

Introduction

The Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) provides strategic leadership and vision for Calgary's Homeless-Serving System of Care, working with a variety of partners to end homelessness in our city.

We are encouraged by the federal government's commitment to prevent and reduce homelessness in Canada demonstrated by Budget 2017's \$2.1 billion investment in the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) over the next 11 years and the creation of the Advisory Committee and its HPS engagement process.

Calgary remains the epicentre of homelessness in Alberta, with 3,222 individuals enumerated in the 2016 province-wide Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness held October 19th. The city represents 60% of the provincial homeless population while only 29% of the province's total population. Furthermore, Calgary has the least affordable housing in the country for the lowest quintile of income earners.¹

Since *Calgary's Plan to End Homelessness* launched in 2008, 8,000 people have been provided homes through program spaces specifically allocated for formerly homeless citizens. With program supports, 91% of these individuals and families have successfully remained housed.² In addition, Calgary's per capita homeless population has decreased by 26%.³ CHF in collaboration with its agency partners, have a proven track record of helping individuals and families access the right housing with the right supports to remain stably housed in community. We are pleased to provide feedback on HPS so we can more effectively and efficiently fund programs working to end homelessness in our city.

¹ Ron Kneebone and Margarita Wilkins (2016). School of Public Policy, SPP Research Papers, volume 9, issue 21, *Shrinking the need for homeless shelter spaces*. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary.

² Government of Alberta, Human Services. *Grant Accountability Review of the Calgary Homeless Foundation 2015/16*. Calgary, AB: Human Services.

³ Calgary Homeless Foundation (2016). Calgary Homeless Foundation Webpage. Retrieved from: <http://calgaryhomeless.com/>

Based on recent calculations made by CHF staff using data from the 2016 Point-in-Time Homeless Count results. A report on Calgary's 2016 Point-in-Time Count will be published in 2017.

1. An expanded HPS should:

1.1 Make federal and provincial homelessness funding co-ordinated, consistent and transparent.

Better alignment between federal and provincial funding would lessen the administrative burden and improve outcomes for vulnerable populations.

Some areas for improved alignment include:

- a) Align and match program and capital funding between different levels and ministries of government to ensure no funding gaps and shared outcomes are achieved.
- b) Agree upon shared outcomes and evaluative measures for provincial and federal homelessness funding. This includes developing shared definitions, such as for chronic and episodic homelessness for prioritization purposes (Table 1).

Table 1: Different definitions of homelessness chronic and episodic homelessness

	<i>Government of Alberta⁴</i>	<i>Government of Canada⁵</i>
Chronic homelessness	Those who have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In order to be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter.	This term refers to individuals, often with disabling conditions (e.g. chronic physical or mental illness, substance abuse problems), who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year (i.e. have spent more than 180 nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation).

⁴ Government of Alberta, Human Services. (2012). *Definitions of Homelessness*. Available from: <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/homelessness/14630.html>

⁵ Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada. (2014). *Types of Supports*. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/housing-first/supports.html>

Episodic homelessness

A person who is homeless **for less than a year and has fewer than four episodes** of homelessness in the past three years.

This term refers to individuals, often with disabling conditions, who **are currently homeless and have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the past year** (of note, episodes are defined as periods when a person would be in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation for a certain period, and after at least 30 days, would be back in the shelter or place).

- c) Align and simplify federal and provincial reporting requirements for homelessness funding. This includes alignment on the frequency of reporting, simplified accountability processes, shared performance reviews, and use of common reporting forms and tools.
- d) The above options would help in the existing context. Another option would be to streamline funding by transferring all administrative responsibilities to the provincial governments so responses to homelessness could be tailored more effectively and efficiently to the local context.

