greater victoria coalition to end homelessness

hope has found a home

Solving Homelessness in British Columbia's Capital Region: A Community Plan

April 2012 - 2015
Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At least 1,958 people used an emergency shelter bed in 2010-2011.[1] Others lived on the street and did not seek shelter. Many more stayed temporarily with family and friends, a hidden experience of homelessness.

Thousands more are at risk of homelessness in our community. Homelessness is an extreme form of poverty characterized by unstable housing and inadequate income, health care supports and social supports.[2] In 2006, one in eight families in Greater Victoria lived in housing that was either inadequate, in disrepair or unaffordable.[3] In 2008, one in six families in Greater Victoria lived on low income.[4]

The solutions to end homelessness are as diverse as homelessness itself, and we all have a role to play in ending homelessness. The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society[5] (the Coalition) is a partnership of all levels of government, service providers, business members, the faith community, post-secondary institutions and private citizens.

This Community Plan is a summary of the common vision and strategies identified by these partners to focus action over the next three years in the Capital Regional District towards ending homelessness. The Community Plan is intended to be a catalyst for action by a range of community partners including agencies serving people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The Coalition is not solely responsible for implementing the Plan. Rather, the Plan is a framework for organizations to work together to achieve common goals, and to assist the community to make the best possible use of scarce resources by reducing overlap and duplication.

Throughout this Plan, Greater Victoria is used to refer to the Capital Regional District, which includes the Southern Gulf Islands , Salt Spring Island and the Juan de Fuca electoral area.

Priority 1: Increase the supply of safe, decent, affordable, permanent housing, including supported housing.
Priority 2: Prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and assist people who are at risk of homelessness.
Priority 3: Support people while they are experiencing homelessness.
Priority 4: Ensure a coordinated and comprehensive community response to homelessness.
Priority 5: Build public and political support to end homelessness.

The Community Plan is a summary of priorities that, when acted upon, will contribute to ending homelessness. It is endorsed by the Coalition and its partners and collaborators.

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[1] Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2011). *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11.*
[2] The Homeless Hub 2009). *Backgrounder: What is Homelessness?*
<http://www.homelesshub.ca/Library/View.aspx?id=46114&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>
[3] Statistics Canada (2006).
[4] Victoria Foundation (2011). *Victoria's Vital Signs.*
5 See Appendix A for a list of Coalition partners and members, and Appendix B for the Coalition's Vision, Values and Principles.

INTRODUCTION

Vision: By 2018, all people facing homelessness in our community will have access to safe, affordable, appropriate, permanent housing, with support if they require it. This will be provided in a coordinated, accessible and effective manner.

Profile

Homelessness is an extreme form of poverty. Inadequate income, whether from low wages, income assistance or employment insurance contribute to generational poverty for many individuals and families.   When it comes to poverty or loss of housing (including the threat of losing housing), many citizens are vulnerable. The profile is broad and includes children, youth, families, working people and seniors. More than a fifth are Aboriginal although only 3.4% of Greater Victoria's population are of Aboriginal heritage.[6] A large proportion of homeless people have cognitive disabilities, and some have mental illness or substance use issues.

Purpose

This Community Plan is a summary of the common vision and strategies identified by Coalition partners to focus action over the next three years in the Capital Regional District towards ending homelessness. The Community Plan is intended to be a catalyst for action by a range of community partners including agencies serving people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Partners[7]

The solutions to end homelessness are as diverse as homelessness itself, and we all have a role to play in finding and implementing solutions. The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society (the Coalition) is a partnership of all levels of government, service providers, business members, the faith community, post-secondary institutions and private citizens. The Community Plan was created through consultation with the Coalition's many partners, community champions, members and volunteers.

Along with income, education, and occupation, and access to adequate nutrition, having a home is widely recognized as a social determinant of health for everyone. The Coalition notes that organizations that provide a range of social, employment, skill development, health and food-related services bring critical insights to the question of how homes fit into the mosaic of health and wellness among marginalized individuals and sub-populations in the Capital Regional District.

Process

The community planning process was guided by detailed studies completed by Coalition partners, as well as the Capital Regional District Strategic Plan and Victoria Vital Signs reports. These resources complemented the direct input from community partners, together providing invaluable information on service gaps, priorities and potential strategies, and their recommendations are woven into the Community Plan. The final set of priorities was approved both by the Management Committee and Leadership Council of the Coalition. Appendix A provides more detail on the planning process.

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6 Statistics Canada (2006).
7 See Appendix A for list of member organizations and partners.

Implementation

In a 2010 review of hundreds of Community Plans to end homelessness, the US National Alliance to End Homelessness identified four factors that lead to successful plan implementation: identifying an organization responsible for implementation, identifying a funding source, setting measurable outcomes and setting a clear implementation timeline.[8]

In keeping with these best practices, the Coalition will support implementation of this Community Plan, work with service providers, and report on progress towards the priorities along the implementation timeline. The Coalition is not solely responsible for implementing the Plan. Rather, the Plan is a framework for organizations to work together to achieve common goals, and to assist the community to make the best possible use of scarce resources by enhancing collaboration and integration. Implementation of the Plan will involve a variety of community partners, some outside the Coalition's formal membership. The Plan is available to any organization to inform its own strategic planning and setting of funding, program and service priorities. Coalition partners should be able to see their organization's role reflected in this Community Plan.

There are five major sources of funding to create and maintain transitional, supported and permanent affordable housing in the Capital Region:

- Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy
- the Capital Regional District Regional Housing Trust
- Government of British Columbia
- United Way of Greater Victoria
- Vancouver Island Health Authority

Additional funding sources include the Victoria Foundation, the private sector and community agencies.

