SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

For the BC Homelessness Action Plan

By Don Elliott, Executive Director
Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

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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 (Coalition) was formed in 2008 with a mission to end homelessness in Greater Victoria. The Coalition consists of service providers, non-profit organizations, all levels of government, businesses, post-secondary institutions, the faith community, people with a lived experience of homelessness, and members of the community. This diverse membership is referred to as Coalition Stakeholders.

Our Vision:

A Region Without Homelessness

Our Mission:

1. To ensure appropriate solutions are in place to serve those individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the capital region.

2. To ensure all people facing homelessness in the Capital Region have access to safe, affordable, appropriate, long-term housing.

greater victoria
coalition to end
homelessness
hope has found a home

PURPOSE

To inform the ongoing development of the BC Homelessness Action Plan with a focus on defining a strong vision, goal and target; establishing logical phases with identified actions; and detailing the role of community in supporting the implementation of a provincial plan focused on addressing homelessness.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the ongoing opportunities to provide input into the BC Homelessness Action Plan over the last number of months. The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (the Coalition) has enthusiastically participated in engagements related to both the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Homelessness Action Plan; we sincerely hope our contributions to-date have been useful in your ongoing work.

The Coalition also wishes to acknowledge the considerable provincial work currently underway, including the following key pieces:

- **30-Point Plan for Housing Affordability in British Columbia**
- **Province-wide Point in Time Count**
- **Poverty Reduction Strategy**
- **Mental Health and Addictions Strategy**
- **Enhancements to Agreements with Young Adults Program**

We see the development of the Homelessness Action Plan as the next critical step in working to make life more affordable, delivering services and building a strong, sustainable, innovative economy that works for everyone. Now is the time to deliver an action plan that is bold and ambitious, that will produce meaningful results, and that will have a positive impact on future generations of British Columbians

THE PLAN

Our submission contains three critical elements that are all key in informing the development of the BC Homelessness Action Plan:

1. **Vision, Goal and Target**
2. **Three Distinct Phases that include four key pillars**
3. **Implementation Structure and Program**

The Coalition is basing these three components on its proven track record of working collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders - including the grassroots community and all levels of government - to address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in British Columbia's capital region.

VISION, GOAL & TARGET

VISION

Communities across British Columbia are safe, healthy, vibrant, welcoming and supportive of people from all walks of life and at all stages in their life journey.

This proposed vision is adapted from the Ultimate Benefit we determined would be achieved by ending homelessness in the capital region. This was identified by the almost 100 stakeholders from 27 organizations who participated in the development of the Regional Housing First Strategy. This language was carefully crafted to detail the shared values that all in the room agreed were important aspects of 'community' and how this can also be inclusive of those who may be experiencing some form of marginalization and/or otherwise may not feel fully able to participate in all social and economic systems.

GOAL

British Columbians are prevented from becoming homeless, and those experiencing homelessness can choose an appropriate, safe and secure place to call home; receive support where they are at on their journey to better health; wellness and livelihood; feel valued and respected; and belong as meaningful contributors to community.

The goal focusses on two key pieces of addressing homelessness:

1. Prevent homelessness for those populations at greater risk, including Indigenous Peoples, youth, women fleeing violence, new-comers, refugees, men, and those with mental health and substance use challenges.

2. Meet the needs of those currently experiencing homelessness. Importantly, this goal also reflects both the best practice as identified in homelessness response literature and what we hear from members of the community currently experiencing homelessness. Our efforts to increase the housing stability of those individuals with a lived experience of homelessness must

   a. Include rapid housing and appropriate support services with no preconditions
   b. Offer individuals a choice in housing
   c. Separate the provision of housing from other services
   d. Provide individuals with tenancy rights and responsibilities
   e. Integrate housing into the community
   f. Offer accompanying support services that are strength-based and promote self-sufficiency

TARGET

Achieve Functional Zero of homelessness across British Columbia by 2028.

Functional Zero describes a situation in which the availability of services and resources match or exceed the demand for them by the target population; **Functional Zero** is considered a step toward achieving **Absolute Zero** in homelessness. In achieving Functional Zero, homelessness across the province will have reached a "steady state" or a balance in supply-demand while also ensuring that any experiences of homelessness will be rare, brief and non-recurring.

