

Victoria Community Plan on Homelessness 2007-2009

Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness

***Condensed from the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy
Community Plan Framework, November, 2007***

“Snapshot”

On December 19, 2006 the Federal Government announced the creation of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), replacing the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The Homelessness Partnering Initiative (HPI), a cornerstone of the HPS, takes a "housing first" approach; that is, finding safe, affordable, appropriate housing as the first step in no longer being homeless. Funding under the HPI began in September 2007.

On June 12, 2007, the Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness (VSCH) held a strategic planning session to identify community priorities on homelessness to fund through the HPI. Given the growing numbers and needs of the homeless in the Capital Region, as evidenced by the February 2007 Homeless Needs Survey and a rental vacancy rate of 0.8%, the VSCH determined that HPI funds would most impact the situation if used to provide housing. Within the limitations (total funding of \$1,389,658 for 2007-09), the VSCH designated all available funds to their first priority: capital investment for new permanent, safe, transitional and supportive housing.

At the same meeting, two other priorities were also identified. Priority #2, implementing the communications strategy, will be completed by the end of 2007 with funds remaining from NHI-SCPI 2003-2007 designation for this area. Primarily this is the launching of the VSCH web site (www.ourwayhome.ca) on homelessness. The site includes ways to contribute to the elimination of homelessness and give feedback to the VSCH on how they are doing.

Priority #3, evaluating the Community Plan, required under the HPS, currently has no funds allocated to it. The VSCH envisions a partnership with one or more agencies to complete this priority by the end of March 2009.

Victoria developed a community plan under the NHI in 2003. With the creation of the HPS in 2007, a national framework was developed for updating community plans. This updated Victoria Community Plan on Homelessness is a condensed version of the 2007-2009 Victoria Community Plan Framework. This includes key social, economic and policy trends in the Capital Region, as well as information on the homeless drawn from the Homeless Needs Survey conducted earlier this year.

The Community Plan also includes a short discussion of the Capital Region's housing, programs, and services for the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness. Information was culled from many sources including Statistics Canada, BC Stats, regional, municipal, and agency web sites, and agency representatives. A compilation of regional resources is provided in the 2007 Regional Assets Inventory at www.ourwayhome.ca.

The Plan's three priorities are outlined with their objectives, rationales, indicators, and targets so the VSCH will know "the job is getting done". To assist the Plan's implementation and sustainability, various ways are identified to make the best use of available resources during the 2007-2009 timeframe. These include leveraging funding, enhancing human resources (within both the VSCH and the homeless serving sector), communicating the Plan, and environmental initiatives to be undertaken by project proponents.

To obtain HPI funding for 2007-2009, the VSCH was required to submit their Community Plan Framework to the Federal Government for approval. The Plan was submitted and Ministerial approval was obtained in November 2007.

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INTRODUCTION

The Victoria Community Plan on Homelessness covers the next funding phase (2007- 2009) of the Federal Homelessness Partnering Initiative (HPI). The Plan was prepared by the Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness (VSCH), administered through the Community Initiatives and Policy Directorate of Service Canada.

At the end of 2009, Service Canada will commission a full evaluation of the Plan to determine if the identified goals and objectives have been accomplished. At that time a full report will be made to the community. In the interim, the VSCH will use its web site (www.ourwayhome.ca) to provide information on the Plan's progress and receive feedback from the community.

DEVELOPING THE COMMUNITY PLAN

In December 2006 the Federal Government announced the creation of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). Previously, federal funding for homelessness had been available under Phases 1 and 2 of the National Homelessness Initiative. Development of a community plan on homelessness has been a requirement for funding under both programs. This update follows two previous plans developed during Phases 1 and 2 of the NHI, 2001 and 2003.

With the creation of the HPS, a national framework (and template) was developed for updating community plans. This Victoria Community Plan on Homelessness is a condensed version of the Community Plan Framework which received Ministerial approval in November 2007. Information includes the development backdrop (e.g. key social, economic and policy trends in the Capital Region, as well as information on the homeless, drawn from the Homeless Needs Survey conducted earlier this year), community priorities, and implementation strategies.

The Plan was developed by the Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness (VSCH). The Committee held a strategic planning session on June 12, 2007 to identify community priorities for HPI funding. Total HPS funding allocated to Victoria for the period of 2007-09 is \$1,389,658, which includes \$337,000 dedicated to Aboriginal projects.

The VSCH has been the primary structural element for planning, implementation and decision-making on priorities for federal funding for homelessness in the Victoria area since 2000. The VSCH's primary role has been to identify community priorities and make recommendations for federal homelessness funding through public calls for proposals.

The Committee is broadly-based, representing the key sectors involved in addressing homelessness in Greater Victoria.