A good example of the kind of partnerships the Coalition hopes to encourage is the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. This is a funding program through Human Resources Skills Development Canada that relies on communities to determine their own needs and to develop appropriate projects. Over 2011-2014, Greater Victoria will receive $1.8 million through this program, of which approximately 30% is designated for projects targeting Aboriginal communities. Acting as the Community Advisory Board to the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Coalition helps to allocate the Strategy's funding to projects in the Capital Region that create and maintain transitional and supportive housing that responds to the diverse needs of homeless and at-risk populations.

> *"When it comes to child poverty, [Canada] ranks 22nd-worst out of the 31 countries in the OECD, a rich-country grouping. [....] In the 1980s and 1990s [vulnerable groups] suffered cuts in welfare payments [...] when governments, both federal and provincial, cut public spending to restore fiscal health.*
>
> *"One of the keenest slashers was British Columbia, which despite being one of the richest provinces has one of the highest rates of child poverty (10.4%) after taxes on family income. Critics of such policies say that children who grow up in poverty forfeit the chance to prosper as adults, or to become productive workers."*
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> - The Economist, 'Mean Streets: The Persistence of Poverty among Plenty' (November 25, 2011)

The Coalition also works with partners to share information on service gaps and community priorities to inform funding decisions. The Community Plan is a summary of priorities that, when acted upon, will contribute to ending homelessness. It is endorsed by the Coalitions and its partners and collaborators.

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[8] National Alliance to End Homelessness (2009). *A Shifting Focus - What's New in Community Plans to End Homelessness.* Washington, DC.

HOMELESSNESS IN OUR REGION

Definition
Homelessness and housing insecurity include:
- Rooflessness (without a shelter of any kind, e.g. sleeping outdoors)
- Houselessness (temporary, e.g. institution or shelter)
- Insecurely housed (e.g. insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence)
- Inadequately housed (e.g. substandard housing, mould infestation, overcrowding)[9]

Profile
There is no single profile of a typical homeless person – seniors and youth, families and single adults, people with varying degrees of substance use and mental health, Aboriginal people, Caucasians and all ethnicities, able-bodied, and people with disabilities all can experience homelessness. Yet we know that some are at greater risk.

Events that contribute to homelessness include job loss, an illness, an eviction, or acquired brain injury. For some, these are recoverable setbacks; for others, especially those marginalized by poverty, substance use, mental health and discrimination, they are part of a pathway to homelessness. In BC's Capital Region, with our critical lack of low-cost housing, many people are more vulnerable to homelessness.

The Capital Regional District includes rural as well as urban individuals and families. Research shows that Canadians in rural areas face additional barriers in accessing secure housing.[10] The costs of transportation and relocation can be significantly higher for rural individuals than for their urban counterparts. At the same time, it can be difficult to maintain privacy when accessing social services such as mental health or addiction supports. The risks – whether real or perceived – of seeking supports can be a barrier.

> *"Rural-focused solutions must be sought to address the needs of those that do not live in urban areas. Mobile services and hospital vans are identified as solutions to help mental health service consumers access the help that they need. Research can also be used to advocate for the need for affordable housing funding to be reallocated to the province so that the responsibility is not on the shoulders of the smaller municipalities."*
>
> - Cheryl Forchuk et al, *Gaining Ground, Losing Ground: The Paradoxes of Rural Homelessness*

Measuring homelessness
There are no easy ways to count all the people who are homeless in our region.

To better understand the scope of housing need, the Coalition collaborated with the University of Victoria's Centre for Addictions Research of BC and the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria to conduct a count of people staying in temporary accommodation on the night of February 2, 2011. This count did not include those who were sleeping outdoors, couch surfing, or living in overcrowded or inadequate accommodation, and therefore is an underestimate of the number of people needing permanent, affordable housing.

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9 European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless (2005) *European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.*
10 C. Forchuk et al. (2010). *Gaining Ground, Losing Ground: The Paradoxes of Rural Homelessness*. Canadian Journal of Nursing Research, 42:2.

The data collected for this snapshot indicate that on the night of February 2, 2011, 1,143 people in Greater Victoria sought shelter in temporary accommodation. Of these, 1,052 were sheltered in 63 facilities, while 91 individuals were turned away.[11]

Other data sources provide insight into the scope of homelessness and housing vulnerability in our region. For example, at least 1,958 people accessed an emergency shelter bed in 2010-2011, and clients had an average of three or more admissions per year, with an average of six nights per stay. This suggests that clients may move in and out of emergency shelters and from homelessness to being vulnerably housed or at risk of homelessness.[12]

Our understanding of how many people are in urgent need of housing is often limited by the number of people who can be served by emergency housing supports, because these are places where people can be counted.

In 2010/11, the emergency shelter occupancy rate was 95%, 9% higher than the 86% occupancy rate recorded in 2008/09. When shelters reach high levels of occupancy, operators are forced to turn people away. On the night of the February 2, 2011 facility count, 35 individuals were turned away from emergency shelters.[13]

Housing is:

A key social determinant of health
A necessary component of harm reduction
Essential in keeping families together and producing healthy, active, productive youth
Fundamental to supporting vulnerable individuals, including youth, families in transition, seniors, rural communities, Aboriginal people, and those challenged by mental illness, substance dependence and physical health challenges

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11 Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2011). *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11.*
12 Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2011). *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11.*
13 Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2011). *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11.*

PRIORITIES

The Community Plan to End Homelessness in BC's Capital Region identifies these five priorities for action.

Priority 1: Increase the supply of safe, decent, affordable, permanent housing, including supported housing.

> Build or start 180 new units of housing with support, towards the 2018 goal of 420 new units.
> Acquire 126 units for housing with support, towards the 2018 goal of 295 acquired units.
> Enable access to housing with 105 new rent supplements, towards the 2018 goal of 245 new rent supplements.
> Increase the stock of safe, decent, affordable rental housing.

Priority 2: Prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and assist people who are at risk of homelessness.