Importantly, Functional Zero, as a relative measurement of the state of homelessness, has a degree of built-in flexibility. It can allow communities to custom tailor their performance targets to local circumstances and priorities while still moving in a clear and measurable direction. This target also acknowledges that important progress can be made on the issues of homelessness without the expectation of eliminating all homelessness or imminent risk of homelessness.

Adoption of this target will help every community across the province move toward the elimination of homelessness while also enabling real time reporting on progress and a more informed ability to adjust strategies and allocate and/or redistribute resources.

What is Functional Zero?

JUNE

16 INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

>4 AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

4 HOUSING PLACEMENTS

JULY

14 INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

>3 AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

3 HOUSING PLACEMENTS

AUGUST

12 INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

>3 AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

3 HOUSING PLACEMENTS

SEPTEMBER

4 INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

≤4 AVERAGE MONTHLY HOUSING PLACEMENT RATE

☑ **Functional Zero Reached**

THREE PHASES

PHASE 1 – HAVE AN IMMEDIATE AND VISIBLE IMPACT 2019 - 2021

Phase 1 serves those individuals with the most complex barriers to housing, including those experiencing street and sheltered homelessness. It both addresses the **immediate need** across the province and builds the foundation for **greater partnering and collaboration**.

This phase is focussed specifically on addressing two principal issues:

1. **A relatively small number of individuals are experiencing street homelessness and present with high levels of mental health and/or substance use challenges.**

There is a group of individuals experiencing street and/or sheltered homelessness that are observed to struggle to achieve stability though typical homelessness initiatives and who tend to exhibit more disruptive behaviours, often in the public realm. They tend to have longer histories of homelessness, lower educational levels, more connection to street-based social networks, more serious mental health conditions, and some indication of greater cognitive impairment. This cohort also consumes disproportionately high levels of service resources that often include corrections/police, hospital, shelter and homelessness services and typically are found to cycle through the system of care.

A further defining characteristic of this population is the relatively high-level of criminal behaviours that are combined with patterns of significant levels of substance use along with reoccurring incidences of absolute homelessness.

The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness worked with a range of stakeholders to develop the following criteria to help communities identify when an individual may be in need of the highest level of support possible and to prioritize these individuals for services and supports:

a. They are experiencing chronic homelessness, meaning:
   • they are currently homeless and have been for six months or more in the past year (i.e., have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or place considered uninhabitable); and/or,
   • they are currently homeless and have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the past year.
b. They exhibit significant levels of disruptive behaviors, including violence.
c. They are currently banned from housing and/or other services.
d. They have a minimum Vulnerability Assessment Tool score of 25.

If three of the four criteria are met, these individuals may require additional care and attention and should also receive the benefit of the **Point of Care Violent Behaviors Assessment** and/or should be considered for enhanced housing and support service options.

Directing social service agencies (including housing, health, corrections/police and community-based organizations) to focus on individuals experiencing homelessness with the most complex challenges will be a considerable step toward ensuring communities across the province are safe, healthy, vibrant, welcoming and supporting of people from all walks of life and stages in their life journey. Importantly, clinical services must be funded and provided to support stability for this population given their high-level of mental health and substance use challenges, which may be co-occurring.

2.   A deep public fatalism around the issue of homelessness.

While experts identify homelessness as a large, nuanced and complicated issue with a range of solutions – both small-scale and discrete as well as broad and transformative – the public typically think of homelessness very narrowly as 'rough sleeping' or the complete absence of housing. Additionally, while experts often describe complex and multipronged strategies touching on addressing the immediate needs and taking bold action on prevention, the public often fails to connect broad, antipoverty economic policies or solutions to the issue of homelessness.

When discussing solutions, people tend to think of immediate forms of crisis management such as shelters, hospitals, jails, or treatment facilities, which all speak to the way the public individualizes the experience of homelessness and often attributes the causes to be some failure on the part of the individual and their choices. This ignores **structural** and **systemic** drivers of homelessness and limits people from considering a range of measures that could have a significant, long-term and sustainable impact.

