does so cost effectively. Such an evaluation should, ultimately, help to determine if what is being funded are, in fact, the best strategies. One such system already developed to perform this analysis is the Homeless System Evaluator Tool, developed by the Centre for Capacity Building. However, the system-level and program-level performance and cost data necessary for such an analysis must be gathered and be available.

Proposed Action: Complete a review of the overall strategy as presented in the 5 Year Plan to determine what is working well, what is not working and what improvements need to occur.

Recommendation 5

While the previous recommendation proposed a system-level assessment of the overall effectiveness of the 5 Year Plan and the strategies that have been developed, this recommendation relates to the evaluation of specific programs that are currently operating. Persons who were interviewed indicated the need to determine the relative effectiveness of the current programs and services being offered in

Red Deer to address homelessness - to determine what is working well and what is not, and why or why not. Such information can help to refine and improve program and service strategies and guide resource allocation.

Proposed Action: Ensure that evaluations are conducted on all programs engaged in serving the homeless and those at risk of homelessness and determine a means for evaluating those programs that play a part in ending homelessness but are not programs funded by the City of Red Deer.

Recommendation 6

It should be noted that merely securing housing for those who are homeless is only part of the solution. It has been suggested that while Housing First is an effective strategy for chronically homeless persons (a minority of the homeless population) as well as individuals and families trapped in the shelter system, it is much less effective for those cyclically homeless. For these individuals and families who cycle in and out of homelessness, housing becomes a reactionary intervention and fails to address the underlying root causes of homelessness. There is a critical need to prevent these underlying root causes from leading to homelessness.

“This is no trivial task, especially given how little we communally know about this social phenomenon. As a community of advocates, we need to be supportive, rather than combative, of efforts to learn more about what causes homelessness. Glib retorts like “a lack of housing causes homelessness” are counter-productive. In order to end homelessness we do need housing, but we also need smart social interventions, insightful research, and a united voice and collective ethos that is open to new ideas and is more committed to solving homelessness than adhering to stringent ideology” (David Henderson, July 03, 2010).

Proposed Action: Ensure that the research agenda includes an examination of how to respond effectively to address the root causes of homelessness and, in particular, the reasons why some individuals and families cycle in and out of homelessness.

Recommendation 7

Further research can inform future policy and practice related to housing and mental illness. Challenges in responding to the housing needs of persons with severe and persistent mental illness were highlighted repeatedly by staff members who work with the homeless population. The Housing First model (for example, the model at the Buffalo) indicates that the first step is to address the problem of housing - to make housing the first step, and then to make available the supportive services to ensure that they remain housed.

Sandra Newman, Ph.D., and Howard Goldman, M.D., Ph.D. (*Putting Housing First, Making Housing Last: Housing Policy for Persons with Severe Mental Illness*. October, 2008 <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/165/10/1242>) offered the following advice.

“Over the past 20 years, the threshold policy questions have remained the same: 1) How to put housing first: what sorts of housing environments work best, for whom, and under what conditions? 2) What are the impediments to persons with severe and persistent mental illness gaining access to housing, and how can these obstacles be removed? 3) What sorts of support services are required to make housing last to ensure that this population can remain stably housed? In our view, the studies conducted to date do not answer these questions fully.

We see three main suggestive findings in the existing research. First, some persons with severe and persistent mental illness are able to live stably in independent housing in the community. But we do not have a clear sense of who this subgroup is or what mechanisms—such as specific support services—facilitate their ability to live independently. Second, data on complaints filed with HUD suggest a substantial problem of housing access as a result of possible landlord discrimination against persons with severe and persistent mental illness. But no published studies have systematically examined these complaint files to characterize these landlords, where they are located, and the nature of their potentially discriminatory action. Third, various models of case management appear to be associated with fewer days homeless and more days stably housed. But we have few insights into the specific support services that lead to successful outcomes or the effects of combining case management with different housing arrangements on such benefits as housing stability.”

Proposed Action: Ensure that the research agenda also includes an examination of housing and mental illness to inform both policy and practice.

