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Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness Committee Recommendations

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RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Community Living Standard Committee recommend to Council that they receive the City of St. Albert's Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness Final Report, dated June 1, 2020, for information.
2. That the Community Living Standing Committee recommend to Council that an Operating Business Case be developed to be considered as part of the 2021 budget process for a Social Housing Coordinator position, to advance the social housing needs of all vulnerable groups in St. Albert, as per the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness.
3. That the Community Living Standing Committee recommend to Council that a Capital Project Charter, along with future operating impacts, be developed and added to the 2021-2030 Growth Capital Plan to be considered as part of the 2021 budget process for the construction and operation of a new youth transitional home, using an advocacy model, as per the Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness recommendations.
4. That the Community Living Standing Committee recommend to Council that the Mayor's Task Force continue to lead the coordination of homelessness prevention strategies among local, regional, provincial, and national organizations, as well as the public and private sectors.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report brings forward a summary of research, finding and recommendations from the Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness for Council's consideration.

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITY

STRATEGIC PRIORITY #5: Housing: Enhance housing options.

5.4 Explore interim housing options to support vulnerable populations.

ALIGNMENT TO SERVICE DELIVERY

N/A

ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL (OR COMMITTEE) DIRECTION OR MANDATORY STATUTORY PROVISION

N/A

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Homelessness exists at the level of the community, and solutions must be coordinated at the level of the community. The Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness was formed in January 2018 in response to the increasing numbers of homeless people living in St. Albert. Task Force members include the Mayor of St. Albert and one other Council Member, two residents of St. Albert, one MLA and when possible, one senior level representative from each of the following government ministries/agencies:

- Alberta Health Services
- Human Services
- Indigenous representative
- Community Village/Food Bank
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Planning & Development Department
- Community & Social Development Department

One of the Task Force's objectives is to ensure recommendations regarding issues relating to people who experience homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless are brought forward to Council in a timely manner. The Task Force established a time line targeting the summer of 2020 to make a presentation to council. This was to allow the Task Force to have an appropriate amount of time to work through assessing and establishing priorities on research and current gaps and needs.

The Task Force researched housing options for four vulnerable groups in St. Albert:

- Women and families fleeing domestic violence
- Newcomers
- Seniors
- Youth

Each group exhibits many vulnerabilities that are responsive to housing interventions, but youth were observed to have the fewest resources and greatest need in St. Albert. This conclusion was drawn using a Service Based Estimation Approach. This method of collecting data was developed by the Alberta Rural Development Network and is a more appropriate method for estimating homeless people in a city with a mostly hidden homeless population.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research and best practice the Task Force is recommending the following:

1. To develop a business plan for the construction and operation of a youth transitional home in St. Albert using an advocacy model with individualized supports for each youth. This model is best suited for youth the National Alliance to End Homelessness describe as "unstably connected". These youth tend to have more complicated housing histories and are more likely

to have repeated episodes of homelessness. These youth are less likely to be engaged in school and exhibit challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. Most of these youth have some level of connection with family members are less likely to experience serious mental health or addictions issues than chronically homeless youth. St. Albert's homeless youth most often fit this "unstably connected" definition.

2. Establish a Social Housing position with the City. This staff member would be responsible for advancing homelessness prevention strategies for all vulnerable groups in St. Albert.

3. The Task Force to continue as the leader of coordinated homelessness prevention strategies among local, regional, provincial and national organizations, as well as the public and private sectors.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS OR ENGAGEMENT

The Mayor's Task Force met monthly over the past two years and have reviewed the report and are in support of the recommendations being presented.

To better understand the scope of the issue without the delay and expense of a "point in time" count, the Task Force met with a variety of stakeholders including:

- Homeless residents
- FCSS funded agencies (St. Albert Food Bank & Community Village, Stop Abuse in Families, and St. Albert Family Resource Centre)
- Outloud
- John Skene (Community Health Empowerment and Wellness project)
- Salvation Army
- Jessica Martel Foundation
- YouCan
- AHS Social Worker
- St. Albert Public Library
- Advisory Committees of Council (Youth and Seniors)
- Strategy and Mobilization (SAM) Committee

IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

The implications associated with these recommendations are both financial and social. Lack of safe housing for youth in the community has a negative impact on their ability to complete their education and enter the work force. Lack of housing also increases their risk of becoming chronically disconnected and increases their risk for mental health and addiction disorders and chronic homelessness. Providing safe and stable housing for youth, ensuring they have the support and resources they need would be a strong preventative measure.

Financial:

The financial implications for building a transition housing home for youth does come with a cost to the city. This cost will depend on successful grant applications as well as the type of building and

available land. There will also be operating costs attached to the home. A 10-resident home with staff would be approximately \$650,000 per year to operate. A Business Case should outline funding opportunities available outside of municipal tax dollars for operating costs. However, there are limited grants that are available for operating costs, so this can be a challenging model to maintain. Partnerships with existing youth housing operators is certainly an option that should be explored. There is also the recommendation that the City hire a Social Housing Coordinator to coordinate the response to housing priorities and needs of the identified vulnerable groups in St. Albert. The approximate overall cost for one FTE is approximately \$98,000/annum.

Legal / Risk:

None at this time

Program or Service:

None at this time.

Organizational:

If the transitional housing home were to proceed without the addition of a Social Housing Coordinator, there would be an impact on staff's current portfolios and projects due to capacity levels. This may result in a reduction in service levels in order to accommodate Task Force recommendations within the existing staff complement.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

Should the Committee not wish to support the recommendation, the following alternatives could be considered:

Alternative 1.

That the Community Living Standard Committee refer the matter back to Administration with direction.

Alternative 2.

That the Community Living Standing Committee recommend to Council that recommendation, the creation of a Social Housing Coordinator position proceed using existing staff resources.

If this recommendation is made there will be significant service level reductions in other areas of Community Capacity building.

Report Date: July 13, 2020

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Committee/Department: Community Services

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City of St. Albert

MAYOR'S TASK FORCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

Final Report

June 1, 2020



Message from the Chair

A couple of years ago I was driving north near Good Life Fitness on St. Albert Trail at around 9 p.m. Walking along the boulevard was a young woman who was clearly in distress. Sometimes you can tell that someone has no place to go.