1.2 Align HPS fund administration structures to the development/ organizational life stage of a community.

Fund administration must include the development of appropriate accountability measures in order to ensure performance outcomes are being met. Jurisdictions, municipalities or communities at the nascent stages of homelessness planning and coordination will have a different level of fund administration expertise. Currently, administrative structures such as Community Advisory Boards (CAB) or Community Plans are used to administer HPS funds and act as accountability mechanisms. For communities with existing plans and collaborative organizational structures to disseminate funding, accessing HPS funds through CABs or community plans is administratively burdensome, and often a duplication of effort. Calgary is one such community. CHF as the system planner for the homeless-serving system

of care applies an outcomes based approach to funding decisions. Accordingly, and in consultation with community, CHF develops performance indicators against which we measure performance of funded programs. We track performance through our Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) and engage in ongoing research to support program evaluation. By being less prescriptive and adopting an outcomes based approach, HPS funds could be used more flexibly to target funds according to needs and gaps as identified by local data. Communities such as ours could be held accountable via community supported measurable performance outcomes, such as the number of people exiting homelessness and experiencing housing stability.

We recommend that administration of HPS funding allow for greater flexibility and adaptation to the local community context.

1.3 Increase resources, including staffing, for the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System.

The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) is an electronic records management system that supports the goal of ending homelessness across Canada. This federally-administered system is now operating in more than 100 communities. We support the idea of increased staffing levels for HIFIS and believe that this would expedite its expansion to more communities. HIFIS provides better data to both the federal government and to communities, making it a win-win proposition.

2. CHF data supports the efficacy of the housing first approach to stably house people experiencing homelessness and reduce public systems usage, when properly resourced and implemented.

A Housing First philosophy is embedded at the core of Calgary's efforts to end homelessness. Our emphasis on providing affordable housing with supports to individuals and families trapped in homelessness has ensured that even as the city experienced unprecedented population increases, homelessness did not rise; in fact, and as previously noted, it decreased on a per capita basis by 26%.

The Housing First philosophy prioritizes housing as peoples' primary need. Other barriers, illnesses or challenges can be addressed once a person has been housed and the chaos of homelessness has been eliminated from a person's life. We fund programs who model Housing First as an intervention type by placing people

experiencing homelessness directly into permanent housing without the requirement of a transition period of sobriety or abstinence. Individualized case managed support services are offered, but not mandatory (although most programs work toward the goal of working with clients to determine and provide the support needed for housing stability).

Housing first does not mean housing only, and for vulnerable populations, support services are needed for people to remain housed. The results reported below are based on the performance of CHF funded housing programs who ascribe to the housing first approach. Between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016, CHF data demonstrated that 91% of people participating in a CHF-funded housing first program remained stably housed and reduced public systems usage on average, by 70%.⁶ This demonstrates the efficacy of housing first when resourced adequately to ensure proper implementation. A community is resourced for housing first effectiveness when it has access to sufficient affordable housing stock **and** the adequate funding and partnerships to deliver necessary support services. CHF has ensured housing first fidelity by: contractually monitoring and evaluating programs; creating a program accreditation process; and providing various avenues of training such as a certificate program in partnership with the University of Calgary and workshops for partner agencies.

3. Reducing poverty is an effective approach to homelessness prevention.

CHF believes that one way to prevent homelessness is to reduce poverty, and we look forward to recommendations that will soon be made by the advisory committee for a national poverty strategy. We have already submitted recommendations of our own as part of that process (refer to Appendix 2). Specifically, CHF has recommended that Canada's federal government: double the Working Income Tax Benefit; enhance Employment Insurance coverage; develop public and non-profit child care services available to all families; and do all of the above in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples

⁶ Government of Alberta, Human Services. *Grant Accountability Review of the Calgary Homeless Foundation 2015/16*. Calgary, AB: Human Services. Refer to Appendix 1 for more detail.

4. As the System Planner, CHF has the big picture view of Calgary's Homeless-Serving System of Care and we mobilize best practices in funding, education, program delivery measurements and advocate for policy advancements to support vulnerable Calgarians. **A number of promising practices have had a significant impact on improving housing stability for people experiencing homelessness in Calgary. These include:**

a. Coordinating Access and Assessment

Calgary's community-based triage and assessment system has streamlined program entry and prioritization, allowing for resources to be dedicated to the most vulnerable. Decisions are transparently and collectively made, further ensuring that proper resources are allocated where they are needed most.

b. Providing Training and Accreditation

Investment in training, professionalizing standards of practice and sharing best practices has been key to ensuring a high standard of care and dissemination of new ideas and methods. CHF partners with the University of Calgary to offer a certificate program titled "Working with Homeless Populations" for agencies' frontline staff. CHF also supports an accreditation process for programs which reinforce philosophical approaches and best practices. Lastly, Communities of Learning are facilitated by CHF to share learnings and collectively address issues across the sector.