> Strengthen interagency capacity to prevent homelessness.
> Increase supports for people at imminent risk of losing housing with access to temporary emergency supports.
> Identify warning indicators of situations that may lead to homelessness. A wide range of service providers could use these indicators to offer early interventions.
> Improve timely access to safe, affordable housing and strengthen the supports necessary to maintain that housing for at-risk youth, at-risk families, Aboriginal people, adults with cognitive impairments and adults transitioning from institutions to the community.

Priority 3: Support people while they are experiencing homelessness.

> Strengthen interagency capacity to assist people while they are homeless.
> Increase the stock of transitional housing to support people experiencing homelessness in their move towards self-sufficiency and independence.

Priority 4: Ensure a coordinated, comprehensive community response to homelessness.

> Ensure the sustainability of the Coalition Secretariat.
> Build the voice of the experiential community into the work of end homelessness.
> Work with municipalities, Capital Regional District, service providers, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Children and Family Development, and BC Housing to enhance coordination and align strategies to improve program outcomes.
> Strengthen coordinated access to a range of support services that assist individuals and families to maintain tenancy.

Priority 5: Build public and political support to end homelessness.

> Strengthen public awareness about the realities and solutions to ending homelessness throughout the region.
> Identify and promote policy changes at the local, regional, provincial and federal level.

PRIORITY ONE: INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF SAFE, DECENT, AFFORDABLE, PERMANENT HOUSING, INCLUDING SUPPORTED HOUSING.

Rationale

Lack of affordable housing is one reason the rate of homelessness continues to grow.

The Plan

Build 180 new units of housing with support, towards the 2018 goal of 420 new units.

Acquire 126 units for housing with support, towards the 2018 goal of 295 acquired units.

Enable access to housing with 105 new rent supplements, towards the 2018 goal of 245 new rent supplements.

Increase the stock of safe, decent, affordable, rental housing.

Some strategies to achieve the Plan

Advocate for extension of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (federal program) beyond March 31, 2014.

Municipal councillors and electoral area directors to advocate (through membership on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and other provincial bodies and associations) for sustainable funding to support the increase of affordable housing stock.

Develop strategies to prevent the loss of private rental housing stock.

Create incentives to encourage repair and maintenance of aging rental housing stock.

Support the implementation of a regional affordable housing levy.

Offer incentives such as: pre-development grants, development application fee rebate, building permit fee rebate and property tax rebate to stimulate the development of rental housing[14]

Increase the supply of affordable rental housing by fostering community investment in, and collaboration with cooperative, non-profit, private rental and faith-based housing sectors.

Explore opportunities to repurpose vacant buildings for housing.

Ensure sustainability of the Streets to Homes Program.

Bolster the Regional Housing Trust Fund.

A housing-first strategy is increasingly seen as the best practice for combating homelessness. In housing first, the approach is to provide the housing with the supports to help retain housing and address other challenges. Some tenants will still not succeed at retaining this housing, despite supports, and housing advocates note the importance of ensuring that supports that come with housing follow the person even if they leave. New housing should also be able to respond to the diversity of need among homeless people by providing a variety of housing forms and support level. This approach differs from traditional linear-housing programs in which clients must complete treatment or demonstrate their readiness to be housed as a prerequisite to obtaining housing.

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14 City of Calgary, Office of Land Servicing and Housing (2012). "Financial Incentive Pilot Program."

Rent, vacancy rates, affordability

Despite some recent improvements, Greater Victoria remains one of Canada's least affordable regions. *Rental prices* have been steadily increasing in Victoria for all apartment types. Rent is considered affordable when households are not required to pay more than 30% of their before-tax income each month for housing that is in good repair and free of overcrowding. Greater Victoria is Canada's fifth most expensive region in which to rent a two-bedroom unit. Greater Victoria's rental affordability indicator has been decreasing since 2007, indicating that the region remains unaffordable to many of its residents.[15]

Vacancy rates remain low, particularly for smaller units. The vacancy rate for bachelor suites was 0.8%, with an overall vacancy rate for all units of 1.5%.[16] With high demand for limited units, landlords often choose not to rent to tenants they perceive as riskier, which may further marginalize youth, families and Aboriginal people.

Housing Affordability is a key factor, because average rents are higher than many people can afford. Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poor people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, childcare, health care, transportation and education. Difficult choices must be made when financial resources are limited, and often resulting in the loss of stable, permanent housing.

If you are poor, you will likely experience frequent moves, and often is essentially one accident, illness, or late paycheque away from eviction.

Rent supplements and follow-up support workers can help some people afford and access existing private market rental housing. In 2010/11, BC Housing provided 2,235 Rental Assistance Program and Shelter Aid for Elderly Residents rent supplements.[17]

Sample monthly income	
Basic income assistance:	**$661.67**
Designated rent:	**$375**
Full time minimum wage:	**$1,313.67**
Affordable rent*:	**$395**
Early childhood educator:	**$2,469**
Affordable rent*:	**$740**

*defined as 30% of gross income

Average monthly rent	
Bachelor:	**$676**
1-bedroom:	**$819**
2-bedroom:	**$1,045**
3-bedroom:	**$1,244**

- Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. (2011). Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11. Victoria, BC.

Demand increases

The stock of affordable housing is increasing at a modest rate, but there is much more to do. The number of purpose-built rental apartments, estimated to be 23,287 units, increased by 51 units since October 2010. This modest increase is related to the actual construction of a small number of new rental market units but it also reflects that when units are undergoing renovations, they are counted in existing rental market stock. Once the renovations are complete, these units are re-captured in the rental market thus appearing as an increase in the supply.[18] The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation forecasts that rental demand will continue to increase in 2012, as enrolment levels are expected to increase at post-secondary institutions and the addition of new jobs in the region.