As a long time St. Albert resident and as the Executive Director of a homeless and poverty relief organization in Edmonton, I was struck by this thought; “there was nowhere in St. Albert this person could go.” This needs to change.

Which is why it has been an honour to serve as the Chair of this Task Force. We are a group of individuals committed to ensuring that our city is a place where everyone is cared for, where those who are alone are never lonely, where those who are without shelter find housing. Our incredible city is known for many things; may it now also be known as the city that cares for its most vulnerable citizens. May it be a city where everyone has a place to go.

Dean Kurpjuweit

Task Force Chair, Executive Director (Edmonton) The Mustard Seed

Message from the Mayor

Hidden Homeless

The intention of The Mayor’s Task Force to End Homelessness was to bring to light the real issue here in St. Albert and to elevate the serious approach we as a city are taking to address homelessness.

Homelessness is a complex issue that impacts our whole community requiring diverse solutions. St. Albert is well known to be a caring and inclusive community and we find it unacceptable that every night there are individuals who are sleeping outside, in their car, on a friend’s couch or on the verge of losing their home.

As you read this report you will understand the need that is often hidden from view but does exist. The task force has identified which vulnerabilities were responsive to housing and which groups were not being adequately served in our current system. The recommendations presented arise from hours of research and hard work. I want to personally thank each member of the Task Force for their contributions.

Cathy Heron

Mayor, City of St. Albert-

The Botanical Art City

Executive Summary

The Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness was formed in January 2018 in response to the increasing numbers of homeless people living in St. Albert. In 2019, the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village recorded 167 homeless people in St. Albert including families, as well as individuals, from seniors to youth.

While some people sleep outside in St. Albert green spaces, most homeless families and individuals are hidden from view. Hidden homeless people are precariously housed and couch surf with family or friends, or sleep in cars, campers, or apartment stairwells.

The Task Force researched housing options for four vulnerable groups in St. Albert: women and families fleeing domestic violence, newcomers, seniors and youth. Each group exhibits many vulnerabilities that are responsive to housing interventions, but youth were observed to have the fewest resources and the greatest need in St. Albert.

Structural, systemic and interpersonal factors all contribute to youth homelessness. Local data indicate that many St. Albert youth are 'unstably disconnected' from their families. Transitional housing programs are recommended strategies for unstably connected youth.

The Task Force researched numerous models of youth housing. The best model for St. Albert youth is an advocacy model in which staff work closely with, and advocate for 3-4 youth. The intended goal of youth transitional homes is for youth to grow and become healthy, independent adults. Staff work with youth to establish goals including finishing high school, finding employment, and learning a range of life skills from budgeting to nurturing healthy relationships.

The Task Force has three recommendations. The first recommendation is to develop a business plan for the construction and operation of a youth transitional home in St. Albert. The second recommendation is to establish a Social Housing position within the City. This staff member would be responsible for advancing homeless prevention strategies for all vulnerable groups in St. Albert.

The third recommendation is for the Task Force to continue as the leader of coordinated homelessness prevention strategies among local, regional, provincial, and national organizations, as well as the public and private sectors.

Research and Data Report

In addition to this report, there is a Research and Data Report available upon request. The Research and Data Report captures the extensive research that support the outcomes and recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness final report. The Research and Data Report is intended for added information and to complement the report's research and findings.

Stories in this report are presented as themes and are true accounts as described by City counsellors, and staff from agencies and schools in St. Albert. This approach protects families and individuals from the trauma of 're-telling' their stories and protects the identities of people who seek the support and services of St. Albert organizations. One account is a first-hand account of a homeless youth in St. Albert and was taken from the "In Their Own Words" report which was commissioned by the Housing Coalition of St. Albert in 2017.

PREVIOUSLY DISTRIBUTED

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Introduction

Supporting vulnerable citizens is an important issue across Canada and homelessness is an increasing concern. “At least 235,000 Canadians are homeless in any given year”¹ and estimating the numbers of homeless people whether nationally or locally is complicated. Some people are chronically homeless while others experience episodes of homelessness and still, other forms of homelessness are ‘hidden’.

Estimating the numbers of homeless families and individuals in St. Albert is also challenging. The stigma of poverty causes people to hide their circumstances which makes it difficult to gauge true numbers. St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village statistics indicate that in 2019, 167 people were homeless in St. Albert.

In January 2018, the Mayor’s Task Force to End Homelessness was established to investigate the current need for housing among vulnerable populations in St. Albert. This report unpacks the profile of homelessness in St. Albert and details Task Force recommendations moving forward.

Municipal Role – Ending Homelessness

Today, small cities face big issues² and homelessness is a social issue that continues to intensify in number and complexity. Back and forth discussion about who should take responsibility to end homelessness is often a distraction if not a barrier to action.

Ultimately, the federal government plays a role in providing a significant source of funding to support homelessness initiatives. Provincial governments manage resources and funding through ministerial action. It is the responsibility of municipalities, however, to **lead the coordination** of support from the other orders of government as well as the public and private sectors. The City of Toronto’s 1998 Homelessness Action Task Force³ not only speaks to the enduring and chronic crisis of homelessness in cities across the country, but it also illustrates the role of municipal governments.

¹ <https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/homelessness-in-canada> (last edited July 2019)

² Walmsley, Christopher, and Terry Kading. 2018. *Small Cities, Big Issues: Reconceiving Community in a Neoliberal Era*. DesLibris. Edmonton, AB: AU Press. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e00xna&AN=1857030&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³ RANASINGHE, PRASHAN, and MARIANA VALVERDE. "The Toronto Shelter Zoning By-law: Municipal Limits in Addressing Homelessness." *Finding Home: Policy Options for Addressing Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: Cities Centre, University of Toronto (2009).

Among the 105 recommendations identified in the final report, *Taking Responsibility: An Action Plan for Toronto*, two key themes emerged from the recommendations:

- i. First, prevention and long-term approaches ought to replace reactive and emergency-type responses to homelessness, and
- ii. **Second, all three orders of government are responsible for solving it.**⁴

As the number of homeless people in Canadian cities increase, municipalities can no longer afford to defer action to other orders of government. Homelessness exists at the level of the community, and solutions must be coordinated at the level of the community.