Member	Organization	Sector
Shannon Baggott	Service Canada	Federal Government
Roger Butcher	BC Housing	Provincial Government
Chris Coleman	Business/ City Councillor	Private Sector/ Municipal Government
Maureen Duncan	United Way of Greater Victoria	Charitable Sector
Dean Fortin	Director of Burnside Gorge Community Centre/ City Councillor	Directors of Community Centres/ Municipal Government
Pat Griffin	Victoria Youth Empowerment Society	Youth Agencies
Gordon Harper	Umbrella	Addictions
Linda Johnson	Vancouver Island Health Authority	Health

Member	Organization	Sector
Henry Kamphoff	Capital Regional Housing Corporation	Housing Providers/ Regional District
Ken Kelly	Downtown Victoria Business Association	Business
Harold Munn	Downtown Churches	Faith Community
Bruce Parisian	Victoria Native Friendship Centre	Aboriginal
Janis Ruel	Community Relations, MEIA	Provincial Government
Alan Rycroft	Cool Aid Society	Shelter Providers/Communications
Kathy Stinson	Cool Aid Society	Shelter Providers
Rev Al Tysick	Our Place	Homeless Agencies – Downtown Service Providers
Wendy Zink	Social Planning and Housing , City of Victoria	Municipal Government

The 2007 Homeless Needs Survey (HNS) information was used extensively in the construction of this Plan. The HNS accessed the thoughts, feelings and needs of 815 citizens who were homeless or unstably housed in the Capital Region on what would need to happen for them to be become and stay housed.

Consultants (Urban Aspects Consulting Group) were contracted to draft the Community Plan, using the HPS framework, for review and approval by the VSCH. Throughout its development, Ann Susnik, from the BC Regional Office of Service Canada, assisted in facilitating and coordinating the process, as well as providing advice and information.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Homelessness is a complex issue. Understanding and acknowledging its many and varied socio-economic aspects, policy and structural elements, and resource needs is important if homelessness is to be addressed adequately and appropriately. The profile provides ‘context’ for informing and guiding the Plan’s planning and implementation process.

Population, Housing and Income Dynamics

Over the life of this Plan, 2007-2009, it is expected that the following trends are likely to continue in the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area (Greater Victoria):

- *Increased population growth* will continue to put considerable pressure on the local housing market.
- *Housing affordability* will be an issue for both renters and homeowners – housing costs are rising faster than incomes.
- *Affordable rental housing is in short supply* and, especially in the absence of new rental and social housing construction in significant numbers (if at all).
- *The rise in construction costs* will exert pressures on new/ renovated housing.
- *As real estate prices rise much faster than rent increases, the pressure to convert rental units to condominiums* will continue.
- *Rising employment levels and a low unemployment rate* will mean more demand for rental suites.
- *Rising university enrolment and demand from low-wage service workers* (a major component of the Victoria economy) will contribute to the pressure on rental stock.

- *With no change in the minimum wage, at \$8/hour, a single parent with 2 children will need to work 63 hours/ week to be above LICO in the Capital Region.*¹
- *Considerable numbers of people remain in core housing need, lacking sufficient income to access affordable and appropriate housing – a situation likely to continue without significant intervention.*
- *Increasing homelessness puts pressure on facilities and services, including rising numbers of people turned away from shelters.*

Table 1 provides a list of key points respecting the Victoria CMA community profile.²

Table 1 - Summary of Socio-Economic Trends

Demographic Trends

- The population growth rate has increased in recent years. The estimated 2006 Victoria CMA population is 343,675 (up over 9% since 2001 as compared to 2.5% for the previous five year period).
- Growth is primarily the result of in-migration, mostly intra and inter provincial.
- Visible minorities comprised 9% of the CMA population in 2001 and Aboriginal People, 3% - relatively small portions of the CMA population compared to some Canadian cities. Aboriginals, however, comprise a significant portion of the homeless population.
- The population is aging, with persons aged 65+ comprising a significant proportion (at 18% one of the highest of any Canadian urban area).
- Non-family households, while not the majority, have been increasing both absolutely and proportionately.

Housing Trends

- The proportion of owned housing units in core housing need declined slightly from 1991-2001, however, the actual number increased.
- Owner shelter costs rose by 40.5% between 1991 and 2001. House prices increased by 82% from 1995-2001 and 75% from 2001-2005.
- In 2001, 47.3% of rented units were below at least one standard of adequacy, suitability or affordability in 2001, with 38.5% of units below the affordability standard
- In 2001, 27.6% of rental units were in core housing need (the majority in Victoria, Saanich and Esquimalt).
- In the past decade, fewer than 1,000 units of new social housing were provided in the CRD – compared to 6,200 built between 1970 and 1995.³
- The last purpose built rental units (21) in Victoria were completed in 1999/2000.⁴
- The conversion of existing suites to other uses has resulted in 100 fewer rental apartments overall.⁵
- In October 2006, the Victoria CMA registered a vacancy rate of 0.5% - the third time in the past 15 years that rates have dropped to that level (2001, 2005, and 2006). The Victoria CMA had the lowest vacancy rate for Major Centres in Canada in both 2005 and 2006.⁶
- In the Victoria CMA, average rents rose to \$681 for one-bedroom apartments and \$874 for two-bedroom apartments in 2006. The situation is especially dire for persons on social assistance – monthly shelter allowance of \$375.
- As of March 2007, there were 560 active clients on the Pacifica Housing Services Community Housing Registry for supported subsidized housing and 1,958 active applicants on the CRD / BC Housing waitlist (including 236 families). Local housing providers reported that if someone on a wait-list for housing is evicted, they most likely end up on the street or in a shelter.

