

WE CAN

END HOMELESSNESS



WPRC
WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION COUNCIL



It is time to change the way we think about homelessness—and the way we work.



Cindy Coker and Rob Johnston,
Community Task Force to End Homelessness Co-Chairs

WE CAN END HOMELESSNESS

In December 2012, we chaired the first meeting of Winnipeg's Community Task Force to End Homelessness. That day we began a journey. We had no idea what we would learn or where we might land. And while we came around the table with very diverse perspectives and some strongly held views, we shared one goal: to explore what might be possible.

Every day, significant efforts are made in our city to support people who are homeless. Every day, lives are touched and many times changed. And yet, in hundreds of conversations over the last year, without exception, people from all walks of life said: What we are doing is not enough. We can do better.

TOGETHER, WE HAVE DEVELOPED A PLAN TO DO JUST THAT

The Long Term Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg reflects many voices, including non-profit service providers, government, Indigenous leadership, and the public and private sectors.

Most important, this plan echoes the voices of those who are or who have been homeless. More than 80 people shared their life stories and their hopes with us. We are humbled, grateful and inspired by each. There is no one who knows better what works—and what doesn't.

Read the unedited words of those we engaged in the *What We Heard Report* available at wprc.ca/whatweheard.

It is the collection of all these voices that has shaped this plan—a shared vision of what is possible. One thing that is very clear to us is that the responsibility or ability to end homelessness does not rest with one sector or organization. The opportunity for substantive progress lies in our ability to build relationships across sectors and to build on the talents each brings.

The responsibility or ability to end homelessness does not rest with one sector or organization.

A Council of Elders walked with us on this journey, offered their wisdom and taught us a great deal. Elder David Budd shared with us, for example, an Indigenous belief that one's significance in this world is nurtured in a sense of belonging. When people do not have a sense of belonging—in family, in community—it is difficult to have hope.

The Plan sets direction in four key areas, with specific strategies and goals outlined under each area:

1. PREVENTION

The Plan focuses on preventing homelessness during key transition points for people, including discharge from hospital or treatment facilities, release from correctional facilities, or “aging out” of the child welfare system. As well, the Plan proposes small direct supports that can literally prevent individuals and families from losing their housing.

YEAR 1

- Engage with hospitals, child welfare and correctional facilities to document current policy and practice with respect to discharge/release planning and to identify housing-related barriers to successful transition.
- Engage collaboratively with governmental agencies/departments/authorities to assist with the identification of policy or practices that may inadvertently contribute to homelessness.
- Design an eviction prevention service/intervention (rent bank, access to entitlements and personal identification, conflict resolution).
- Design a housing registry accessible to homeless people and people at risk of homelessness as well the agencies providing housing-related services to them.

YEARS 2-4

- In collaboration with discharging/releasing institutions, create formal person-centred referral pathways to prevention services and the homeless system of care.
- Collaboratively describe roles and responsibilities for governmental agencies/departments/authorities in supporting the prevention of homelessness.
- Create a one-stop access centre incorporating the housing registry and eviction prevention services and add individualized system navigation support (serving homeless, at risk of homeless and landlords).

2. CREATE A PERSON-CENTRED SYSTEM OF CARE

Most people will end their homelessness on their own or with the services currently available. However, for individuals with more significant mental illness, long-term substance use, brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and developmental disorders, a system of care is needed; one built around programs focused specifically on ending homelessness with intensive “Housing with Supports” programs and with the means of “triaging” and assigning limited program spaces to the most “acute” homeless people.

YEAR 1

- Design a person-centred and culturally proficient “System of Care” for homeless people (central intake, standardized assessment, cultural proficiency and end homeless programs, including Housing First and enhanced EIA benefits and/or housing subsidies) with the capacity to achieve 2017/18 system performance targets.
- Establish a formal network of community agencies providing services to homeless people to improve coordination and build a “community of practice” in support of the plan to end homelessness.

YEARS 2-4

- Implement a culturally proficient homeless system of care, including Housing First as one of a range of program options.
- Create formal pathways to the homeless system of care from emergency shelters.