The first step towards identifying evidence-based recommendations is to conduct in-depth research and investigation. The findings from the work of the Mayor’s Task Force to End Homelessness support three main recommendations founded on:

- Immediate action targeting homelessness prevention for the vulnerable group in St. Albert with the highest needs and fewest resources,
- Creating a new position to lead coordinated prevention actions for vulnerable populations in St. Albert,
- Vesting in the Task Force to advance homelessness prevention actions among local, regional, provincial, and federal agencies and governments.

The work of the Task Force followed specific steps which are reflected in the body of this report:



⁴ Ibid.

This report follows the framework above and concludes with three specific recommendations:

- 1. To develop a business case to construct and operate a youth transitional home in St. Albert.**
- 2. To create a new Social Housing position within the City administration.**
- 3. To empower the Task Force to continue to provide leadership for homelessness prevention actions in the City of St. Albert.**

Background

Stable housing is a key determinant of health for the individual, family, and community.⁵ Moreover, the costs to the community and the economy of not preventing and addressing homelessness are significant. The provincial and municipal governments incur both direct and indirect costs when community members do not have stable homes. Direct costs include dollars required to operate shelters, provide direct services, as well as various programs. Indirect costs are also incurred and include costs to the health, corrections and legal systems.⁶ For example, in 2008 dollars, “chronically homeless people – those facing the most challenges – cost (Alberta) taxpayers directly and indirectly over \$100,000 a year per person.”⁷

Just as the costs of homelessness to individuals and communities are diverse, the pathways to homelessness are also diverse. Pathways vary according to demographics, as well as internal circumstances such as a family breakup, and external circumstances such as economic conditions. The ways individuals or families arrive at the experience of homelessness are important to examine as these are the primary emphases for homelessness prevention initiatives.

People who lack stable, safe, and affordable housing include “*men & women, single persons & families, young & old people, those with and without mental and physical health problems, rural and urban dwellers, the rich and poor, people with high and low educational and occupational statuses, and racial, ethnic and visible minorities, illegal immigrants, former criminal offenders, runaway youth, prostitutes, and people with drug and alcohol addictions, (all) contribute to the composition of the population*”.

(Peressini, Tracy. "Perceived Reasons for Homelessness in Canada: Testing the Heterogeneity Hypothesis." *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 16, no. 1 (2007): 112-26. Accessed April 15, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/26192529.)

⁵ “Housing And Health: An Overview Of The Literature,” Health Affairs Health Policy Brief, June 7, 2018. DOI: 10.1377/hpb20180313.396577

⁶ The Alberta Secretariat For Action On Homelessness: *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, 2008.

⁷ The Alberta Secretariat For Action On Homelessness: *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, 2008.

Overview of Homelessness

Homelessness is an important social, health and economic issue in Canadian urban and rural areas. It is defined as “the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.”⁸

While the *experience* of homelessness is personal, the *expression* of homelessness occurs at the level of the community. There are four ways in which homelessness is expressed:⁹

- i. **Unsheltered** – people staying in places that are not fit for human habitation such as cars, alleys, etc.
- ii. **Emergency Sheltered** – people temporarily provided with shelter for a limited period of time due to the cold weather, family violence, disasters, etc.
- iii. **Provisionally Accommodated** – people living in non-permanent housing, includes couch-surfing, motels, institutional care, newcomer settlements, such as hotels, and other forms of temporary housing
- iv. **At-Risk of Homelessness** – circumstances are such that a person or family may lose their accommodation due to risk factors such as discrimination, behaviours of residents, overcrowding, unemployment, etc.

The effects of homelessness can be very visible, with individuals living ‘rough’ in the streets and in shelters, or homelessness can be more hidden, where families and individuals couch surf, or sleep in vehicles or apartment stairwells. In St. Albert, most homelessness is ‘hidden’ where families and individuals are provisionally accommodated or are at-risk of becoming homeless.

Three broad homelessness risk factors include:

- i. **Extreme poverty,**
- ii. **A lack of affordable housing, and/or**
- iii. **Domestic violence**

Echenberg, Havi, and Hilary Jensen. Risk factors for homelessness. Parliamentary Information and Research Service, 2009.

⁸ Rodrigue, Samantha. *Hidden homelessness in Canada*. Statistics Canada= Statistique Canada, 2016.

⁹ Gaetz, S.; Barr, C.; Friesen, A.; Harris, B.; Hill, C.; Kovacs-Burns, K.; Pauly, B.; Pearce, B.; Turner, A.; Marsolais, A. (2012) *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Other risk factors including unemployment and reduced income, reductions in welfare support, deinstitutionalization, economic disruptions, and gentrification, as well as individual disabilities, mental illness, substance abuse, and criminal activity¹⁰, all contribute to and exacerbate the above three social factors associated with homelessness.

There is no one solution to encompass support for all vulnerable populations. All three orders of government, as well as non-profit agencies and research groups, have investigated opportunities to eliminate and/or reduce the incidence and prevalence of homelessness among different populations. As Canadian municipalities increasingly find themselves on the front lines of the homelessness issue, they must implement solutions that meet the unique needs of vulnerable groups in their communities.

Profile of Homelessness in St. Albert

In contrast to people who are 'unsheltered' or 'emergency-sheltered', 'hidden' homeless individuals and families are mostly 'provisionally' accommodated and must rely on friends and family (or agencies) in order to remain hidden.

"In 2018-19 we worked with a 61 year old woman who lived in her camper truck. She appeared to have significant mental health concerns. Her son had been murdered (and) we believe she had been living in her camper for awhile – perhaps years. She accessed the Community Village for meals, showers and laundry over the winter months of late October through March."

(Social Worker – SACV)

This support is often precarious, and time limited and homeless guests are left vulnerable to the demands of the homeowner causing the hidden homeless to become visibly homeless at any time. St. Albert also has a significant number of residents who struggle to meet their basic needs.