STRUCTURAL

SYSTEMIC
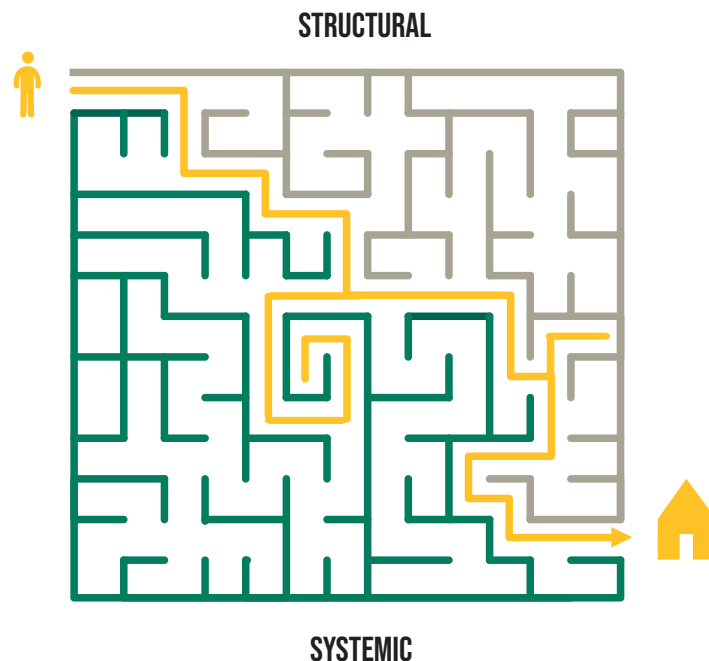
The public support necessary for the sweeping social and economic changes that are needed to more effectively prevent homelessness will not occur overnight. It will take a long-term and focussed effort to generate the public will to enact these deep reforms. However, significantly reducing the visibility of homelessness will demonstrate that immediate action is being taken to address the crisis while long-term work takes place to educate the public on the system-based solutions and the complex steps needed to address this broad social issue. Demonstrating success in this area will expand support for collective action into Phase II and III of the Homelessness Action Plan.

It is important to note that there are already a significant number of federal and provincial initiatives underway, and framing these activities within a larger context will ensure communities have clarity as to the interconnectedness of these efforts and will help describe how they can best support government efforts.

A BRIEF SELECTION OF INITIATIVES UNDERWAY INCLUDE:

- New housing budget commitments (30-Point Plan)
  - Building BC: Supportive Housing Fund
  - Building BC: Community Housing Fund
  - Building BC: Women's Transition Fund
  - Building BC: Indigenous Housing Fund
- Province-wide Point in Time Count
- BC Poverty Reduction Strategy
- BC Mental Health and Addictions Strategy
- Enhancements to Agreements with Young Adults Program
- Government of Canada's Reaching Home Program (formerly Homelessness Partnering Strategy)
- Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy

Specific activities in Phase I include

- Funding support to backbone agencies across the province
- Enhanced supportive and supported housing resources with a focus on clinical support
- Focussed effort to house and support individuals presenting with the most complex needs in every community
- Regional/community-based Coordinated Access and Assessment and Homelessness Management Information Systems linked into provincial and federal systems
- Mandatory annual municipal/regional report out on housing and homelessness

PHASE 2 - TRANSFORM THE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE SYSTEM 2022 - 2026

This phase will build off the successes of Phase I and shifts to focus resources and efforts on addressing the structural and systemic drivers of homelessness. Key to this phase is a targeted shift toward **prevention** while continuing to ensure ongoing **stability** of a range of individuals, including those served through Phase I and those struggling with ongoing affordability challenges in low-cost and market housing.

Following successful efforts to support better housing stability for those individuals identified in Phase I the province can shift to make deeper and more long-term changes to the housing and health/social support system based on the experience of collaborative efforts in community-level intervention and collaboration. The **system-transformation work will be the most critical and challenging part of the plan** but is one that will be made considerably easier through building a better understanding of structural and systemic homelessness intervention with the public and through showing measurable progress on increasing the housing stability of the most vulnerable individuals in community.