Income Trends

- Owner income rose between 1991 and 2001 by 22.5%.
- The percentage of average owner household income spent on rent including utilities rose to 19% between 1991 and 2001.
- Renter income rose between 1991 and 2001, but renter incomes were considerably lower (less than 60%) of owner income levels.
- The percentage of renter household income spent on rent including utilities in both 1991 and 2001 was 31%.
- Core housing need renter income rose by 11.8% between 1991 and 2001, but was significantly lower (less than 40%) of other renter income levels.
- For core housing need renters, average monthly shelter costs increased by 16.2% between 1991 and 2001, as did the proportion of household income spent on shelter including utilities (51%).
- Unemployment decreased from 8% to 4% between 1991 and 2006.
- The proportion of people aged 19-64 on BC Basic Income Assistance in June 2007 in the Capital Region was lower (0.8%) than the BC average (1.1%), but higher in the City of Victoria (1.6%). Social assistance case loads in BC were significantly reduced in 2002 with provincial regulatory changes.⁷
- Owners of small businesses are experiencing rising costs due to security demands, petty theft, vandalism and cleanup of human waste and needles. Developers and owners or managers of larger businesses have described annual security costs up to \$100,000 each.⁸

Policy and Structural Trends

A number of initiatives currently underway in the region suggest an increased local commitment to addressing affordability and homelessness. These have long-term potential to positively impact housing and support services for low-income and homeless individuals and families. At the same time, as many initiatives are still in early development, realizing significant benefits will likely take longer than the Plan's two-year timeframe.

A number of projects (e.g. Our Place and Aboriginal Safe Housing) from Phase 2 of the NHI will come on-stream shortly and will reduce the number (by 33) of homeless individuals in the community. The need is much greater still and requires more concerted effort and investment if Victoria's homelessness situation is to be addressed.

Recent changes and anticipated trends providing direction for the Plan are summarized below.

Local Government/Community

- Adoption of a Regional Growth Strategy (2005) and Regional Housing Affordability Strategy (2007).
- Inauguration of the Regional Housing Trust Fund (2005) and City of Victoria Housing Trust Fund (2004) and potential development of other municipal funds in the CRD. Funds have already supported the development of non-market housing units.
- Updating of official community plans implementing the Regional Growth Strategy and Regional Housing Affordability Strategy.
- Updating of the City of Victoria's Downtown Plan (2007).
- Development of secondary suite policies in a number of municipalities.
- Closure of unsafe residential buildings, many housing those at-risk of homelessness in two key municipalities.
- Development of a Cold, Wet, Weather Strategy and Extreme Weather Protocol (2004/05) led by the City of Victoria, with an extension to the District of Saanich. In 2007, Victoria secured provincial funding for the coordination of services for the Extreme Weather Protocol for Greater Victoria.
- Changes in United Way funding priorities initiated in 2007 with a new emphasis on: housing the homeless, low income and working poor; mental health and substance abuse; family development and wellness, community assistance, and capacity building.

Provincial Government

- In 2001 a number of shifts in policy and funding priorities occurred. As well, there was the adoption of a more formal contract awarding/review process that reduced or eliminated funding for many programs serving low-income and homeless individuals and families. Significantly affected areas included income assistance, employment, life skills and social housing.
- In April 2002, the Province transferred the delivery of addiction health services to the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) aligning addictions services with mental health services.
- In September 2004 the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness was established. In March 2005 \$10M was awarded toward the construction of Our Place, providing 45 units of housing (a net gain of 23) and support services to the homeless/at-risk.
- In 2006-07 the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) announced new policies and regulations designed to assist low income and homeless individuals and families. MEIA is in the process of enhancing its outreach and linkage capacity with both clients and service agencies on Vancouver Island.
- In October 2006, *Housing Matters BC* launched a number of programs serving the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness. Included were the Rental Assistance Program, Homeless Outreach Teams, Independent Living BC, and the Provincial Homelessness Initiative.

- Establishment of the Housing Affordability Secretariat in the CRD and support for addressing homelessness.
- Establishment of the Mayor’s Task Force on Breaking the Cycle of Mental Illness, Addictions, and Homelessness in May 2007 recommended a service model and business plan to assist those who are mentally ill and/or who have substance use problems in the City of Victoria.
- Approval in June 2007 of a Comprehensive Housing Strategy to address affordability in the City of Victoria.
- In 2006 responsibility for shelter programs was transferred from MEIA to BCHMC.
- In 2006 BCHMC developed policy, procedures, and guidelines for shelter services in extreme weather conditions.
- In March 2007 the Province announced an increase in income assistance rates– the first in 12 years.
- In April 2007, funding for one SRO hotel and two apartment buildings (to be converted to supportive housing) was announced for Victoria.