Because homelessness is for the most part hidden in St. Albert, a point in time count is not a feasible way to assess the number of people who are homeless in this city. A more appropriate method for estimating the number of homeless people in a city with a mostly 'hidden' homeless population is to use a 'service-based estimation' approach.¹¹

¹⁰ Echenberg, Havi, and Hilary Jensen. *Risk factors for homelessness*. Parliamentary Information and Research Service, 2009.

¹¹ <https://www.ardn.ca/publications/step-by-step-guide-to-estimating-homelessness>

This method, developed by the Alberta Rural Development Network, “estimates the number of individuals experiencing homelessness as well as those at risk of becoming homeless in a community by using data collected by service agencies over a defined period of time.”¹²

The St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village is the primary source for real-time data of families and individuals who are either homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless. In 2019, 167 people were identified by the St. Albert Community Village as being homeless in St. Albert.

“In 2018-19 we worked with a 58 year old male who was living in a motel with his 82 year old mother after being evicted from their home. Client had lost his job and they lived off of the mom’s pensions. He was eager to find a safe place for his mother and was committed to her care and to securing employment which he eventually did.”

“We (SAFB/CV) supported them in staying in the motel and also accessed funding through Salvation Army and Crisis (funding) to assist them in moving into an apartment in March 2019 (3 ½ months in motel).”

(Social Worker - SACV)

¹² Ibid

Landscape of Housing Supports in St Albert

Housing supports and services in St. Albert range from direct subsidies to indirect assistance.

Housing Organizations/ Groups in St. Albert

Organization	Type of Support
Capital Region Housing (CRH)	Is a provincial housing management body, operating under the <i>Alberta Housing Act</i> , and is responsible for allocating provincial rental subsidies and programs in the Capital Region.
Homeland Housing	Builds and manages housing facilities for seniors and offers different living options: Independent Living (Self-contained apartments), Supportive Living, and Affordable Housing (apartments)
Co-op Housing	Co-op housing provides subsidized rent and may offer a range of unit sizes from one bedroom to four or more bedrooms, depending on the complex. There are two housing co-ops in St. Albert.
Habitat for Humanity	St. Albert also has one Habitat for Humanity site with 35 duplex units. Habitat for Humanity uses sweat equity in exchange for a down payment on a house
St. Albert Housing Society	The SAHS owns 27 rental units in Big Lake Pointe that are rented at 10 per cent below market rates to low income families and individuals, seniors, families fleeing domestic violence, single parents, and people with disabilities.
Housing Coalition of St. Albert	In 2017, the Coalition transitioned from the former Temporary Residential Services Committee. The Coalition educates residents about homelessness in St. Albert and advocates for sustainable housing actions. The latest Coalition initiative involves planning a HomeShare program under the auspices of the St. Albert Community Village.
Other supports	St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village, Salvation Army, Alberta Works, Alberta Health's addictions programs, Sturgeon Hospital, Churches

"Homeless and at-risk youth that I work with face several challenges in finding and making a safe home for themselves. Several themes pop up over and over again including: the lack of overall funding for youth programs and supports, the lack of affordable housing as well as the unwillingness of landlords to rent to youth, the challenge of surviving on minimum wage, lack of support and recognition of need from Children's Services for youth under the age of 18, and challenges of couch surfing with friends who are abusing drugs. All while often trying to manage mental health issues and addictions"

(City of St. Albert Youth Counsellor)

While there are some services available for families and individuals who are struggling to meet their needs, there remain significant gaps in housing options and many people are currently homeless in St. Albert. Long wait lists exist for Capital Region Housing and no new applications for rent supplements are being accepted by CRH at this time. Similarly, long waits for Homeland Housing exist and acceptance is prioritized based on need.

A significant gap in services and resources in St. Albert exists for youth.

Currently, there are no housing options for homeless and at-risk youth in St. Albert. Further, youth experience a range of challenges when trying to find a safe, affordable home for themselves.

“Most of the nights I sleep in the lobby. I know the managers. They don’t mind. Just to get out of the cold. As long as I’m gone in the morning before the (door) opens”

(St. Albert Youth - In Their Own Words, 2017)

St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village data demonstrate the overall need of many families and individuals who are struggling in St. Albert:

- The SAFB/CV has 1,085 families on file who access the food bank anywhere from once per year to once per month.
- In 2019, the SAFB distributed 3,631 hampers to families and individuals.
- The SAFB averages about 300 hampers per month.
- Approximately 4 per cent of people receiving hampers from the St. Albert Food Bank are homeless.¹³
- Between 62 and 71% per cent of families accessing SAFB/CV services are spending more than 50 per cent of their income on rent.

The increasing number of families and individuals seeking support from the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village as well as other social service agencies in St. Albert¹⁴ reflect the numbers of people who are either homeless or are at risk of becoming

“The St. Albert Public Library has (also) been identified as a welcoming facility for people seeking housing information and computer services for submitting employment and other applications online.”

(In Their Own Words - 2017)

homeless. As of December 2019, there were 167 homeless people in St. Albert. The increasing number of vulnerable people in St. Albert point to the need for city-based interventions to prevent homelessness at any stage.

¹³ This figure may vary depending on the month.

¹⁴ Other agencies in St. Albert where families and individuals seek help include SAIF, Family Resource Centre, Salvation Army, Primary Care Network, and churches.

Federal & Provincial Initiatives

Some provincial and federal policies developed in the early and recent 2000s support ending homelessness in principle but have had little traction to date. In 2008, *A Plan for Alberta; ending homelessness in 10 years*, set a bold vision to end homelessness by 2019 and to have a system for rehousing homeless individuals within 21 days.¹⁵ More recently, in November 2017, the federal government unveiled *A place to call home; Canada's first ever National Housing Strategy (NHS)*. The NHS includes \$40 billion in investments for affordable housing across the country over the next 10 years¹⁶ with aims to reduce chronic homelessness by 50 per cent over 10 years, to build 60,000 new social housing units, and to repair 240,000 units over the same period.¹⁷

Closer to home, some successes have been observed. In 2009, Medicine Hat became one of the first Canadian cities to commit to ending homelessness using the Housing First approach. The 2018 Medicine Hat Community Housing Society progress report showed that 1,212 formerly homeless individuals have been housed and supported since 2009.¹⁸ Similarly, Edmonton's Plan to End Homelessness has supported and housed over 8,400 since the plan was launched in 2009.¹⁹

Prior to the 1990s, the task of building affordable housing and ensuring that all citizens have safe, secure housing fell mainly on the federal government. In 1993, federal spending on the construction of new social housing ended and by 1996 the federal government had transferred responsibility of building social housing to the provinces.²⁰

"The federal cutbacks to social housing assistance meant the provinces and territories had to increase their level of commitment to social housing. But while most provinces and territories have new cost-sharing agreements with the federal government, little new construction has taken place. For example, in Alberta, spending for social housing projects dropped from \$382 million in 1991 to \$190 million in 2007."²¹ Provincial inactivity in social housing has further

¹⁵ Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*. Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2008.