c. Participation in the Recovery Task Force

Calgary Recovery Services Task Force is a committee of individuals from homeless-serving agencies, government, and interested stakeholders who have come together to consider ways of collaboratively responding to the complex health, housing, and supports needed for homeless individuals in Calgary. The Task Force also included systems representatives such as Alberta Health Services, Human Services, CHF, and members of government. This wide-ranging collaboration empowered the Task Force to take a strategic look at not only the current provision of services, but more effective ways to work together in order to better serve the most vulnerable. Seven recommendations, detailed in the Task Force Final Report, are being implemented over the next two years.

d. Membership in Collectives with Aligned Missions

CHF is a member of other collectives with aligned missions such as: Calgary's Community Housing Affordability Collective (CHAC), Vibrant Communities Calgary's Social Policy Collaborative and the Calgary Coalition for Supervised Consumption. These collective organizations are working together to advance non-market housing; develop a social policy agenda to reduce poverty; and identify the need for Supervised Consumption Services in Calgary, respectively.

e. Empowering the Client Action Committee

The Client Action Committee (CAC) is a group of persons with lived experience of homelessness, convened by the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF). The group helps conduct research and inform policy and practice at CHF, and undertake their own projects, such as the creation of a Homeless Charter of Rights for Calgary. They are empowered to exercise their voice and influence their peers to respond to policies that impact their livelihoods.

Appendix 1: Performance of CHF housing programs, 2015/2016

Indicators ⁷	2015/16 CHF Results
Annual retention rate (total caseload in year – negative exits in year)/ (total caseload in year)	91% (April 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016)
Comparison of <i>interactions with EMS</i> in 12 months prior to housing and post-housing	Reduction: 67%
Comparison of <i>Emergency Room visits</i> in 12 months prior to housing and post-housing	Reduction: 62%
Comparison of <i>Days in hospital</i> in 12 months prior to housing and post-housing	Reduction: 71%
Comparison of <i>Interactions with police</i> in 12 months prior to housing and post-housing	Reduction: 72%
Comparison of <i>Days in jail</i> in 12 months prior to housing and post-housing	Reduction: 84%
Comparison of <i>Court appearances</i> in 12 months prior to housing and post-housing	Reduction: 59%

Note: The above indicators were reported in the Government of Alberta, Human Services' Grant Accountability Review of the Calgary Homeless Foundation 2015/16.

⁷ Government of Alberta, Human Services. *Grant Accountability Review of the Calgary Homeless Foundation 2015/16*. Calgary, AB: Human Services.

Appendix 2: CHF's Submission on the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy

Submitted June 2, 2017

Introduction

The Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) supports the federal government's development of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. We eagerly anticipate a Strategy that reflects the need to ensure all Canadians, especially those most vulnerable, have access to the supports and services that will improve their economic well-being.

While poverty is not always about homelessness, homelessness is always about poverty. Calgary remains the epicentre of homelessness in Alberta, with 3,222 individuals enumerated in the 2016 province-wide Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness held in October. The city represents 60% of the provincial homeless population, but just 29% of the province's total population. As a community, *Calgary's Plan to End Homelessness (2015)*, identifies 15,600 Calgary households in extreme core housing need. These households spend over 50% of their income on shelter and have incomes less than \$20,000 per year, placing them at high risk of homelessness.

Success for our community as identified by *Calgary's Plan to End Homelessness*, means:

- 100% of those experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness will be housed;
- 35% of households at risk or experiencing transitional homelessness will be stabilized;
- The average length of stay in adult singles emergency shelters will be reduced 60% to 10 days and in family homelessness emergency shelters to 14 days; and
- The total number of people experiencing homelessness enumerated in the Homeless Point-In-Time Count will be reduced by 70%.

We believe a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy can help prevent homelessness and help people exit homelessness.

As the System Planner for Calgary's Homeless-Serving System of Care, CHF is working hard alongside government, service providers and the private sector to advance actions toward the goal of ending homelessness in our city. Given that we have made recommendations to address affordable housing with supports for people experiencing homelessness during the recent National Housing Strategy consultations, the present brief will discuss poverty-related factors that have a major impact on preventing homelessness.