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15 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2010). *Rental Market Report, Canada Highlights.*
16 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2010). *Rental Market Report, Victoria CMA.*
17 Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2011). *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11.*
18 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2011). *Rental Market Report, Victoria CMA.*

Building more affordable housing requires a multi-pronged approach addressing regulatory policies and procedures, incentives, funding and innovative urban planning. In the Capital Region, there is an opportunity for leadership to emerge from one or more organizations including:

Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, which works to strengthen policy tools and incentives, and monitors housing trends in the region;

Victoria Real Estate Board, which brings together private sector stakeholders;

Capital Regional District which, through their staff and the Regional Housing Trust Fund, contributes directly to the development of, and planning for, affordable housing options in the region.

Constructing new housing takes time. Assuming a new site has been identified, a project can take at least two years from the start of the design through approvals, financing, permits, and construction. Unfortunately, there are few readily available, publicly owned sites for housing in Greater Victoria. Additionally, land and construction costs have been high, further complicating securing sufficient funding to make units affordable for very low incomes. All these factors contribute to slowing the process of building more affordable housing, yet it remains an essential component of the vision to end homelessness.

Building new housing is a necessary long-term strategy.

PRIORITY TWO: PREVENT INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES FROM BECOMING HOMELESS AND ASSIST PEOPLE WHO ARE AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS.

Rationale
Without prevention, homelessness will not end. Even as service providers are supporting people to transition from a life of homelessness, others are falling victim. To eliminate homelessness, we must break the cycle that leads to it.

The Plan
Strengthen interagency capacity to prevent homelessness.

Increase supports for people at imminent risk of losing housing by providing access to temporary emergency supports.

Identify warning indicators of situations that may lead to homelessness. A wide range of service providers could use these indicators to offer early interventions.

Improve timely access to safe, affordable housing and strengthen the supports necessary to maintain that housing for at-risk youth, at-risk families, Aboriginal people, adults with cognitive impairments and adults transitioning from institutions to the community throughout the entire region.

Strategies to achieve the Plan

Connect people at risk of homelessness with appropriate programs (e.g., income assistance, housing outreach programs, mental health services and addictions treatment, employment training, life-skills training, meal programs).

Strengthen discharge planning services to support the transition from corrections facilities, foster care or treatment institutions to the community.

Provide people with tenancy information and legal support to ensure their rights are protected.

Increase emergency assistance initiatives such as the Homelessness Prevention Fund (which provides one-time rent or utility assistance) to housed individuals or families.

Enhance outreach services and connection to a range of support services to promote rapid re-housing.

Undertake prevention initiatives that can offer cost-effective ways of containing homelessness.[19]

Coordinating our efforts
While significant steps have taken place to improve interagency coordination and collaboration for those who are already homeless, the same capacity needs to be developed to support prevention efforts. One of the biggest challenges will be to build effective interagency responses at transition points – sometimes the policies of one ministry conflict with the policies of another at the point where a transition needs to occur. A recent example of interagency coordination is the Centralized Access to Supported Housing initiative, through which community agencies identify potential tenants and refer them to a coordinator. The coordinator maintains an

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19 A research study undertaken for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation examined the cost-effectiveness of eviction prevention programs. It concluded that the costs of eviction are substantial, for landlords, for tenants and for taxpayers. Key success factors identified in the study for preventing evictions include direct outreach and early intervention. (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2005). *Research Highlight: Cost Effectiveness of Eviction Prevention Programs.*

updated vacancy inventory and works with a Selection Committee to make recommendations matching tenants with vacant supported housing units. These recommendations are forwarded to the relevant housing provider for the final decision.

Additional tools are needed to facilitate prompt responses for people at imminent risk of losing their housing. Factors that precipitate loss of housing include: failure to pay rent, damage to the rental unit, and unacceptable behaviour. Each is amplified by issues such as job or other income loss, chronic illness, mental health issues, substance misuse and cognitive deficits. The current social safety net has limited crisis intervention tools.

Some people may still fall through the cracks.

Evidence supports programs such as cash assistance (e.g., rent bank), asset and resiliency building, life skills development, and housing mediation. One recent development of this type of programming is the Homelessness Prevention Fund. Created through the Victoria Foundation, the Homelessness Prevention Fund works with community based partners[20] to provide one-time emergency grants to individuals and families to help stabilize their housing. In 2011, 82 individuals and 30 families accessed the Homelessness Prevention Fund to maintain their housing.

Focusing on those at highest risk
The prevention strategies outlined below focus on seven populations: persons living in rural communities, families living in poverty, abused women and their families, youth, Aboriginal people, individuals with cognitive impairments and individuals transitioning from institutional to community care. While prevention strategies are needed for all individuals and families at risk in our community, these demographic groups face specific vulnerabilities that require targeted intervention.

Rural: For all partner organizations whose offices are located in the City of Victoria, a daily challenge is bringing appropriate focus to those communities facing significant barriers related to housing affordability.   In Greater Victoria, this means drawing attention to untenable circumstances of communities outside of downtown Victoria. The municipalities with the highest per capita incidence of core housing need – where residents are forced to consistently use more than 30% of their income for rent/mortgage, or housing is in need of major repair, or is overcrowded – are our rural communities.

The municipalities or electoral area with the highest incidences of core housing need are:
> Salt Spring Island (23.5%)
> City of Victoria (20.1%)
> Southern Gulf Islands (18.5%)
> Esquimalt (17.9%)

Families living in poverty: With child poverty rates at about 20% and one of the most expensive housing markets in Canada, many families in the Capital Regional District face enormous obstacles.[21]

A two-parent family with two children needs to work a combined 70-hour work week earning $18.03 an hour ($65,620 annually) to afford an adequate standard of living in Greater Victoria. The same family, with both parents earning $9.50 minimum wage, earns $34,200 annually.[22]

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20 Victoria Cool Aid Society, Pacifica Housing, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Our Place Society, Burnside Gorge Community Centre, St. Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, Together Against Poverty Society, Ministry of Social Development, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society and Mustard Seed.
21 First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (2011). *2011 Child Poverty Report Card.* Vancouver, BC.
22 Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria (2011). *Affordability Index 2011.*

A lack of economic security is often the trigger for tipping families into homelessness, and other underlying factors will, if not addressed, increase the likelihood of a family becoming homeless and remaining homeless. Family life is influenced by a range of factors such as single parenthood, lack of affordable child care and substance misuse or family violence, which all have a strong influence on the parent's ability to get a job and keep it, and to find and maintain safe, decent, affordable permanent housing.