¹⁶ Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. *Affordable Housing Budget Expenditure Highlights in Canada*, 2018.

¹⁷ Government of Canada. "A Place to Call Home: Canada's National Housing Strategy." (2017).

¹⁸ At Home In Medicine Hat Our Plan To End Homelessness Year 9 Progress Report

¹⁹ Edmonton's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness 2018 Progress Report.

²⁰ Suttor, Greg, *Still Renovating: A History of Canadian Social Housing Policy*.

²¹ Moskalyk, Alexandra. *The role of public-private partnerships in funding social housing in Canada*. Canada: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2008.

downloaded the responsibility of addressing social housing needs to municipalities in Alberta and other provinces.

Finally, in the wake of the recent COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it is difficult to predict the commitment to social spending by the federal and provincial governments. However, homelessness continues unabated in Alberta and municipalities continue to witness this social, economic and humanitarian crisis. This report unpacks the pathways of homelessness among vulnerable groups in St. Albert and provides recommendations to City Council and residents about how to address homelessness in St. Albert.

Proposed Housing Supports – 4 Vulnerable Groups

Several distinct groups or populations in St. Albert experience different ‘kinds’ of vulnerabilities for a range of reasons. For example, members of the LGBTQ community in St. Albert may be vulnerable to discrimination and abuse, again in varying situations and circumstances, from school, to work, to home. Similarly, the tragic experiences of Indigenous peoples confer generational vulnerabilities that are unique to this community. Moreover, seniors, newcomers, people with disabilities, youth, people living in poverty, and many more communities and groups, may all be vulnerable to one or more challenges throughout their lives such as illness, injury, and/or loss of employment and income.

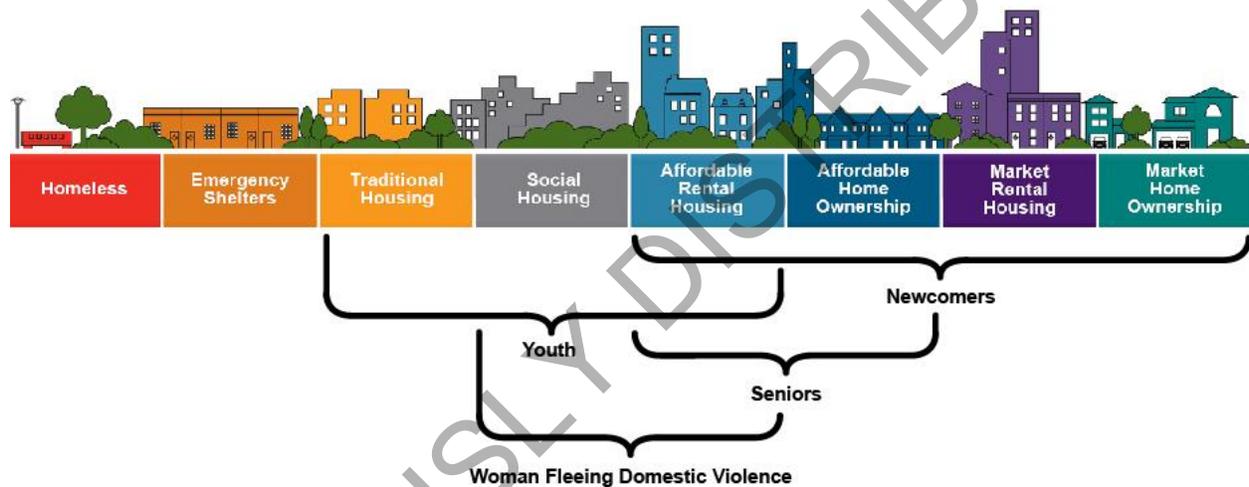
The Mayor’s Task Force to End Homelessness was challenged with first identifying which vulnerabilities are truly responsive to housing, and which groups or populations require a broader range of supports to make an impact. For example, to address the housing and psychosocial needs of the Métis and First Nations people who live in the St. Albert region, a more intensive process that defers to St. Albert Métis and First Nations peoples as the drivers and designers of their supports is required. This more intensive process may require a designated ‘social housing specialist’ to expand the reach of experience and knowledge beyond that of housing. This social housing specialist is one of the two recommendations proposed by the Task Force.

Similarly, Council’s Strategic Priority 5.4 *Explore interim housing options to support vulnerable populations*, included recommendations to focus on specialized supportive housing for people with disabilities as well as supportive housing for people with chronic mental illness and addictions. Each of these areas of supportive housing requires intensive vertical partnerships with Alberta Health Services and other provincial ministries to construct supportive housing that

fully meets the needs of these groups. The Task Force elected to first investigate the housing needs of vulnerable groups that were more feasibly addressed in the near future. The Task Force investigated the vulnerabilities and housing needs of four specific groups in St. Albert. Several interviews with agencies who provide supports to different groups in St. Albert revealed the unique vulnerabilities of each group.

Housing takes on different forms and exists on a continuum from homelessness to market ownership. Depending on the group, the 'best fit' housing varies along the continuum. Each housing target is indicated below for the four different vulnerable groups discussed.

Housing Targets for 4 Vulnerable Populations



<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/developing-and-renovating/develop-new-affordable-housing/programs-and-information/about-affordable-housing-in-canada>

Women and Families Fleeing Domestic Violence

Between July and September 2019, staff from six local and regional agencies were interviewed to identify the challenges that women and families living in domestic violence circumstances experience. Several themes emerged from the interview data:

- i. All agencies are seeing an overall increase in family violence, addictions and mental health issues. Some agencies are also seeing a rise in unemployment.
- ii. Women fleeing domestic violence are often forced to stay in the abusive relationship due to lack of financial resources and financial literacy skills, or because their children may have disabilities or psychological needs which make it difficult for mothers to work outside the home.
- iii. Children are often deeply traumatized by the violence.