Homelessness and the At-Risk of Homelessness Trends

Population growth and housing prices, a continuing shortage of new and affordable rental housing (exacerbated by gentrification and closure) combine to assure homeless numbers will rise in 2008 and 2009.

- The number of homeless has grown significantly in the past twenty years in the region. The 2007 Homeless Needs Survey (HNS) enumeration found 1,242 people homeless or unstably housed in the Capital Region.
- Homelessness is a regional problem impacting more than downtown Victoria. Of 815 people surveyed in the 2007 Homeless Needs Survey: 73% were from the four core municipalities (Victoria 61%, 496 people; Saanich 6%, 48 people; Esquimalt 3%, 24 people; Oak Bay 1%, 6 people); 4% from the Western Communities; 3% from the Saanich Peninsula; and 4% from Salt Spring Island (16% did not state a municipality).
- Homelessness is also a home-grown problem: only 11% of those surveyed were from outside BC, with 73% from the CRD, and 16% from elsewhere in B.C., mostly Duncan and Vancouver.
- Homelessness is not well documented in the region. The region's first Homeless Count found 696 homeless people (including some women and children) in the City of Victoria and Saanich on the night of January 15, 2005.
- 8,100 individuals and 24,300 families were in core housing need based on the 2001 Canada Census. Households are in core housing need where they have no option but to pay more than 30 percent of their gross income on housing and, cannot find somewhere to live that is in reasonably good condition and big enough for their household.
- Aboriginal people are overrepresented in the homeless population (25%) as only 2.8% of the population in the CRD is Aboriginal. Even at this high percentage, Aboriginal service providers felt Aboriginal homeless were undercounted, particularly youth.
- Families and children are significantly undercounted due to the difficulties in surveying them (not knowing where they are) and their reluctance to come forward and identify as homeless. There is only one agency in the Capital Region dealing with homeless families and they are “maxed out” in their service levels.
- Other research indicates there are 250 to 300 street youth in the CRD. Reasons cited for youth homelessness in the HNS included: personal conflict violence or neglect by a family member, friend or caregiver (55%), alcohol or drug use (50%).

Community Assets

An Assets Inventory was originally compiled in 2001, updated in 2003, and updated again in 2007. The Inventory establishes a base from which to assess existing resources for addressing homelessness, providing information on facilities, programs, and services serving and accessible to the homeless population, and those at-risk of homelessness in the Victoria CMA. Given the sensitivity of a number of services, particularly with respect to the clients served, the Inventory does not identify confidential locations.

The Inventory is posted on the VSCH web site - www.ourwayhome.ca.

In the Victoria CMA there is a network of agencies and organizations serving the region. Most are located in the City of Victoria, with few elsewhere in the region. Most are not-for-profit organizations, though some are major public institutions and many are faith-based organizations. Some services have paid staff, others are run by volunteers. Some serve a variety of people; others focus on a specific group within the population. Some provide a range of service, others have a more 'specialized' focus, e.g. housing, food, or employment. This "web" of agencies is linked through partnerships, collaboration and networking.⁹

Based on BC Housing information there has been little low income family and seniors housing added to the CMA's housing stock in the last decade. However, with the advent of new policy and program initiatives at both the local and provincial levels (noted above), there are indications this situation is improving. There remains however, an enormous gap between the need for and capacity to provide safe, affordable, supportive, transitional, and permanent housing and support services. This is particularly true for mental health and addictions, but also across the range of services.

There appears to be more asset stability in 2007 than a few years ago. Many agencies experienced considerable challenges following significant provincial cuts to programs and changes in policy (particularly in employment, life-skills, and income assistance supports). Agencies have rebuilt their programs and some gaps have been narrowed to some extent since then. However, in recent months there are signs some agencies are having difficulty maintaining services.

NHI funding, leveraged into additional funding particularly from the province, has had a positive impact on capacity. This includes 'concrete' achievements in the provision of additional housing/ shelter and enhanced services and changing practices and approaches to homelessness such as more coordination between agencies and more attention paid to homelessness.

In 2006 BCHMC announced the seasonal (cold, wet weather) increase of shelter beds (30) provided through the Victoria Cool Aid Society at Streetlink and Sandy Merriman House would be permanent and ongoing – a significant step forward. Fifteen of those beds are now part of the Next Steps program, a 30-90 day stay for those who commit to stabilizing their lives and will accept the help to do so.

Nevertheless, the ability of agencies to meet community needs, respond to, and adapt over the longer-term has been affected by a number of factors. These include: increasing homelessness, shifts in provincial priorities (away from the provision of affordable housing for low income individuals, families, and seniors and towards frail seniors and special needs), cutbacks and changes in funding for support services and, income assistance. Despite effort and commitment over many years, notably in the not-for-profit sector, there has been little real progress in reducing homelessness. The seriousness of the situation has finally brought homelessness onto government and community agendas.