In the short term, important first steps will be taking action to identify families at risk, link them to available resources and expand access to short term emergency funds. In the longer term, much more effort needs to be made to develop affordable, supported housing alternatives for at risk families.

Abused women and their families: While abused women and their families also experience poverty and lack of decent, affordable housing, there are a few key differences between the needs of abused and non-abused families. These differences include personal safety, trauma-related health issues and the emotional impact of the abuse. About 20% of women who exit abusive relationships continue to be exposed to violence after the separation.[23] Emergency shelters may not always provide a safe space for homeless women and their families, as a result, may resort to couch surfing with friends or family.

Youth: Many young people experience successful transitions from living with their families to independent living. However, youth who experience family instability, family violence and conflict, negative experiences in government care, and undiagnosed mental health challenges, among other factors, often face challenges in terms of securing appropriate housing. These youth are at higher-risk than their peers of experiencing homelessness. A 2007 study, found that marginalized and street-involved youth were three times more likely to have been physically and sexually abused than youth the same age who were not street-involved[24]. In addition, service providers in Greater Victoria estimate that between 250 and 300 youth are experiencing homelessness. While many youth are able to live independently with little supports, youth who have experienced trauma, and/or experience other challenges require a higher level of support.

Similarly, young people transitioning from provincial care to adulthood do not have access to the level of support available when they were a youth-in care although developmentally, very little may have changed for them on reaching 19. Some youth experience conflict in their families which neither the youth nor family have the tools to deal with including issues of family violence, sexual abuse and conflict over sexual orientation. Over 50% of homeless youth aged under 19 (72% for females; 33% for males) interviewed for the McCreary study had experienced sexual abuse in their home of origin.[25]

Aboriginal: Up to 40% of all children in care on South Vancouver Island are Aboriginal,[26] and 22% of people who used emergency shelters in Greater Victoria in 2011 were Aboriginal, whereas Aboriginal people represent 3.4% of the local population.[27]

The legacy of homelessness and inadequate housing can be traced to the Indian Act and the creation of reserves and residential schools. Aboriginal communities are among those most affected by homelessness and a lack of

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23 Patterson, M. (2007). The Faces of Homelessness Across BC. *Visions: BC's Mental Health and Addictions Journal*. 4:1.
24 The McCreary Centre Society (2007). *Against the Odds: A profile of marginalized and street-involved youth in BC*. Burnaby, BC.
25 The McCreary Centre Society (2002). *Between the Cracks: Homeless Youth in Vancouver.* Burnaby, BC.
26 Victoria Foundation (2011). *Victoria's Vital Signs.*
27 Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2011). *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11.*

stable housing. The Victoria Native Friendship Centre is working to change this by addressing the intergenerational effects of poverty that can lead to homelessness. For many, the greatest needs are housing, health services and family services. A proposed strategy, *Finding Our Path: Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness*, was endorsed by the Coalition in 2011. Our shared vision is to work together in a strong and inclusive way to ensure that all Aboriginal people have access to housing and holistic support along the full continuum of homelessness to sustainable housing.

Cognitively impaired adults: Individuals with cognitive impairment (e.g., acquired brain injury, mental illness, substance misuse, developmental disabilities, fetal alcohol syndrome and autism spectrum disorder) face additional obstacles in getting and keeping housing and often face stigma and discrimination. Their impairment may make it difficult to understand information and to follow through on instructions. It is not always easy to tell if a person has a cognitive impairment and landlords and agency workers may assume a degree of competency that is not there. Strengthening the capacity of the system to identify persons with cognitive deficits and better understand how to successfully work with them will be an important step in keeping this population from falling through the cracks. Some people with cognitive impairments may need lifelong supports to succeed in the community.

Agencies such as BC Brain Injury Association, Community Living BC, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Fetal Alcohol Disorders Society, Cridge Centre for the Family, Ministry of Children and Family Development, University of Victoria and Royal Roads University are important partners in addressing the complex needs of this population.

Individuals in transition: Transitioning from an institution back to the community can be challenging for anyone. For those facing additional barriers such as poverty, illness, and social exclusion, the challenge may feel insurmountable.

Effective transitioning, whether from a hospital, correctional facility, or other institutions, requires pre-release/discharge planning and a coordinated hand-off from one agency to another. To ensure successful transition, individuals must have immediate access to financial resources, housing options, and follow-up supports until stabilized. In some cases, additional challenges – such as the unpredictability of the release date for the remand population in correctional facilities can result in some high risk individuals being released without the necessary supports to make a successful transition into the community.

PRIORITY THREE: SUPPORT PEOPLE WHILE THEY ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

Rationale
Homelessness is not simply being without a home; it is being without the essentials of physical and mental health and wellness.

The Plan

Strengthen interagency capacity to assist people while they are homeless.
Increase the stock of transitional housing to support people experiencing homelessness in their move towards self-sufficiency and independence.

Some strategies to achieve the Plan

Build capacity of vulnerable individuals and families by prioritizing employment, skill development and training opportunities, tenancy education and budget management.
Improve housing affordability for families and individuals (e.g., provide rent supplements).
Expand existing outreach to landlords and property owners to address barriers, explore private-public partnerships and increase awareness.
Consult with service providers in other jurisdictions to stay abreast of new innovative solutions and best practices that could be incorporated in Greater Victoria.
Evaluate and share emerging research related to homelessness to inform program planning, funding allocation and service delivery models.
Link development, renovation and maintenance of social housing stock with training and employment opportunities to build the capacity of prospective tenants.
Support the growth of ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) and VICOT (Victoria Integrated Community Outreach Team) which help to stabilize individuals with severe and persistent addiction and mental health problems.