Jessie's House is a 35 'pillow' facility that is open to all women, children and men in Sturgeon County and beyond who are fleeing domestic violence. While Jessie's House creates individual, trauma-informed, care plans for each individual and family staying there, it is up to the destination location to support victims of violence by providing a 'soft place to land.'

The two biggest reasons women often return to their abusive relationships is lack of employment and lack of affordable housing.²² Through engagement with businesses, Economic Development and Community Services, a social housing specialist could develop streamlined processes to help people exiting shelters find flexible employment opportunities in St. Albert. Moreover, the social housing specialist would also work with Planning and Development and Community Services to create new points of entry into St. Albert's rental market that are fast, efficient and affordable. Finally, a soft place to land for children exiting shelters must include consistent, long-term trauma counselling that is integrated into the school system.

The Task Force's recommendation to support women and families fleeing domestic violence is to focus on the post-shelter needs of people who are exiting Jessie's House and other shelters. Post-shelter supports will enable women and children to live and thrive independently and away from their abusers.

Newcomers

As the diversity of St. Albert residents continues to increase, the strength of this diversity may be lost if newcomers can't thrive due to a lack of safe and affordable housing. Newcomers to Canada face numerous challenges in finding employment and housing that enables them to fully participate in and contribute to society. The Task Force interviewed several agencies in St. Albert to articulate the vulnerabilities of newcomers in St. Albert.

For the most part, unless a family has been privately sponsored by a group in St. Albert, newcomers to St. Albert have lived somewhere else in Canada before coming to St. Albert. That is, St. Albert is a secondary migration destination. Most of the services that support newcomers are based in larger centres such as Edmonton or Calgary. Most newcomers living in St. Albert have chosen to move to St. Albert after they have first settled elsewhere in the province or country. The challenges facing newcomers in St. Albert are not unlike other low-income families and individuals. Housing responses by the Task Force focus on options enabling newcomers to enter market and near market housing.

²² Sev'er, Aysan. "A feminist analysis of flight of abused women, plight of Canadian shelters: Another road to homelessness." *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 11, no. 4 (2002): 307-324.

Each of these housing options would reduce the costs of newcomers with lower incomes to rent near market and market housing and to purchase affordable housing. Incidentally, these options would benefit any low-income families and individuals in St. Albert.

Seniors

Several of the interviews focusing on the vulnerability of seniors indicated that many seniors in St. Albert are facing a housing affordability challenge where more than 30 per cent of their income goes to housing costs such as rent or home maintenance including utilities and taxes. Moreover, more seniors are also reporting incidences of elder abuse and isolation and the associated health effects of isolation such as depression. The issue for many seniors in St. Albert is that downsizing into smaller, more affordable, more walkable, and transit-friendly homes 'is not an option'²³ in St. Albert.

Affordability issues are confirmed by national studies: "decades of limited investment in private purpose-built rental housing, conversions to condominiums and decreasing federal funding in social housing have contributed to an overall decline in the availability of affordable rental housing. The vacancy rate at (private) seniors' residences, however, is high across the country and at 2.5 times the cost of rents in the private market they are not an option for many seniors."²⁴ Seniors would benefit from some of the same housing options for newcomers. Innovative housing that enables seniors to downsize or rent more affordably can also address other issues such as isolation, walkability and access to transit.

The Housing Coalition of St. Albert is investigating a HomeShare program for St. Albert. The primary target for this program is seniors in St. Albert who have extra space in their homes they could rent out to individuals looking for affordable rental options. This program would support seniors in several ways including, raising their income through renting out space in their home, providing support with errands and home maintenance, as well as reducing isolation.

²³ Conversation with St. Albert Seniors Advisory Committee members, Sept 12, 2019

²⁴ Federation of Canadian Municipalities. *Seniors and Housing: The Challenge Ahead Part II of Canada's Aging Population: The Municipal Role in Canada's Demographic Shift*, 2015.

Youth

Youth vulnerabilities are directly responsive to housing. Some of the factors that make youth vulnerable include difficulty finding work, discrimination from landlords, abusive home environments, mental illness including depression and anxiety, addictions, and institutional challenges. For example, youth who are not considered in imminent danger are not supported by Children’s Services. But, youth who are under 18 are also not eligible for Alberta Supports, so these youth who have been kicked out of their homes or have left their homes have no source of support. Their options are to couch surf with friends, sleep in cars, stairwells, or outside, move to a shelter in Edmonton, or return to abusive situations.

“Youth ages 15-25 cannot find jobs, cannot afford housing, and have to couch surf while in school.”

“Youth experiencing homelessness (mostly couch surfing) have a difficult time with school and often get kicked out (of school) because of non-attendance or fail because of difficulties in paying attention in school.”

“The homeless youth often find their way into Edmonton and unfortunately, this gets them into trouble (prostitution, drug use/abuse, dangerous situations, etc.)”

(City of St. Albert, Community Support Worker)

The best fit housing option for youth, who are caught in the ‘in-between’ stage of development with no supports, is some form of ‘in-between’ or transitional home that includes the guidance and support youth need to be able to transition to independence.²⁵ There are numerous models of transitional homes across the country and beyond. Given the range of operational models of transitional homes for youth, the challenge is identifying the best fit model for the City of St. Albert.

²⁵ This is not a group home since group homes are allowed a maximum number of 6 residents as per the St. Albert Land Use Bylaw (No. 09/2005), Part 8, section 8.17. Transitional homes have more than 6 residents.

Emphasis on Youth

There are many reasons the Task Force decided to focus on youth homelessness in St. Albert. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a key period for identity formation. In fact, “forming an identity that sets a firm foundation for adulthood is the central developmental concern and issue of adolescence.”²⁶ As well, ‘reflection,’ an important step in identity formation, occurs in later adolescence and extends into early adulthood.²⁷ There is significant evidence indicating that this process of growth is disrupted when young people experience the trauma of homelessness.