PRIORITIES

Solutions to homelessness require participation by all levels of government, both at the discussion and the funding tables, through private/public partnerships, partnerships between various levels of government, within the homeless serving sector and, the homeless themselves.

For the 2007-09 HPI funding phase and the timeframe for this Plan, a number of priorities have been identified by the Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness. For each of these priorities, objectives, rationales, targets, indicators, and funding conditions have been established.

Community Plan Priorities 2007- 2009

Priority # 1:

New permanent, safe, transitional and supportive housing

Issue

The rental vacancy rate in Victoria is currently 0.8 % according to CMHC, effectively zero. In both 2005 and 2006, Victoria had the lowest vacancy rate of major Canadian centers. The last purpose built market rental units (21) in Victoria were completed in 1999/2000. There are currently only 563 transitional and long term supported housing units available to the homeless/at risk in the Capital Region.¹⁰

Finding and maintaining safe, affordable, stable housing is, according to the 2007 Homeless Needs Survey, the primary concern of 71% of its 815 respondents. The number of homeless has grown significantly in the past twenty years in the Victoria CMA, from 237 in 1991, to over 1,242 in 2007.

In March 2007, there were 560 active clients on the Pacifica Housing Services Community Housing Registry waitlist. At the same time, there were 1,958 active applicants on the CRD/BCHMC waitlist, including 236 families. In the past decade, mostly prior to 1999, fewer than 1,000 units of new social housing were provided in the CRD – compared to 6,200 built between 1970 and 1995.

Recognizing the seriousness of the local housing situation for the homeless and at-risk, at a planning session on June 12, 2007 the VSCH identified creation of new, permanent, safe, transitional and supportive housing as its pre-eminent concern for 2007-2009 HPS funds.

Specifically, the VSCH has established the following target groups:

- *Families with children*
- *Youth*
- *Aboriginal people*
- *The chronically homeless*

Objective

To increase the number of transitional and/or supportive housing units for the homeless and at risk population in Victoria and the surrounding area by the end of 2009 through capital investment, and targeting the following priority groups: families with children, youth, Aboriginal people, and the chronically homeless.

Rationale

The chronically homeless population in the Capital Region includes adult men and women, families with children, youth and Aboriginal people, all of whom are poor and many of whom have mental health and addictions concerns. Many circulate through the city's low-end hotels, motels, rooming houses, shelters and living on the street. On an average day Streetlink shelter serves over 350 and Our Place over 600 people, the vast majority of whom have no place they call home. Common knowledge on the street is, "the longer you are on the street, the more difficult it is to get off it". This view has wide general acceptance and is supported by an abundance of homelessness literature.

In the 2007 Homeless Needs Survey (HNS), people reported on their experience of living without a home. Over half of the Survey's participants (813 people) had been unstably housed for the last two years or longer (chronically homeless by many definitions), and 44% had been homeless more than twice in the last ten years.

Twenty-six percent (26%) of respondents who were homeless did not stay in shelters. Of those not staying in shelters, most (60%) slept outside or "rough". Only a small portion (3%) of survey participants did not want permanent housing. The most commonly reported contributing factors to current homelessness were all health-related: alcohol or drug use (327 people, 41%); illness or medical reasons (281 people, 35%); and social or emotional challenges (212 people, 27%).

Though comprising only 2.8% of the population of the Victoria CMA, people identifying as Aboriginal comprise 25% of those surveyed in the HNS 2007. This overrepresentation is considered to be an undercount by Aboriginal serving agencies.

Homeless families are a severely underserved portion of the homeless population. Though undercounted in the HNS 2007, the Burnside Gorge Community Association (BGCA) Homeless Families Outreach Program (NHI-SCPI funded) served 900 people and gathered information on 432 families. There are no family shelters in the region. So when families become homeless, they must find somewhere else to stay, or parents must separate from their children. Often spouses/partners are also separated.

There is no common factor to all homeless or unstably housed youth. The most frequently reported contributing factor in the HNS was personal conflict, violence or neglect by a family member, friend or caregiver (55%). The second most frequently reported contributing factor was alcohol or drug use (50%). Three-fifths (58%) of youth were using alcohol or drugs. Youth serving agencies estimate there are 250-300 homeless or seriously at-risk of homelessness youth in our region. Stable housing and supports for learning and re-learning life skills are crucial for the survival and integration of homeless youth in our region.

Indicators of Success

- Number of beds/units added at the end of the HPS (March 31, 2009)
- Amount of leveraged funds

Targets

- Increase the number of transitional and long term supportive housing units for families with children, Aboriginal people, youth, and/or the chronically homeless by at least 10 (using available HPI funding), by March 2009.