Recommendation 8

There needs to be a common set of data and terminology used by municipal and federal counterparts with respect to vacancy rates, the number and kind of housing units, etc. It is suggested that CMHC, community housing organization, and city agencies providing “housing first” work together to develop common definitions, terminology and data sets.

Proposed Action: Engage funders, service providers and other government organizations to work together to establish a common set of data, definitions and terminology.

Recommendation 9

Consider engaging in political action guided by recent comments and observations from The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness.

The Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness is an arm’s length body from Housing and Urban Affairs. The Secretariat initially wrote the ten year plan and for the past two years has been visiting the seven cities to get community feedback on how “housing first” is working and how it is not working in their community. From this information, the Secretariat released their first report to the Minister. The

Chair of the Secretariat at that time, Wayne Stewart, indicated that after staff and board visitation regarding the first full year of “housing first” programming, three areas of provincial concentration around what is not working were the following:

1. The Government of Alberta needs 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.
2. The issue of youth, 16 and 17 years of age, being homeless is a great common concern in communities across Alberta, and requires the attention of the Government of Alberta, in partnership with the communities that are sheltering homeless youth.
3. Housing and Urban Affairs is a small ministry and cannot be the only ministry paying attention to the homeless file. Ending homelessness requires addressing barriers within complex and interdependent public systems that impact people’s access to permanent housing.

Proposed Action: The community and the City of Red Deer should work with and support the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness in developing an effective strategy for responding to these concerns.

Recommendation 10

The tenth recommendation is to encourage, promote and support interagency collaboration rather than competition between agencies. Territoriality and other challenges with respect to agencies working together were identified by persons who were interviewed for this study. Such working relations can result in less effective and efficient service provision and, ultimately, poorer quality service for clients.

Proposed Action: Consider ways in which agencies can be encouraged to work together for the benefit of the clients. It would, for example, be interesting to examine how clients would assess the degree of collaboration in the delivery of the various services and programs they utilize.

Recommendation 11

It is proposed that there be continued efforts to educate and inform all citizens of the community about homelessness and the true picture of poverty in Red Deer. The “face” of homelessness is much more diverse and complex than many believe it to be.

Proposed Action: Continue the work that was initiated during the previous social marketing campaign to educate and inform citizens about homelessness.

Recommendation 12

Repeatedly, service providers who were interviewed for this study have pointed to the need to respond before people become homeless and to develop programs, services and resources for individuals and families that are at risk of becoming homeless.

Proposed Action: The final proposed action is the development of more programs that focus on prevention in the City of Red Deer.

Appendix

Letter to Interviewees

Recently, you received a letter from Roxana Nielsen Stewart, Program Coordinator- Housing Social Planning Department of Red Deer, that a Housing and Homelessness Needs Assessment is being conducted to build upon the previously completed work. The objective of this assessment is to provide the City of Red Deer and the Red Deer & District Community Foundation with an up to date inventory of current and future housing needs and to identify gaps in programs and services.

It is intended that this work will help to fine-tune the strategies identified in the goals in the 5 Year Implementation Plan by providing information related to the following:

1. An inventory and in-depth analysis of housing demand and supply in Red Deer.
2. An inventory and in-depth analysis of support services in Red Deer.
3. Identification of any gaps or trends in the housing needs and support for various sub-populations such as Aboriginal population, persons with disability, and individuals with multiple barriers to housing and mental illness, homeless youth, women fleeing domestic violence and new immigrants.
4. Policy recommendations for addressing current and future anticipated housing and homelessness needs in Red Deer.

The information that you can provide is a vital aspect of this study. We hope that you would be willing to participate in an interview either in person or by telephone. The questions that are provided on the following page are intended to help guide the interview process. Additionally, you may wish to provide a written response to these questions.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and the information you provide will be kept confidential. Interview data will be identified by specific agencies, but not the individuals who provided the comments. Interview notes will be seen only by the consultant and destroyed upon approval of the final report.