Moreover, the 2015 National Canadian Homelessness Youth Survey sampled 1,103 youth across the country and found 42 per cent of the participants reported one or more suicide attempts, and 85 per cent had high levels of psychological distress.²⁸ Ultimately, youth homelessness is experienced not only as a loss of housing, but also includes disruptions of financial and food security, critical mental and emotional development, as well as the potential loss of friends, family and community.

“Even when youth do get approved, funding (whether that be through Children Services funding, learners benefits funding, or Alberta Works supports) it is almost impossible for youth to secure housing in St Albert due to landlords not willing to rent to youth and high cost housing.”

(City of St. Albert, Community Support Worker)

Finally, where young people are concerned, **it is critical to halt homelessness before it becomes a chronic experience.** As well, homeless youth who have grown up in St. Albert have memories and familiarity with their community and want to stay in their community. Most St. Albert youth are not familiar with Edmonton, they are afraid of living in shelters in Edmonton, and are at high-risk of being pulled into dangerous ‘street life’ survival behaviours.

²⁶ Abbasi, Neda. "Adolescent identity formation and the school environment." In *The Translational Design of Schools*, pp. 81-103. Brill Sense, 2016.

²⁷ Klimstra, Theo A., and Lotte van Doeselaar. "Identity formation in adolescence and young adulthood." In *Personality development across the lifespan*, pp. 293-308. Academic Press, 2017.

²⁸ Patten, Scott B. "Homelessness and Mental Health." *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 62, no. 7 (July 2017): 440–41. doi:[10.1177/0706743717711423](https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743717711423).

Emphasizing prevention actions that target at-risk and homeless youth enables them to stay in the city in which they have a sense of belonging. As well, the emphasis on youth homelessness prevention actions can change the trajectory of at-risk and homeless youth during critical stages of their development.

Youth Homelessness Defined

Youth homelessness refers to young people ages 13 to 24 who do not have the means or ability to acquire a safe & stable residence²⁹ and includes being unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated where accommodation is temporary, or at risk of homelessness where the current housing situation is precarious. There are several ways in which youth homelessness differs from adult homelessness:³⁰

- i. Young people often leave homes in which they are typically dependent on adult caregivers.
- ii. Youth may not have acquired personal, social and life skills for independent living.
- iii. Many young people are in the throes of physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.
- iv. Youth tend to seek, access, and respond to services and supports differently than adults.
- v. Young people often avoid the homeless-serving system out of fear of authorities.
- vi. In some cases, there are no services to access, especially for those under 16.

"I have (a) student who was kicked out of their family home and lived with a relative for a period of time. Soon afterward, the relative was evicted so the student was back living homeless, couch surfing and desperate for housing. A friend's family agreed to take the student in on a semi-permanent basis. Throughout this long drawn out search for a stable living arrangement, the student attempted to attend school, find work and maintain their mental and physical well-being."

(Outreach School)

"Youth homelessness is defined by inherent instability, profound limitations and poverty. At a time when these young people are experiencing loss and potentially trauma, they are simultaneously charged with managing a diverse and complex set of tasks, including obtaining shelter, income and food, making good decisions and developing healthy relationships"

(Gaetz, S. (2014a). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.)

²⁹ Gaetz, S. (2016). Canadian definition of youth homelessness. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. Retrieved from <http://homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-youthhomelessness>

³⁰ Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Pathways to Homelessness for Youth

The causes and conditions of youth homelessness are diverse and complex. Within the youth homeless population diversity is expressed in terms of age differences, levels of maturity, gender and sexual orientation, the experience of racism, and experiences of trauma before becoming homeless.³¹ Each young person's story is different and involves structural, systemic and interpersonal factors.



Structural factors contributing to youth homelessness include economic and societal issues such as a lack of adequate income, inadequate access to affordable housing, childhood poverty, and/or the experience of discrimination.³² Further, structural factors often create the conditions under which relational crises push young people to homelessness.

Systems failures occur when systems of care and support including child protection, health care, mental health care, and corrections fail. Institutional "silos and gaps both within and between government funded departments and systems, as well as within non-profit sectors"³³ contribute to systems failures. Some examples of systems failure related to youth homelessness include difficult transitions from child welfare and inadequate discharge from addictions facilities or corrections facilities. For example, many young people in child protection often become homeless when their placements break down and when they are discharged without adequate planning and supports. Ultimately, in the absence of strong transitional supports, many young people transition directly from child welfare, corrections, and healthcare facilities into homelessness.³⁴

Finally, **interpersonal factors** contributing to youth homelessness include personal circumstances in a youth's life, such as abuse and/or neglect, addictions, family breakdown, extreme poverty at home, or disabilities, etc. Each of these factors may lead to anxiety,

³¹ Hoffman, Kwasi. "The Rise of Youth Homelessness: Is Canada facing a Crisis?" *Open Health Services and Policy Journal* 3 (2010): 23.

³² Schwan, Kaitlin, David French, Stephen Gaetz, Ashley Ward, Jennifer Akerman, Melanie Redman, and Tamsin Stirling. "Preventing youth homelessness: An international review of evidence." (2018).

³³ Gaetz, Stephen, and Erin Dej. *A new direction: A framework for homelessness prevention*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2017.

³⁴ Schwan, Kaitlin, David French, Stephen Gaetz, Ashley Ward, Jennifer Akerman, Melanie Redman, and Tamsin Stirling. "Preventing youth homelessness: An international review of evidence." (2018).

depression and other mental health issues, which can complicate and exacerbate problems at home.³⁵ Once youth become homeless, their opportunities to graduate from high school, find adequate employment, transition to independence, and develop healthy and supportive relationships are drastically diminished.

We know that 1 in 3 homeless youth finishes high school, 25-40 per cent of youth self identify as LGBTQ, and 40-70 per cent of homeless youth have mental health issues compared to 10-20 per cent who are housed.³⁶ Hence, the pathways to youth homelessness are diverse and unique. They result in severe disruptions at crucial periods of development along the life course, and youth homelessness most often results in diminished opportunities which can further entrench homelessness for youth well into adulthood.