Funding Conditions

- Funding from the HPI will be used to address this priority: \$1,052,402 from HPI the Designated Communities program and \$337,256 from the Aboriginal Partnerships program.
- A public Call for Proposals, a requirement of federal funding, will be issued by the VSCH.
- Through capital investment in one or more projects, the VSCH will seek to increase the number of transitional or supported housing units for the chronically homeless, families with children, Aboriginals and/or youth in the Capital Region.
- Successful proponents will be expected to bring considerable agency knowledge, expertise and credibility in serving the homeless to the table. Many will be able to leverage intra-agency resources to provide for proposal development, financial management, and cost effectiveness).
- Successful proponents are expected to demonstrate an ability to creatively leverage additional funding by enlisting other partners (e.g. BCHMC, CMHC, Regional Housing Trust Fund, Victoria Housing Trust Fund, and United Way) to support their project. Financial or in-kind support from mainstream agencies and particularly the private sector may enhance a proponent's submission.
- A broad base of relationships and/or partnerships with government at the municipal, regional, provincial and federal levels, as well as participation by Aboriginal communities and homeless serving agencies will be necessary for project success. Support by mainstream agencies including the United Way will be especially helpful. A relationship with the private sector (financial, in-kind or philosophical support) is particularly desirable as this area is not well developed.
- Successful proponents will further be expected to incorporate sustainable practices into their projects. Additional points will be awarded in the Call for Proposal process for projects which demonstrate environmental initiative. Initiatives could include: environmental (ecological protection and restoration and green design), social (public consultation, housing affordability, heritage preservation, public spaces and streetscapes and promotion of transportation alternatives) and economic (support to local businesses, employment creation, impact on the tax base, infrastructure efficiency, and energy/water savings).

Priority # 2:

Implementing a Communications Strategy

Issue

Research undertaken for the NHI 2003-2007 Communications Plan revealed the public, especially the business community, have limited knowledge of the homeless and specific efforts to deal with homelessness in the community: The “VSCH needs a greater community presence...and should be proactive in sharing accomplishments and success stories...This not only raises public awareness about the Committee, but also informs people things are being done to find solutions to homelessness.”

This priority will focus on implementation of activities identified in the VSCH Communications Strategy.

Objective

Two interdependent parts of this objective are to:

- Increase the level of awareness and understanding of homelessness amongst municipal decision-makers, the private sector, and the general public.
- Communicate the work done by the VSCH through the Community Plan to key stakeholders and the general public.

Rationale

The assessment of Phase 2 of the NHI (2003-07) identified the need to increase communications activities to raise public awareness as a priority.

Indicators of Success

- Number of press releases,
- Number of "hits" on VSCH web site *www.ourwayhome.ca*
- Number of presentations made by VSCH members, using materials from the communications strategy to engage the broader community, key stakeholders, and the homeless

Targets

- A minimum of five articles/spots in the media on homelessness for the life of the Plan (2007-09)
- The Community Plan on Homelessness posted on the VSCH web site (*www.ourwayhome.ca*) within 60 days of completion and linked to the web sites of VSCH members.
- Case studies of successful NHI projects demonstrating to the community what has been achieved, how it was done, and who was involved posted on the VSCH web site (*www.ourwayhome.ca*)
- A listing of existing resources and agencies, available as a resource guide or online, to assist in filling public knowledge gaps (e.g. demographics, local initiatives, available resources, who to turn to or how to help)

Funding Conditions

- Funding to address this priority will be provided from unused outreach funds from NHI-SCPI 2003-2007. Leveraged funds will also be used as available.
- Support, both financial and in-kind, will be sought from all levels of government, homeless serving agencies, private business and, area citizens. A list of agencies and ways to contribute will be posted on the VSCH web site (*www.ourwayhome.ca*).
- The VSCH web site, *www.ourwayhome.ca*, will be a focal point for the dissemination of information – e.g. for accessing the Community Plan on Homelessness, project case studies, ways to participate in solutions to homelessness and, providing a vehicle for feedback to the VSCH. Ongoing support for the site will be crucial to its success.
- The VSCH will serve as the central point for larger initiatives where members will foster relationships and serve as mediators/facilitators in the development of partnerships when promising.

Priority # 3:

Monitoring and Evaluating the Community Plan

Issue

The requirements of the HPS dictate the need for comprehensive planning and ongoing evaluation, including a full assessment of the *Community Plan* in 2009. Evaluation is a critical component of the need for long term sustainability. A community plan and corresponding series of projects that cannot produce and demonstrate positive results in the long term is limited at best. Evaluation results can serve as the basis for future amendments to the Community Plan, the development of new partnerships, improvements in existing service provision and new initiatives to help the homeless. The Steering Committee recognizes the demonstration of positive outcomes will be the basis for future community support and the effectiveness of projects. The Steering Committee also recognizes this Community Plan will be a reference for other work being undertaken in the community, particularly the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness.

This priority will focus on planning and evaluation activities for the *Community Plan 2007-2009*.

Objective

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Community Plan on Homelessness.

Rationale

In reviewing previous efforts, several areas were identified to be addressed in the next funding phase.