3. HOUSING SUPPLY

The Plan recognizes the need for additional housing in the years ahead with the majority of effort in the coming decade focused on creating permanent housing (with supports, if necessary). Establishing new affordable housing for people who are homeless will take considerable will and creativity from across all sectors—each of whom will bring important talents to the table.

YEAR 1

- Conduct a one-time inventory of all housing, including rooming houses and single room occupancies (SROs) accessible to people who have been homeless.
- Create a plan to increase housing with supports for homeless people by 300 units by 2015/16.

YEARS 2-4

- Increase the supply of housing with supports for homeless people by 300 units.
- Based on the findings of the housing inventory and census, project additional housing capacity needed to end homelessness in Winnipeg by 2024/25.
- In the absence of adequate housing, develop a plan to make rooming houses and SROs an acceptable alternative to housing for some homeless people.
- Consider creative approaches to housing development and create plan to increase housing inventory by the amount required to end homelessness in 2024/25.

4. MEASUREMENT

The Plan emphasizes the importance of measuring progress and gathering better data. The collection of data is important for the evaluation and continuous improvement of any program or service and it essential to knowing if, as a community, we are making a difference.

Successful plans to end homelessness attribute much of their success to maintaining a constant presence in the community by reporting achievement towards a vision in terms that are clear and based on solid information and analysis.

YEAR 1

- Conduct a “point in time” census of homeless people in Winnipeg in collaboration with other stakeholders.
- Estimate the number of “unique” individuals who used emergency shelters in 2013/14. Negotiate data-sharing agreements with service providers to allow for the sharing of data for the purposes of planning and system performance accountability.

YEARS 2-4

- Create a data management system capable of recording and tracking all homeless people engaged with the homeless system of care for the purposes of planning, reporting, system performance management and funded service accountability.
- Undertake research with a view to determining the distinctive paths of Indigenous peoples into homelessness including specific circumstances, needs and mobility related to their communities and reserves. This will be done in partnership with Indigenous peoples and consistent with OCAP Principles (Ownership, Control, Access and Partnership).

WE CAN SAVE LIVES AND MAKE BETTER USE OF RESOURCES

Overall the Plan is focused on shifting our thinking as a community from managing homelessness to ending it. When communities must focus primarily on meeting the immediate needs of the homeless (e.g. through shelters, soup kitchens, etc.), we assist in the short term, but are limited in our ability to help individuals stabilize and move forward.

We believe stability occurs when an individual or family is living in a safe and secure home, with appropriate supports. Emergency support services will always play an important role in the homeless-serving system, but must shift from being the standard response to homelessness to being a temporary response. **This shift is proving successful in cities across North America.**

The boldest elements of the Plan are; the notion of a new non-profit organization to provide ongoing leadership; the opportunity to blend funding from multiple sources; and the opportunity to ensure greater coordination. To be successful, we believe this new organization must embrace the perspectives of persons with lived experience and Indigenous elders, a multi-sector approach, Indigenous leadership and stakeholder engagement on an ongoing basis.

Working closely with the network of existing organizations, the new organization will have one driving mission—to end homelessness.

THE TIME IS NOW

We have heard clearly the effects of homelessness on individuals and our community. People are dissatisfied with status quo and are ready to be part making real progress on this issue.

Some may ask: “Is it really possible to end homelessness?” Working together, we believe it is. And why should we settle for anything less? The economic case to end homelessness is clear, the human rights case is compelling and it is the essence of a caring community.

Thank you to everyone who has been involved. Please continue to be. And please encourage others to be.

Ending homelessness in our city will take a decade. Let's get started.

Cindy Coker

Rob Johnston

COMMUNITY TASK FORCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

The Community Task Force to End Homelessness is composed of fifteen members from multiple sectors, including the Government of Canada, the Province of Manitoba, the City of Winnipeg, community organizations and the private sector. Over 25% of the Task Force members are of Indigenous descent. All Task Force members have contributed significant time, energy and expertise towards building the relationships and commitment necessary to successfully lay the groundwork for the launch of a Long Term Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg.