LEVELS OF PREVENTION
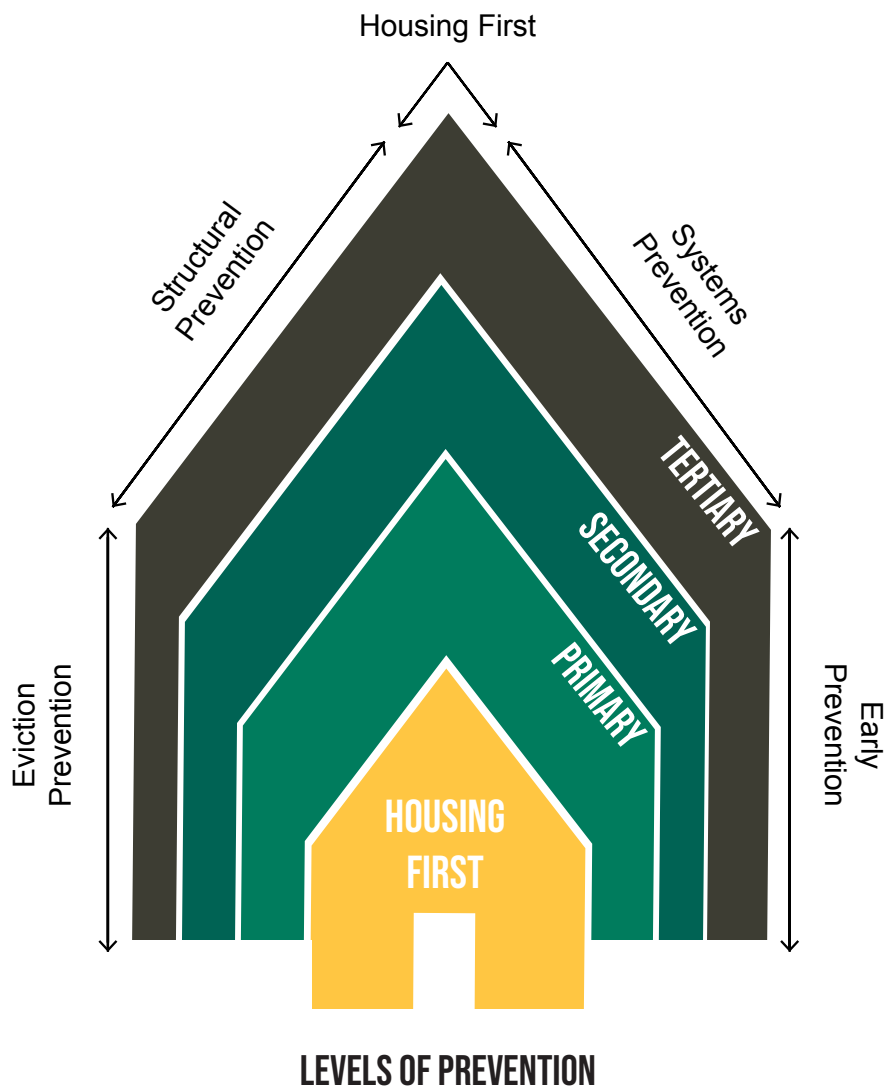
At this stage, the province will be able to better anticipate opportunities and challenges through the various ingress and egress points across the housing and health/social support system. It will also have established a better understanding of how individuals throughout the system access more coordinated services, are better prioritized based on needs, and experience more effective and positive success-based housing and support service transitions.

Ultimately, the work through this phase will ensure there are fewer gaps across the system of care and, at the same time, promote greater housing stability for those individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. This will likely also include additional emphasis on preventing homelessness in combination with strategic supply-side interventions, advocating for long-term policy changes and funding stability and ensuring available resources are focussed on supporting the most vulnerable individuals.

Specific activities in Phase II include

- Specialized effort on youth homelessness prevention based on better service coordination across targeted transition points;

- Integrated effort alongside the federal government to address the disproportionate numbers of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness and facing concentrated poverty;

- Policy alignment and accountability across all ministries and crown corporations;

- Development process improvements; and

- Enhanced, outcome-focussed and integrated peer-based, social and clinical support services provided across the province or via telehealth systems.

PHASE 3 – FINE TUNING AND SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY 2027 – 2028

The final years of the Plan will be fine-tuning and making the adjustments necessary to complete and sustain success. Likely, this will include efforts to ensure ongoing monitoring and system sustainability. Any effective system will require ongoing maintenance and a focus in the later years of this plan will be to both identify additional supply-side interventions and to continue to implement identified system improvement strategies. All of this will undergo ongoing monitoring conducted on an annual basis and will likely extend beyond the timeframe of this plan. This phase will include continued efforts to monitor the ongoing stability of individuals across a range of housing types and support services models, and to tweak the community-based responses as necessary.