1. Setting clear goals, objectives and outcomes for the Plan through strategic planning processes.
2. Setting measurable outcomes and targets for projects.
3. Evaluating the effectiveness of the Plan and its measures on an ongoing basis and, at the conclusion of the HPS in 2009.

Indicators of Success

- Number of formative and outcome evaluations of HPS funded projects
- \$ amount from different funding sources
- Implementation of Community Plan recommendations
- Development of collaborative partnerships with/ between the VSCH, CRD, VIHA, and United Way

Targets

- A full outcome evaluation of the Community Plan is conducted
- Formal agreements are in place between the VSCH, CRD Homelessness Secretariat, and United Way
- Evaluation outcomes are positive and support continuation of the HPS or similar program after 2009

Funding Conditions

- Funds for addressing this objective are limited to unused outreach dollars from NHI-SCPI 2003-07. Other funding sources need to be identified.
- The VSCH will engage a consultant to complete the assessment of the Community Plan on Homelessness in 2009 and any updates required by the HPS.
- Feedback on the Plan will be obtained using interviews, facilitated workshops and the VSCH web site (www.ourwayhome.ca)

IMPLEMENTING AND SUSTAINING THE PLAN

If the Plan is to have immediate and longer-term effect, its priorities must be implemented and sustained. Achieving the Plan's priorities will be determined by the ability to obtain and leverage financial resources and support for and mobilization of the community's human resources. Communications will be a critical component for ensuring these resources are available.

The following strategies have been identified to guide the Plan's overall implementation.

Financial Resources

Strategies to increase financial resources:

- Adopting a 'Housing First' policy and funding priority.
- Funding projects sponsored by well-established not-for-profits that have leveraging power through their existing programs and reputation, contribution of equity, relationship with donors, etc.
- Using HPS funds as "seed money" to leverage contributions from other sectors.
- Leveraging additional capital funding for maximum impact, e.g. the Housing Trust Funds and accessing other funding opportunities through agencies such as BCHMC and the United Way who share similar goals.
- Developing a strategy for leveraging operational funding to make project proposals viable.
- Supporting successful proponents to obtain operational funding if necessary through advocacy, mediation, and partnership.
- Mobilizing support for projects from the business community by encouraging donation of equipment and furnishings through the VSCH web site.
- Developing and applying funding guidelines that require collaboration, leverage, partnering, etc. to ensure as many aspects of a homeless person's needs are met most effectively.

Human Resources

The Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness (VSCH) will oversee the Plan's implementation, particularly with respect to ensuring Federal Government administrative and funding requirements are met.

Assessments of previous Committee efforts identified the Steering Committee's strengths, for example its leadership, capacity to develop strategic solutions, a shared sense of purpose and values, representation,

participation, and cooperation in efforts to address homelessness. These assessments also pointed to a number of areas where further work is needed to strengthen the Committee's administrative and planning structure. These include:

- developing relevant skills
- gaining a better understanding of homelessness causes and solutions
- developing integrated goals and objectives to plan services and supports
- undertaking regular evaluation of progress towards strategic goals

While VSCH membership includes representatives from various direct service agencies who meet regularly with homeless and at-risk individuals and families to identify and address their needs, the Committee recognizes the need to engage and involve the homeless more directly in its activities.

Strategies for further developing VSCH knowledge and skills:

Strategic Planning

- continue to incorporate strategic planning in regular monthly meetings and at special longer sessions
- develop and implement a regular monitoring and evaluation framework and process (on an annual basis) that reviews progress
- work with other community organizations such as the United Way, VIHA, and CRD to address homelessness and implement the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness
- support participation of Committee member(s) in the BC and Yukon Sustaining Community Partnerships Committee (SCPC), with the aim of increasing private sector action on solutions to homelessness

Leadership/ Membership

- develop strong and consistent leadership, especially in the position of Chair
- continue to use a broadly-based community steering committee for plan delivery, forum for sharing/ receiving information and, developing policy and strategies for addressing homelessness
- strengthen and diversify representation from the business sector and senior governments and Aboriginal organizations
- develop mechanisms for increasing homelessness participation in Steering Committee activities

Fundraising

- take a strategic approach to funding allocations and leveraging
- involve new emerging funding/ equity partners, e.g. Credit unions, developers, land owners, other business leaders through the web site, and personal communication by highlighting the benefits of participation in plan initiatives
- focus on projects that are collaborative in nature, maximize leverage, have the most potential for sustainability through operating or capital funding from multiple sources
- focus on housing and sheltering people with the necessary support systems

Communications/ Public Awareness

- continue to implement the Communications Plan and communications strategies
- use the recently developed VSCH web site to provide information and obtain feedback, and link to other key homelessness sector web sites
- continue to incorporate information-sharing in conjunction with regular monthly meetings
- leverage current networks and contacts of VSCH members to expand participation and promote ongoing dialogue around homelessness issues
- retain consultants with responsibility for communications, publicity and media relations, including a communications person on the Committee