ROB JOHNSTON (CO-CHAIR)

Regional President, Royal Bank of Canada

CINDY COKER (CO-CHAIR)

Executive Director, SEED Winnipeg

LUCILLE BRUCE

Housing First Aboriginal Advisor, At Home/Chez Soi

STEVE CHIPMAN

President & CEO, Birchwood Automotive Group

RÉAL CLOUTIER

Chief Operating Officer & Vice President of Community Health,
Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

JOY CRAMER

Deputy Minister, Family Services, Province of Manitoba

DR. JINO DISTASIO

Vice President of Research and Innovation, University of Winnipeg

SANDY HOPKINS

Chief Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity Manitoba

JOE KRONSTAL

Executive Director, Citizen Services, HRSDC—Service Canada

FLOYD PERRAS

Executive Director, Siloam Mission

DR. IAN S. RABB

General Manager, Winpark Dorchester Properties

MICHAEL ROBERTSON

Managing Architect, MMP Architects

DIANE ROUSSIN

Project Director, Winnipeg Boldness Project

CLIVE WIGHTMAN

Director of Community Services Department, City of Winnipeg

ELDER'S COUNCIL

The Task Force established an Elders' Council early in the process. The Elders provided substantive feedback at each stage of the work of the Task Force. Their wisdom is informed by their traditional knowledge, spiritual practices and a diverse range of life experiences. The Task Force is grateful to have had the following Elders' involved.

DAVID BUDD

Youth Cultural Worker, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre

MAE LOUISE CAMPBELL

Elder in Residence, Red River College

MICHAEL ESQUASH

General Manager, Spirit Sands Singers

BERTHA FONTAINE

Executive Director, Native Addictions Council of Manitoba

JO JO SUTHERLAND

Outreach Worker, Native Women's Transition Centre

The Long Term Plan to End Homelessness echoes the voices of those who are or who have been homeless. More than 80 people shared their life stories and their hopes with us. We are humbled, grateful for and inspired by each. There is no one who knows better what works—and what doesn't. At the end of the day, we believe these voices matter most. Their words are best read in the Task Force's *What We Heard Report* available at wprc.ca/whatweheard. Below is a just a small selection of all we heard.

"Growing up with my mother and my brother, we lived in a hotel. That is where we stayed. During that time, I honestly thought this was normal; when I was young, living in a hotel was normal. I thought going to Salvation Army or Siloam was normal."

"When we look at a homeless person; that is someone's sister, mother, brother, aunt, uncle. We are all born good in the Creator's eyes. We all dream of being a fireman or a policeman or a nurse, ..."

"I am thankful I have a strong little girl who is always one foot in front of the other and never gives up. I'd like to share a story. When we left the shelter, CFS took us to a hotel, my daughter said, "Thanks for having a big mouth, Mommy." I didn't know how to take it at the time. At first I was like "why do you say that?" She said, "Now we don't have to sleep there, we can sleep here." It was like night and day to her. She was so much better [she was getting sick in the shelter]."

"70-80 year old people shouldn't be here. A 78 year old man—he shouldn't have to be here."

A child of the foster care system at three, Robert had been living on and off the streets since he was seven until he found permanent housing through the At Home / Chez Soi initiative four years ago.

"Right now you have to get a day job and get back here by 8:15 p.m. to get your number or you are out of luck—especially in the winter. If the [shelter] is full, you have to go to the bus shack. Some of the bus shelters are heated."

Where do you sleep? Salvation Army; under a bridge; Siloam; on the riverbank; walk around all night; between doors of a business; between doors in an apartment building; storage lockers; almost everybody sleeps down by the river; summer it's easy to find places; peoples' cars.

"My whole life, it's been one place to another to another. I never felt like I had a home, friends, or people I could actually talk to and listen. I just existed... survived, you know?"





People across our city may wonder
“what can I do?” to make a difference.

Most immediately, one answer lies in a story shared with us last fall. A woman was walking down Main Street and found a group of people gathering around a kitten. The kitten was alone and people were concerned. There was a flurry of activity to ensure the kitten would find a home and be safe and cared for. The woman then walked on, past an older man who was clearly homeless. No one paused to acknowledge him. Or to say “hello” or “I hope your day goes well”. In the words of Elder David Budd, each one of us has the opportunity to create a sense of belonging and hope in our city.