Specific activities in Phase III include

- Continued annual reporting on housing and homelessness by each municipality/region

IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

RECOMMENDED APPROACH:

Community-based implementation through backbone organizations working to enhance collaboration in support of federal and provincial objectives.

Specifically, the recommendation is for the BC Homelessness Action Plan to detail the following related to implementation:

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY	A whole-of-government approach will be necessary, in which all ministries are required to consider the impact of any change to policy, program or service related to poverty and homelessness through a poverty/equity lens. Please see Appendix A for a full list of the key BC Ministry Roles related to preventing and ending homelessness.
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	Data and ongoing monitoring of outcomes are critical at both a local and provincial level to allow for effective decision-making relating to funding allocation and prioritization as well as program and policy design. Please see Appendix B for a draft Monitoring Framework.
FUNDING TABLES	Empowering community to participate in the process of addressing poverty and homelessness will be an essential component of Homelessness Action Plan implementation. Please see Appendix C for a Community-Based Funding Table concept.
FUNDING SUPPORT	Effective support for implementation of the BC Homelessness Action Plan will be essential to ensure the highest level of impact in meeting the needs of those struggling in poverty and/or homelessness. There are 28 regional districts in British Columbia ranging in size from a population of 3,400 to 2.6 million residents. An implementation program making up to $250,000 available to each region to support backbone organization activities would cost a total of approximately $7 million annually and would significantly alter the way in which services could be coordinated at a regional level. The intention of this funding would be to leverage additional funding and/or in-kind contributions from municipal governments directly or through Regional Districts and the Government of Canada's Reaching Home program.

ROLE OF COMMUNITY-BASED FUNDING TABLES

The recommended role of community-based funding tables is to empower various actors to inform regional decision-making that reflects identified priorities and align with achieving a Functional Zero-level of homelessness. The community-based funding tables would function in the following way:

1. The Backbone Organization, working with a broad range of stakeholders, would identify specific priorities for homelessness intervention e.g., a specialized housing program for individuals with high-levels of substance-use co-occurring with mental health challenges and significant engagement with the corrections system.

2. The Backbone Organization would map out the relevant government stakeholders to collaborate on the solution such as BC Housing (Crown Agency), Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Public Safety and Solicitor General and others such as community foundations, regional governments, Indigenous Nations, etc.

3. The Community-Based Funding Table would jointly draft and issue an Expression of Interest for the solution and would jointly review proposals with a focus on selecting the strongest proponent and identifying how their specific agency can provide funding and/or resources for the portion of the initiative under their mandate.

4. Once the wining proposal is selected, each crown agency or ministry engages that proponent for their portion of the initiative through existing contract management processes, ensuring alignment with the other funding partners as well as enough fiduciary oversight by each funding entity.

5. The project is funded with the individual-level outcomes monitored by the backbone organization, which reports out regularly to the funders and the public as part of an increased effort to highlight successes at working toward Functional Zero.

6. The process is repeated for additional initiatives as identified by the Backbone Organization (e.g. youth transitional housing and supports).

Specific activities include

- Bring to the table key funders within the homelessness serving system related to a specific initiative or funding call.

- Identify, invite and support the participation of other funders including community foundations and others invested in homelessness prevention or services.

- Review Community Plans as they are available and issue funding calls that are connected to areas of greatest need in community.

- Review responses to calls and select appropriate initiatives for funding including capital projects and complementary support services.

- Receive regular updates from the backbone organization on the impact of the funded-projects in terms of working toward Functional Zero.

ROLE OF BACKBONE ORGANIZATIONS

Backbone organizations are to coordinate the various dimensions and collaborations within the homelessness serving system. Essentially, these entities will function as the supporting infrastructure and will ensure the BC Homelessness Action Plan implementation will maintain momentum and have the desired impact.