I will be contacting you in the next couple of days to, hopefully, set up a convenient interview time and to determine if you would prefer to conduct the interview in person (December 2-3; 6-7) or by telephone (November 22-26). Alternatively, you can provide me with some alternative dates and times via email. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes.

Kindest regards,

Raymond Downie, Ph.D.
Broadview Applied Research Group Inc.

Interview Questions:

1. What types of services are provided by your agency/organization and how long has the agency provided these services in Red Deer?
2. Does your agency/organization provide housing (e.g. permanent, transitional housing) and/or supportive services designed to assist individuals and families to secure and retain permanent housing, such as outreach and housing placement?
3. What factors do you believe are affecting housing demand in Red Deer (for example population and household growth, migration patterns, labour force trends, income and earnings, the structure of the local economy, local tax structure and community amenities)?
4. What factors do you believe are affecting housing supply in Red Deer - market and non-market affordable housing, permanent supportive housing and specialized housing?
5. Please note: market housing can be defined as any housing unit that is being rented at or near market level. Non-market housing would fall under the 30% of income and 10% or more below market level. The 10% or more below level housing units usually have some sort of funding agreement in place with either The City of Red Deer or the Province.
6. Does your agency/organization provide support services and resources to prevent housed persons from becoming homeless or returning to homelessness?
7. How is the housing or support services delivered to your clients?
8. What is the eligibility criterion for your housing and support programs?
9. Who is your target population? Does it include, for example, Aboriginal population, persons with disability, and individuals with multiple barriers to housing such as substance abuse and mental illness, homeless youth, women fleeing domestic violence and new immigrants?
10. What are the most frequently identified needs of your target population?
11. How successful are you at meeting these needs? What is working well? How do you know?
12. What challenges are you encountering in meeting client needs? Are there some needs you are not able to meet? How do you know?
13. What gaps do you believe exist between the services that are available for homeless individuals and families and those services that are needed? How do you know?
14. What is not working well or hindering efforts at meeting these needs in the City of Red Deer? How do you know?
15. What suggestions do you have for being more successful at meeting the needs of these individuals?
16. Are you turning people away? If so, why (for example, not within the targeted client group, insufficient or inappropriate space or other resources)?

17. Have any needs emerged over the past year that should be incorporated into the 5 Year Plan?
18. Can you think of any other agency/organization that may have additional information related to this area of study?

Definitions:

1. **Affordable Housing:** Households are in core housing (or affordable housing) need if they cannot find somewhere to live that is in reasonably good condition and is big enough for their household without spending more than 30% of their income. Most affordable housing is targeted to people who have core need income threshold or have been identified in the core need income threshold population. These thresholds have been gauged by the Province through looking at rental rates in individual communities. This housing opportunity can be achieved by a household whose gross income is less than 65 percent of area median income, spending no more than 30 percent of that gross income on rent or mortgage. This housing opportunity should be safe, quality and accessible.
2. **Subsidized Housing:** A form of subsidy provided for low-income social housing, based on financial need of individuals or families. Private landlords may voluntarily enter into a contract in order to provide affordable housing options. The landlords will then designate specific units for low-income tenants. The rent for these units is capped at 30% of the tenant's income, and the landlord receives the remaining rent through supplements. Thus, the landlord collects the full-market rent, while providing a long-term affordable housing option. Other models of subsidized housing exist in which the funds are transferred directly to the tenants and the tenants manage the funds themselves.
3. **Below Market (funded): 30% Below Market:** Non-market housing provides housing solutions for those individuals who are unable to afford market rents. Rents are based on the tenant's ability to pay rather than on market rates and rent is set at 30% of income. **10% Below Market:** Landlords have received grants from funding sources as part of the grant conditions. Rents must be at least 10% below market rate. Tenants need to be identified in the core need income threshold population.
4. **Secondary Suites:** Any self-contained dwelling unit that includes a kitchen, bathroom and sleeping accommodation contained within a principal dwelling. These Secondary units increase the stock and access to affordable housing while taking advantage of existing infrastructure.