- continue to develop collaborative, trusting and inclusive relationships across all sectors
- clarify the reporting relationship of sector representatives, ensuring that there is reporting back to their sector
- ensure effective linkage and connection with the City of Victoria, Provincial Government VIHA, United Way, and CRD

Local Knowledge

- support the development and implementation of a survey to track homeless numbers and needs support the development of an effective system for collecting and recording information on the use of services

Previous Plan assessments noted improvement in coordination of resources, increase in volunteers, and improved working relationships between organizations and agencies in the homeless serving sector. However, they also indicated:

- agencies and organizations are finding it harder than a few years ago to adapt to situations of limited resources and high demand;
- there are not enough funding partners to ensure adequate on-going financial resources; and,
- the relationships between governments, non-profit, private sectors and community agencies need to be strengthened

Strategies for developing human resources within the homelessness sector:

- support project sustainability (shared ideas/resources, coaching, mentoring)
- support projects that improve inter-agency cooperation, coordination and collaboration
- continue to use an inclusive and transparent communications strategy that increases community awareness, involvement, and support on a sustained basis
- provide information on the Community Plan, what it is, who is involved, what is happening, when, and how progress is monitored and assessed
- support research and best practices
- approach key members of the business/private sectors to discuss homelessness and encourage support for initiatives that address homelessness
- develop partnerships with key sector representatives through networking and collaboration and, establish mechanisms (such as a funding roundtable involving the United Way, VIHA, and business community representatives) to secure operating and capital funding
- encourage agencies to involve the homeless in planning/developing projects and community events

Communicating the Community Plan

As part of a larger communications initiative in Phase II, 2003-2007, the VSCH contracted with Artemis PR & Design to examine the level of awareness and understanding of homelessness issues in several key sectors, particularly the business community. A second part of the initiative was the development of a web site (www.ourwayhome.ca) for the VSCH. The web site is a key vehicle for communicating the Plan, addressing the need for clear information on homelessness, ways the general public and the business sector can become involved and support the work being done by the VSCH and homeless serving agencies.

Strategies for communicating the Plan:

- use the communications tools that have been developed to "tell the story" of homelessness in Victoria and involve government and citizens in solutions
- post the Community Plan (and updates) on the VSCH web site (www.ourwayhome.ca) and linking to local government and agency sites
- provide case studies of successful NHI and HPS projects to show the public what has been done, how they have been done, who was involved, and their outcomes
- provide annual reports to the community
- identify opportunities for providing contributions to fill in service gaps, e.g. developing and regularly maintaining an online list of current needs of the different non-profit agencies
- fill in existing public knowledge gaps (including demographics, local initiatives, available resources, who to turn to or how to help) by establishing and making available a list of existing resources and agencies
- host public information sessions/ forums – linking housing and homelessness, profiling solutions to homelessness

MOVING FORWARD

This Community Plan covers the 2007-09 Homeless Partnering Initiative (HPI) funding period, setting out the specific priorities and implementation strategies to be pursued, using available HPI funding. At the same time, it is expected that this Plan will be part of the larger community effort to address homelessness in Victoria – in particular the implementation of the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness (*Breaking the Cycle of Mental Illness, Addictions and Homelessness - A Victoria Model*) and the United Way Housing Impact Council.

Until recently, the Victoria Steering Committee on Homelessness has been the primary structural element for planning, implementation and decision-making for community priorities on homelessness in the Victoria area. However, a new governance structure for addressing homelessness in Victoria is under development, spurred by the significant increase in homelessness, heightened community awareness and concern, and recent community initiatives. As progress is made, it is expected that a new community governance structure will emerge to enhance and expedite efforts to address homelessness.

FOOTNOTES

¹ *Quality of Life in BC's Capital Region*, Community Council of Greater Victoria, 2005.

² Note: The information is drawn from a number of sources including: the Canada Census (1991, 1996, and 2001) and preliminary 2006 Census data, local service agency staff, and local/ government reports. The Data Tools Series A of the *Community Plan Assessment (CPA)*, completed as part of the HHBSC funding requirements and posted at www.ourwayhome.ca, provides further information.

³ Capital Region *Housing Affordability Strategy*, CRD, 2007, p. 13.

⁴ Based on information from an interview with Al Kemp, Rental Owners and Manager's Association, September 25, 2007

⁵ Based on information obtained from Stan Schopp, Manager, Development and Regulatory Services, City of Victoria, May 1, 2007 by email.

⁶ *Victoria CMA – Rental Market Report*, CMHC, Released December 2006.

⁷ BC Stats, *Community Facts*, City of Victoria and Capital Regional District, May 15, 2007.

⁸ *Homelessness in Greater Victoria: Perceptions of the general and business publics*, Artemis PR & Design, 2007.

⁹ The 2007 Assets Inventory should be referred to for a fuller description of the facilities, programs and services directly serving and accessible to the Victoria CMA's homeless and homeless at-risk populations.

¹⁰ *Based on 417 identified in the Community Plan Assessment, plus new units purchased by BC Housing, new units coming on line from SCPI-Phase II and youth units.*