SPECIFIC BACKBONE ORGANIZATION ACTIVITIES INCLUDE
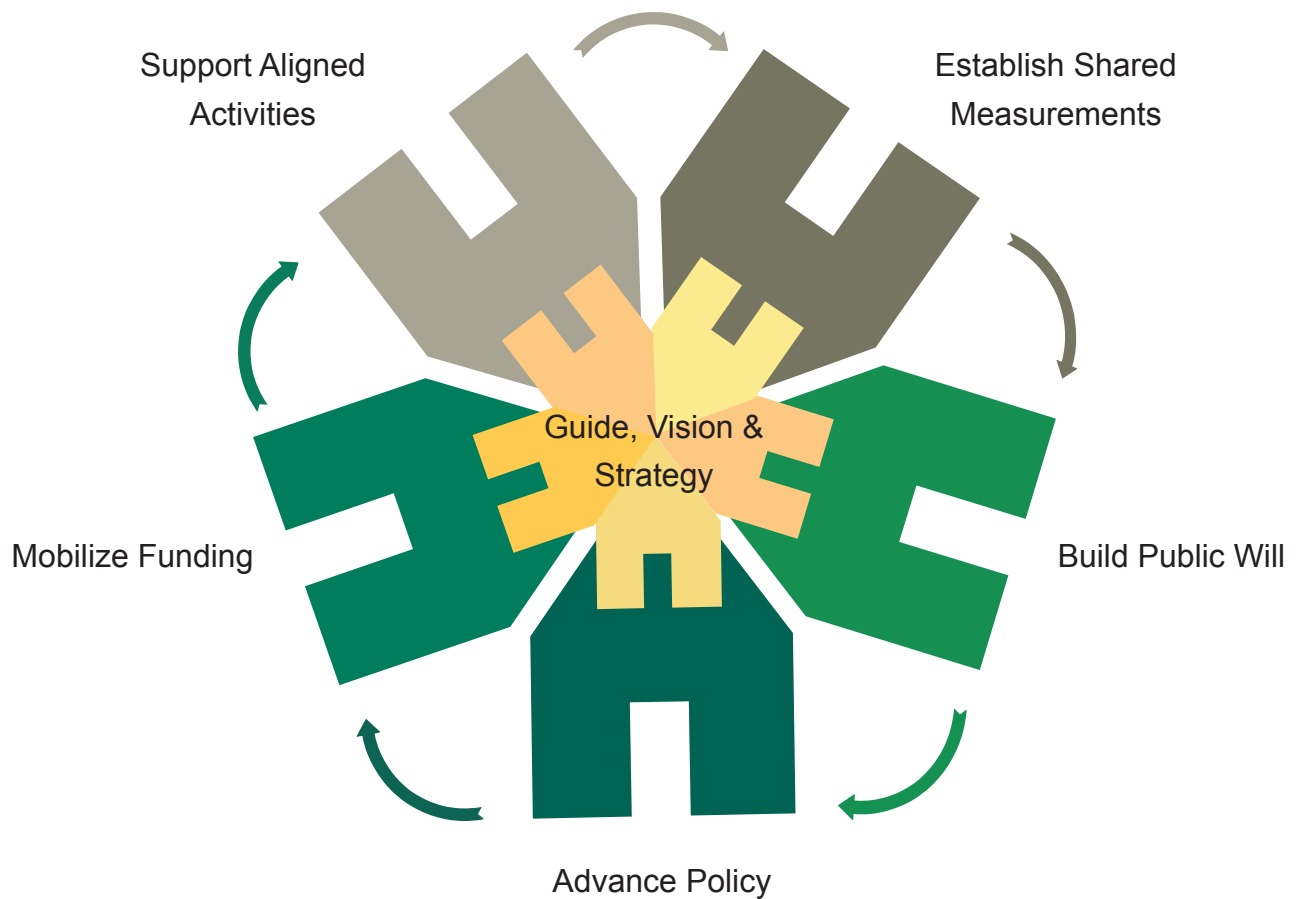
Guide Vision and Strategy

- Work in community to develop and define shared goals and processes to work toward Functional Zero.
- Work with stakeholders in defining and understanding the homelessness system, including prevention.

Support Aligned Activities

- Support stakeholders in identifying areas of alignment between existing activities and those more directly connected to achieving Functional Zero.
- Recognize and support effective initiatives and help stakeholders work to improve the quality and efficiency of efforts.

Establish Shared Measurement Practices

- Function as a regional data hub that is integrated into a provincial system.
- Manage the collection, interpretation and dissemination of de-identified regional data for planning and reporting purposes.
- Work with community to set targets toward Functional Zero.
- Encourage decision-making based on real-time data and data utilization.