There are many competing demands for scarce public funding. Social service agencies are regularly asked to do more with less, meeting ever-rising demands for service with reduced funding. This plan advocates introducing new long-term solutions with current essential supports for people who are homeless.

Undermining health
Housing is among the foundational resources that all individuals require for physical and mental health.

The average length of hospital stay for a person who has been identified as homeless is 3.17 days longer than the average length of stay of a housed person, costing an additional $2,000 per person, per year.[28] Health and dental services available through the Access

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> **Social Determinants of Health**
> - *Income*
> - *Education*
> - *Employment*
> - *Early childhood development*
> - *Food security*
> - *Housing*
> - *Social exclusion*
> - *Social safety net*
> - *Health services*
> - *Aboriginal status*
> - *Sex*
> - *Race*
> - *Disability*
>
> -J. Mikkonen and D. Raphael, *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*

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28 Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2010). Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports.

Health Centre (a partnership between the Victoria Cool Aid Society and AIDS Vancouver Island) or St. Vincent de Paul are essential in reducing hospital use in cases where care is more appropriately delivered in settings other than the hospital.

The provision of secure housing is itself an important aspect of harm reduction in the area of substance abuse and dependence. Current research shows that removing sobriety as a requirement for participation in a housing program may be more effective than the carrot-and-stick approach of making housing contingent upon recovery.[29]

Addressing hunger
In March 2010, 21,180 individuals used Greater Victoria food banks. The greatest increase in use was at the Sooke Food Bank, where 26.4% more people were served in March 2010 compared to March 2009.[30] People experiencing homelessness rely on the invaluable supports provided through agencies with meal and food bank programs such as Our Place Society and the Mustard Seed. For people who are homeless outside of the downtown core, it can be additionally challenging to access services, despite the best efforts of agencies such as Salt Spring Island Community Services.

Supports with impact
The Capital Regional District is fortunate to have many agencies that provide a range of supports for people experiencing homelessness. These range from physical supports (snacks, socks, blankets) to emotional supports (conversation, a feeling of community). Both are necessary to trigger and sustain a sense of hope. During Homelessness Action Week events in Victoria and on Salt Spring Island bring together local service providers and volunteers provide additional information sharing and free services, including a barbecue lunch, replacement of identification, income tax returns, resume development and grooming services.

Transitional housing
For people who have been homeless, transitional housing is an essential intermediate step from living on the streets or in an emergency shelter to having one's own place. Transitional housing is typically offered for the short term, e.g. from 30 days to two or three years, and includes the provision of support services, on or off-site, to help support the move towards self-sufficiency. Transitional or second-stage housing includes housing for women fleeing abuse.

Outreach advances transition from homelessness to housed.

Outreach supports in Greater Victoria have increased, particularly with the addition of the Assertive Community Treatment teams and Victoria Integrated Community Outreach Team. This coordinated response shows a welcome shift from emergency response to permanent solutions.

We know that some people cycle through a range of housing status – from housed to homeless or staying in health facilities or correctional facilities. Through BC Housing's Emergency Shelter Program and Homelessness Outreach Program, and Assertive Community Treatment teams, hundreds of people have been housed during the period of 2009-2011.[31]

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29 B. Pauly et al. (2011). *Housing and Harm Reduction: A Policy Framework for Greater Victoria*. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.
30 Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2011). *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11.*
31 Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2010, 2011). *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2009/10* and *Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2010/11.*

PRIORITY FOUR: ENSURE A COORDINATED, COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS.

Rationale
The scope, complexity and importance of housing issues require long-term planning that is fully integrated into core municipal projections and budgets.

The Plan
Ensure the sustainability of the Coalition Secretariat.

Build the voice of the experiential community into the work of ending homelessness.

Work with municipalities, Capital Regional District, service providers, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Children and Family Development, and BC Housing to enhance coordination and align strategies to improve program outcomes.

Strengthen coordinated access to a range of support services that assist individuals and families to secure and maintain tenancy.

Some strategies to achieve the Plan

Secure ongoing core funding to support the Coalition Secretariat.

Continue to foster information sharing and alignment of protocols, consent forms and resources to create efficiencies and improve communication among service providers.

Conduct research that maps the transitions from homelessness to housed to home, to better identify gaps, barriers to access and outcome post-discharge.

Identify mechanisms and strategies to foster social inclusion.

Bring decision-makers from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Ministry of Health, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Ministry of Social Development and BC Housing to a common table with the goal of improving service coordination and funding.

Identify service gaps throughout the Capital Regional District

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In the fall of 2011, an evaluation of the Coalition's contribution to the work to end homelessness identified that its most significant contribution had been bringing a broad array of organizations to the table to talk about homelessness. As well, the Coalition was seen to have successfully achieved the following:

Kept homelessness top of mind for the public;

Engaged local governments, especially outside the core;

Spurred local housing and homelessness research;

Supported agencies to work together in a more integrated manner;

Supported the development of new housing, rent supplements, and increased access for at-risk tenants to the private rental market.

The Coalition acts as a connector for the many groups working to end homelessness and providing support for people experiencing homelessness. These include access to addiction and mental health treatment services close to home; home support for seniors to promote aging in place; employment services; identification replacement, and services for families at risk and women in transition.

The Coalition is a focal point for conversations and a repository of information. As our community moves forward towards a comprehensive Plan for ending homelessness, an organization is needed to support implementation of the Plan, work with service providers, and report on progress on the priorities along the implementation timeline. The Coalition Secretariat can also continue to act as a neutral third party in the development of collaborative initiatives that often would be harder to organize through a single service provider.

Social Inclusion
Social exclusion is a major issue facing people in poverty and who experience homelessness. The opportunity to participate in decision making processes is a key component of both inclusion and provision of appropriate services.