We recommend that the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy:**5. Double the value of the Working Income Tax Benefit.**

The Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) is a refundable tax credit that makes low-paying work more attractive to workers. The WITB transfers more money into the hands of low-income households while also increasing labour market participation. In June 2016, the federal government announced a \$250 million increase to the WITB. While this is a positive step, it is important to note that the increase was designed to offset increased contributions being made by low-income workers in light of the expanded Canada Pension Plan. Additional program expansion is necessary. The 2013 *Income Inequality in Canada: An Overview* report of the Standing Committee on Finance highlighted WITB program expansion and / or modification as a key mechanism to further benefit Canadians and further incent workforce attachment. Advancing this recommendation into action will positively contribute to poverty reduction. Therefore ***we call on the federal government to double the WITB program as part of its poverty reduction strategy.***⁸

6. Enhance Employment Insurance coverage.

Employment Insurance (EI) is critical to Canada's social safety net. It can be used to address precarious work and reduce inequality. For example, marginalized groups such as Indigenous people, people with disabilities and LGBTQ people are disproportionately employed in low-wage precarious work. Temporary and part-time workers are unlikely to qualify for EI and benefit rates for precarious workers are often lower. Lowering the entrance requirement to qualify for EI and instituting a minimum benefit level would help level the playing field for these workers.

We recommend for the government to:

- ***Establish a uniform national eligibility requirement of 360 hours for regular benefits, and 300 hours for special benefits; and***

⁸ For more information on expanding the WITB, refer to: Gilezeau, R. and Speer, S. (2016). "Progressives and conservatives can both get behind the idea of expanding this key income support program," in *Policy Options*. Retrieved from: <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/december-2016/the-cross-party-case-for-the-working-income-tax-benefit/>.

- ***Add a low-income supplement so that no regular or special benefits fall below \$300/week.⁹***

7. Develop public and non-profit child care services available to all families.

Investment in Early Childhood Education and Childcare (ECEC), coupled with other family policy improvements, such as enhanced parental leave and income support would help prevent family homelessness. Advocates state that child care provision in Canada is unaffordable, unavailable and inconsistent in quality. ECEC systems tend to be market-driven services with very little public base funding, relying heavily on fees for revenue. Furthermore, specific groups such as infants, children with disabilities, newcomers, rural communities, Indigenous families and parents working part-time nonstandard hours are often left out of ECEC. Universal, high quality, comprehensive care would prevent social, ability-based, cultural and geographic barriers to equitable access.¹⁰

In addition to helping children and families, child care can also have immediate results on a government's bottom line—indeed, research from Quebec makes clear that a well-funded child care program can pay for itself (i.e., more parents enter the labour force and the taxes they pay increase government revenue more than enough for the government to finance the cost of the child care).¹¹

We recommend for the government to commit \$600 million to a dedicated and sustained federal funding stream for early childhood education and care.¹²

8. Be done in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

⁹ For detailed recommendations, refer to the Alternative Federal Budget, 2017, "Employment Insurance" chapter. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2017). *High Stakes, Clear Choices: Alternative Federal Budget 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/afb2017>.

¹⁰ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2017). *High Stakes, Clear Choices: Alternative Federal Budget 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/afb2017>

¹¹ Fortin, P., Godbout, L. and St-Cerny, S. (2012). *Impact of Quebec's Universal Low-Fee Childcare Program on Female Labour Force Participation, Domestic Income, and Government Budgets*. University of Sherbrooke. Retrieved from: http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/News/Fortin-Godbout-St_Cerny_eng.pdf.

¹² For detailed recommendations, refer to the Alternative Federal Budget, 2017, "Child Care" chapter. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2017). *High Stakes, Clear Choices: Alternative Federal Budget 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/afb2017>.

The federal government must remain cognizant of the historical impacts of colonization and the residual impact of race-based policies on Indigenous peoples. This has been underlined by contemporary reports, including the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the more recent *Truth and Reconciliation Report*. In particular, substantial investments should be made towards both on-reserve housing and housing for urban Aboriginal peoples. What's more, the federal government should direct Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Canada to consult on a Nation to Nation basis in discussing the details.