Build Public Will

- Engage community broadly to share scale of need and evidence-based solutions to homelessness e.g., community associations.
- Identify and support community members in meaningfully participating in processes around solutions and impact measurement.

Advance Policy

- Identify, recommend to and advocate for changes to policies and programs that are in alignment with achieving targets.
- Ensure influencers and policy makers are included in the policy improvement process.

Mobilize Funding

- Provide administrative support to the Community Funding Table.
- Identify, invite and support the participation of other funders, including community foundations and others invested in homelessness prevention or services.
- Encourage and support the redirection of funds when needed to support region in achieving goal of Functional Zero.

APPENDIX A - KEY BC MINISTRY ROLES IN PREVENTING AND ENDING HOMELESSNESS

BC MINISTRY	ROLE
Municipal Affairs and Housing	Safe, affordable housing; support for local governments, non-profits, healthy communities
Children and Family Development	Child Protection; Family support; Children with Special Needs, Youth Services; Transition Plans
Social Development and Poverty Reduction	Financial assistance; Supports to people with disabilities; Transition Planning
Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation	Promote positive relations, reconciliation, Indigenous youth leadership; Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women (MACIW)
Education	Enable children, youth to develop their potential, acquire knowledge, skills, abilities to contribute to a healthy society, sustainable economy
Public Safety and Solicitor General and Emergency	Corrections, victim services, address human trafficking, public safety, criminal record checks
Mental Health and Addictions	Improve access to and quality of mental health and addictions services; immediate response to the opioid public health emergency
Health	Ensure access to quality, appropriate, cost effective and timely health services
Advanced Education, Skills and Training	Post-secondary education and skills training
Labour	Promote fair wages; healthy, safe working conditions and employment relationships
Overall BC Government Commitment (included in all Ministry mandates)	1. Make life more affordable 2. Deliver the services that people count on (e.g., ensure children get access to quality education; families get timely health care) 3. Build a strong, sustainable, innovative economy that works for everyone (tackle poverty and inequality, create good-paying jobs, ensure people from every background have the opportunity to reach their full potential)

APPENDIX B - DRAFT MONITORING FRAMEWORK

SYSTEM

- # of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness

- # of supportive units in system

- # of individuals receiving supports

- Turnover and vacancy rates and reasons for turnover

ACCESS

- To CAA
  - Demographic identifiers (e.g. age, gender, Indigeneity)
  - Source of application
  - Average wait time before CAA process completed, including response back to applicant

- To Housing
  - Average wait time to access resource through CAA
  - Average unit turnover time
  - Demographic identifiers
  - Source of application

PREVENTION

- % of individuals leaving correctional institutions with housing and support plans

- % of individuals leaving health facilities with housing and support plans

- % of tenants rehoused with appropriate supports within 30 days of receiving a notice to vacate