Share the living experience of people who are homeless.

The Coalition continues to work to develop processes for meaningful inclusion in collaboration with people affected by poverty and homelessness in the Capital Region. Examples of work so far includes the Coalition's Experiential Advisory Committee, which strove to provide a non-threatening, non-judgmental open forum for people who were homeless to share their stories, talk about current issues and barriers, and articulate what needs to be changed in the systems that should support, enable and enrich their lives.

Another approach to sharing the lived experience of people who are homeless is the Street Stories project, a photo documentary initiative designed to strengthen the capacity of the street community to inform and participate in solutions to ending homelessness.[32]

> *"When a community such as Victoria decides that things must change and every single person in our city must be treated with the dignity of basic housing and supports, it takes a highly skilled and committed team to put that decision into practice. The Coalition is a beacon of hope that within the decade, every single person in this city will be housed and supported in a life of dignity."*
>
> - Retired Rev. Harold Munn, Church of St. John the Divine

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32 Pauly, B., Cain, D., Henry, R., Krancevic, J. (2010). *Street Stories: Building Knowledge and Capacity for Change.* Presentation at Critical Conversations III: International, Indigenous, Intersectional. Third Annual Diversity Research Forum. University of Victoria: Victoria, BC.

PRIORITY FIVE: BUILD PUBLIC AND POLITICAL SUPPORT TO END HOMELESSNESS.

Rationale
To solve homelessness across our region requires the ongoing contributions of local, regional, provincial and federal governments, the private and non-profit sectors, and citizens of all ages.

The Plan:
> Strengthen public awareness about the realities and solutions to ending homelessness throughout the region.
> Identify and promote policy changes at the local, regional, provincial and federal level.

Some strategies to achieve the Plan
> Advance strategies and policies that create mixed-use diverse communities and a range of housing options.
> Encourage municipalities and electoral areas in the Capital Regional District to speak with one voice when negotiating for policy changes or funding from the regional, provincial and federal governments.
> Work with the Coalition and service providers to develop and execute the Community Plan to end homelessness in the Capital Regional District.

Priority Five is a critical enabler of the first four priorities. Addressing the systemic issues that contribute to homelessness will only happen if a heightened focus is aimed at homelessness as a priority issue of civic life in the Capital Regional District.

Keep homelessness top of mind, even if success impedes visibility.

Today, misconceptions about homelessness – such as the myth that homelessness is restricted to the downtown area – are common among the media, the public and local government. Continued efforts are necessary to correct misconceptions, to identify and promote best practices in relevant policy and legislative arenas, and to advance consensus among our municipal, provincial and federal governments.

Policy advances
Though there can be disagreement about what changes are needed, most who work in the sector agree that policy advances are part of the solution.

A paradox of the issues surrounding homelessness is that while there is a wealth of solutions that require policy adjustments, no single government or non-governmental organization is charged with the specific responsibility to "solve homelessness." The energy for change can dissipate in inter- and intra-organizational debate, slowing down the pace of translating ideas into action.

Only a renewed, concerted, inter-agency commitment will lead to real change.

Policies to reduce poverty and increase incomes

Some suggested priority arenas for policy development to reduce poverty include:

> A regional poverty reduction strategy, including a living wage policy*.
>
> Encouraging self-sufficiency by implementing earning exemptions for people on basic income assistance.
>
> More community economic development that enables participation of citizens in diverse circumstances.

*Efforts are being led by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria.

Policies to increase affordable housing

Key policy advances to increase affordable housing could include:

> Implement a National Housing Strategy.
>
> Increase long-term federal and provincial investment in affordable housing stock.
>
> Create an enabling policy environment that promotes the development of affordable housing units through creative zoning options, tax incentives, social and community financing options for housing developers.

Canada is one of the few OECD countries without a National Housing Strategy.   Increased long-term federal investment in housing, supplemented by current and future provincial investments, would significantly increase permanent housing stock. Similarly, a promising role for municipal governments is their ability to use the levers of zoning and taxation to attract and support inclusionary and affordable housing. This is a rich area for potential enhancement, as several municipalities in the Capital Regional District have the potential to increase their incentives for developers to build below-market housing or upgrade rental housing.

Policies to integrate services

Social service agencies and governments point to opportunities lost due to their respective planning and operational silos. Improved communication and joint planning could eliminate duplication, and the cost savings achieved could then be invested to fill current gaps in service. These include youth transitioning from foster care and patients who have nowhere to go when they leave withdrawal management or other treatment facilities.

The above are just some of the policy solutions that could make a measurable difference in the level and severity of homelessness in our region. They require media attention, public and political support, which is why Priority Five must underpin any comprehensive plan to end homelessness.

CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

What is food, without a table where food can be prepared and shared?
How can you find a job, when each day's work is finding a place to sleep?
What is rest, without a safe and secure place to lay your head?

Canada needs more resources for permanent, affordable housing, food, and other health supports for all those who live in poverty. Housing security is proven to be a key determinant of health and must be better integrated into the core of our health and social service priorities. For children and families the consequences of poverty and homelessness are particularly severe as they not only impact health but also education and the future prospects of the affected children and their families. This plan is both a framework and catalyst for government, non-profit agencies and organizations in Greater Victoria to work collaboratively. The ultimate goal is to remove the devastating physical, financial, and emotional effects of homelessness and poverty from the daily lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

Only policy advancements, public support and the commitment of our most senior elected officials will generate the ongoing financial investments needed to achieve this goal. The most important return on this investment is ensuring that more of our vulnerable citizens and neighbours can participate fully in the economy and their community, sustain their health and advance their education. Furthermore, providing a range of supports that prevent vulnerable individuals from falling into crisis is more cost effective for the broader community.

Priorities include creating new housing, preventing homelessness, rapid re-housing, service coordination, and increasing the engagement in poverty and homelessness issues of both our elected officials and the population at large.