STABILITY

- Average number of moves per year and % of positive moves

- % of clients who move from transitional to long-term housing

- % of clients who remain housed after 6 months

- % of clients who remain housed after 12 months

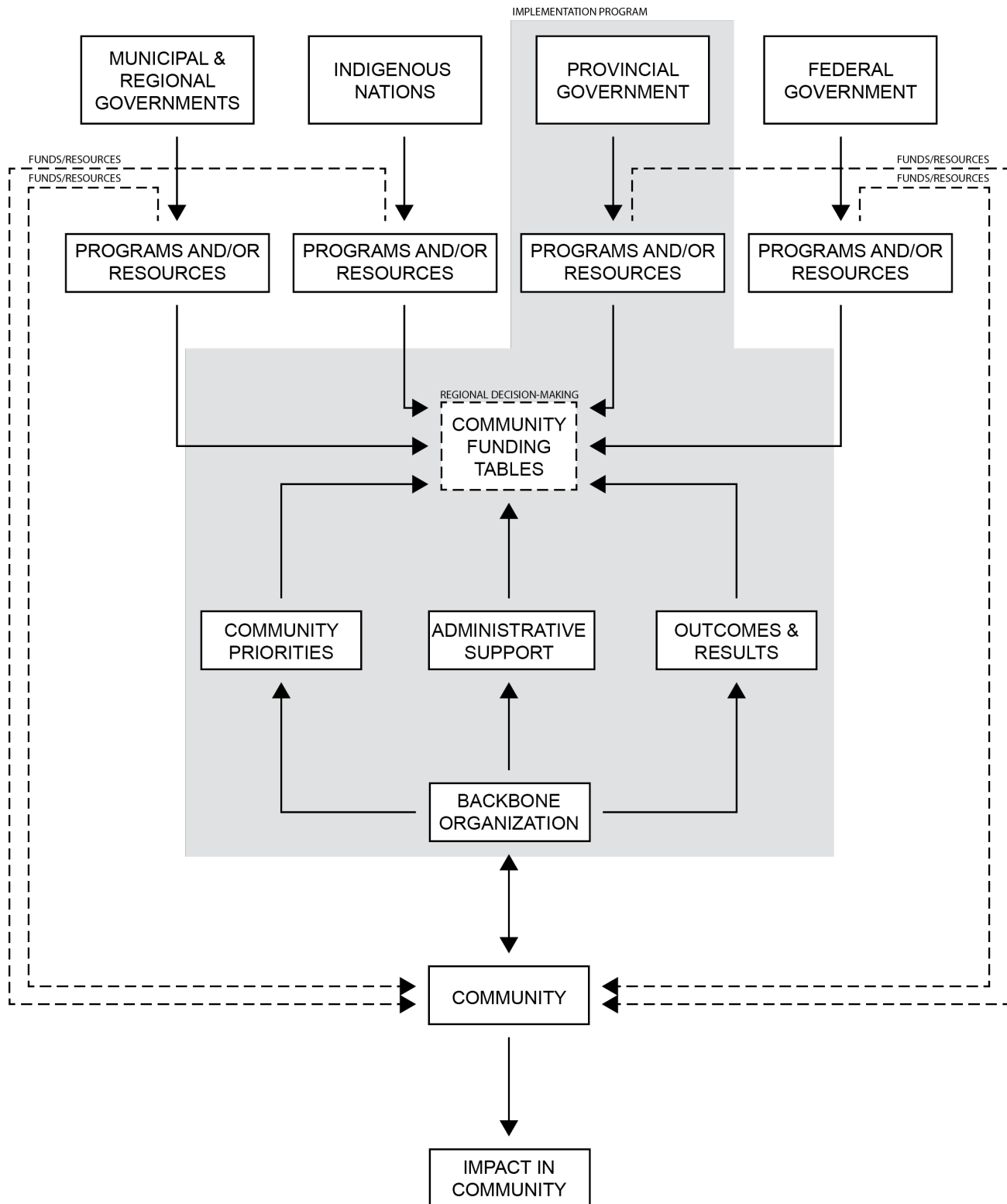- % of clients who remain housed after 18 months

SURVEY/NARRATIVE DATA

In addition to the above quantitative data, the following qualitative data are also considered important components of measuring system effectiveness:

- Access
  - Did you receive the supports/housing that met your needs?
  - Were services provided to you in a respectful way?
  - What did you need that you couldn't find?

- Cultural Inclusivity
  - Do you see yourself reflected in this space?
  - How comfortable are you using this service?

- Health and Wellness
  - Do you feel connected to:
    - Primary healthcare service?
    - Healthcare provider?
    - Mental health services?
    - Mental health professional?
  - Does your current living situation feel like home?
  - What could help you in feeling more comfortable and secure?

APPENDIX C

BC HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

| MUNICIPAL & REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS | INDIGENOUS NATIONS | PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT | FEDERAL GOVERNMENT |

FUNDS/RESOURCES
FUNDS/RESOURCES

FUNDS/RESOURCES
FUNDS/RESOURCES

| PROGRAMS AND/OR RESOURCES | PROGRAMS AND/OR RESOURCES | PROGRAMS AND/OR RESOURCES | PROGRAMS AND/OR RESOURCES |

REGIONAL DECISION-MAKING

COMMUNITY FUNDING TABLES

| COMMUNITY PRIORITIES | ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT | OUTCOMES & RESULTS |

BACKBONE ORGANIZATION

COMMUNITY

IMPACT IN COMMUNITY

greater victoria
coalition to end
homelessness

hope has found a home

Hope has found a home.

victoriahomelessness.ca