The next 18 months are critical for the Coalition and its members, partners and collaborators to increase awareness, create buy-in and secure the commitment of government to support the priorities outlined in the community plan.

 We ask: if not now, when?

APPENDIX A: Coalition Partner and Member Organizations

Accent Inns
Anawim House*
AIDS Vancouver Island *
Beacon Community Services - SCAP
BC Housing
BC Schizophrenia Society
Burnside Gorge Community Centre
Capital Regional District
Capital Mental Health Association
Church of St. John the Divine*
City of Victoria *
Committee to End Homelessness
Community Living British Columbia
Community Social Planning Council *
Cridge Centre for the Family
District of Saanich (via CRD)
Downtown Churches Association
Downtown Service Providers *
Downtown Victoria Business Association *
Enterprise Project Management
Faith in Action
Federation of Community Social Services of BC
Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce
Greater Victoria Housing Society
M'akola Housing Society
Ministry of Children and Families
Ministry of Social Development *
Mustard Seed Street Church and Food Bank *
Our Place Society *
Pacifica Housing Advisory Association *
Rental Owners and Managers Society BC
Royal Roads University
Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Community
Services Society
Salvation Army *
Service Canada
Sooke Family Resource Centre
Southern Gulf Islands Electoral District (via CRD)
South Mid-Vancouver Island Zone Veterans Housing
Society
St. Vincent de Paul Society

The Bay Centre
Threshold Housing Society
Together Against Poverty Society *
Queenswood Consulting
Umbrella Society *
United Way of Greater Victoria *
University Canada West Academics
University of Victoria
Vancouver Island Health Authority *
Vancouver Island Regional Corrections Centre
Vancouver Island University
Victoria Conservatory of Music
Victoria Cool Aid Society *
Victoria Foundation
Victoria Immigration & Refugee Centre Society
Victoria Human Exchange Society
Victoria Native Friendship Centre *
Victoria Police Department *
Victoria Real Estate Board

*Note: Organizations noted with * are members of the Downtown Service Providers.*

Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness: Mission, Values, Principles

Our Vision

By 2018, all people facing homelessness in our community will have access to safe, affordable, appropriate, permanent housing, with support if they require it. This will be provided in a coordinated, accessible and effective manner.

Our Values

We respond to our community's needs. We strive to provide solutions that are integrated and sustainable.

We engage partners. We work across boundaries to engage partners in all levels of government, the non-profit sector, the private sector, funding agencies, post-secondary, service and housing providers, and our target populations

We are effective. We base our decisions and our actions on evidence and best practices that are most likely to achieve the Coalition's Vision. We respect the processes needed for action but focus on getting timely and sustainable results.

We provide leadership. We lead the action and resources and work hard to drive the community's commitment. We stay informed and contribute to the body of knowledge on ending homelessness. We learn from others and share our own information and best practices.

We are accountable. We are fully accountable to our community for our actions and results. We build trust in each other and collectively we build the community's trust in us. We are always ethical, honest and respectful.

Our Principles

People-centred. People come first. We will advocate for a variety of housing options and relevant supports in ways that best meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Seamlessness. Housing and supports will be integrated, coordinated and tailored to individual needs.

Accessibility. Access to appropriate housing and supports are a key component of our work. People will be served where they live and work.

Adaptability. People will be supported along their continuum of care as needed. Where appropriate, care and support will be culturally relevant and individualized to meet people's needs, with an emphasis on integration into the community.

Inclusiveness. Housing and supports will be provided to all people facing homelessness and will not be contingent on abstinence or treatment.

Research and Innovation. We embrace research and innovation, and seek to learn from our actions and share information and best practices with the community. We draw on evidence-based models, tailored to our specific context and seek to generate new knowledge.

Prevention. Identifying, mitigating and advocating for systemic change that addresses the root causes of poverty and homelessness will be key components of our prevention work.

Respectfulness, Dignity & Humility. We treat everyone with respect and dignity.

Community Engagement. We build a broad range of support for the work that we do and engage all members of the community in finding and implementing appropriate solutions

APPENDIX C: Developing the Community Plan

The Community Planning Working Group provided guidance in developing the Community Plan. The group consisted of:

Roger Girouard, Co-Chair, Management Committee

Debbie Thompson, past executive director, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

Kathy Stinson, Chair, Downtown Service Providers

Bernie Pauly, Research, Evaluation and Data Working Group

Maggie Kerr-Southin, past Communications and Planning Specialist, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

Marianne Alto, Chair, Experiential Advisory Group

The following outlines the process undertaken to develop the Community Plan:

The Leadership Council provided an outline of the key priorities for 2012-2015.

A Community Plan outline with input from Coalition Working Groups and Committees, which includes housing and social service providers, was developed.

The Community Planning Working Group met numerous times to develop the key messages, establish priorities and goals of the Plan.

Numerous resource materials and research reports were reviewed to provide local context, demographics, and current data in the Plan.

The draft Community Plan was prepared based on the activities described above.

The Plan was finalized based on feedback from Working Groups, Management Committee and the Leadership Council.

The Plan was signed off by the Management Committee on February 13, 2012 and Leadership Council on February 21, 2012.

The Community Plan was guided by the following Coalition resource materials:

2008-11 Coalition Strategic Plan

Leadership Council Strategic Planning Retreat Summary, July 27, 2010

Housing Procurement Plan (2008); currently under revision

A Plan to Prevent Homelessness (2010)

2009-10 Report on Housing and Supports

2010-11 Our Way Home: Aboriginal Housing Plan

2010-11 Report on Housing and Supports

Leadership Council Strategic Planning Retreat Summary, September 20, 2011

Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Community Plan

Additional references:

Capital Regional District Strategic Plan 2009-11, www.crd.bc.ca

Community Plan to Address Homelessness in York Region 2008 Update, www.york.ca

Victoria Vital Signs 2011, www.victoriafoundation.bc.ca

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, www.cmhc.ca