Prevention Continuum

Prevention means to invest in supports and to coordinate services to reduce the likelihood that people will become homeless. To work properly, homelessness prevention relies on multiple sectors beyond the homelessness sector. Housing, social services, health and employment sectors all have a role to play in preventing homelessness.

Preventing homelessness cannot and should not be the sole responsibility of the homelessness sector³⁷ and prevention strategies should be measured by their capacities to reduce the risk factors that lead to homelessness.

“Two people are standing at the edge of a river. All of a sudden, a drowning child floats by and one person jumps in to save her. Then another child comes floating by and the other individual jumps in to pluck him from the water. But soon, more and more children are in the river and drowning. People cannot keep up with the demand. Eventually, someone decides to go upstream to figure out why kids keep falling/being thrown in the river in the first place.”

(<https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention/primary-prevention>)

Homelessness prevention exists on a continuum. Upstream, or primary prevention strategies, may include programs that work with schools to build problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills among youth. Midstream, or secondary prevention, may include stopping the flow of young people from institutional care into homelessness as well as other shelter diversion strategies.

³⁵ Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver (2013) *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Stephen Gaetz & Erin Dej. (2017). *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Youth Transitional Home(s)

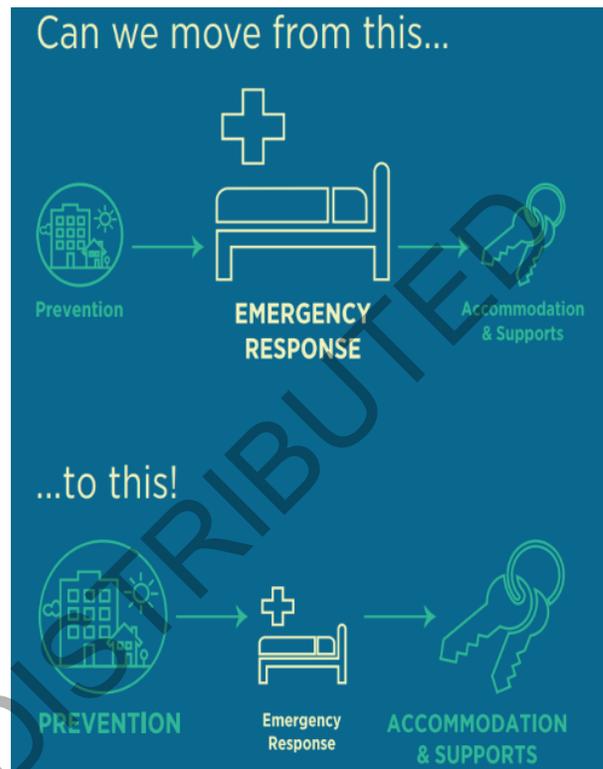
Reinforcing the difference between adult homelessness and youth homelessness cannot be overstated. Specifically, “homeless youth generally are leaving a situation – whether it is family, child welfare or correctional services – where they were dependent upon adult caregivers for their overall support.”⁴¹

While the trend toward more coordinated prevention responses is improving in Canada through the development of plans with targets, benchmarks and evaluation plans,⁴² most responses to youth homelessness remain fragmented. The non-coordinated and ‘ad hoc’ patchwork of emergency services may include shelters and isolated day programs which may meet immediate needs but do not contribute to preventing or ending youth homelessness.

Youth transitional homes are tertiary prevention strategies that move away from shelters to more coordinated systems of support that assist homeless youth to either return home or transition towards independence.

Strategies that distinguish the uniqueness of youth homelessness and at the same time emphasize prevention rather than emergency backstops are best grounded in a thorough understanding of the ‘typology’ of youth homelessness within a community.

The American based National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) provides useful definitions to help define the typology of youth homelessness in St. Albert. The circumstances experienced by many St. Albert youth indicate that most at-risk youth in St. Albert are ‘**unstably disconnected**’ from their families and are at risk of becoming ‘chronically disconnected.’



⁴¹ The Homeless Hub. *Youth Transitional Housing Toolkit*. 2015.

⁴² Stephen Gaetz, “The struggle to end homelessness in Canada: How we created the crisis and how we can end it” *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*, Vol 3 (2010), 23.

The recommended support for unstably disconnected youth homelessness is transitional housing programs that provide programming and other supports to enable youth to transition into healthy and independent adults.

Transitional Home Operational Models

There are many ways to operate a youth transitional home. Several factors that distinguish one operational model from another include: length of stay, philosophy of separating or mixing all genders and orientations under one roof, age ranges, demands of programming, rules and expectations, staff to resident ratios, etc.

Some transitional homes provide intensive programming with high demands and expectations, while other homes are more flexible with the length of stays and house rules. Further, building form and living arrangements range from dormitory shared rooms with common areas and facilities to independent apartments.⁴³

Each of the transitional homes below has features that are common to all as well as distinguishing features. Staff are well trained in de-escalation techniques and teach youth communication skills which support them to self regulate when their emotions become overwhelming.⁴⁴ Each home has a rule that if a youth is absent for seven days then they will lose their bed.

⁴³ NOVAC, SYLVIA, JOYCE BROWN, and CARMEN BOURBONNAIS. "Transitional housing models in Canada: Options and outcomes." *Finding home: Policy options for addressing homelessness in Canada (e-book)* (2009).

⁴⁴ Interview with YESS 'violence comes from a lack of communication and a lack of autonomy and independence'.

Summary of Transitional Home Features

	Transitional Home	Distinguishing Features				
		Ages	Length of Stay	Expectations	Staffing	Programming
↑ Increasing Expectations	The Loft	16-24	6-9 months	Highest expectations. Expected to participate in strict budgeting program.	6 beds, 2 staff on evenings and some days, 1 awake staff overnight.	Male only. Emphasis on transitioning to independence. Illicit drug use is grounds for dismissal.
	YESS - Shanoa's Place	15-21	Open ended	High expectations. Expected to set goals, and attend school, training, or work.	9 beds, 1 staff per shift, plus mngr, 48 hrs on and 4 days off	Emphasis on goal setting and transitioning to independence Housing 1 st
	YESS - Graham's Place	16-24	Open ended	Mid- expectations. Expected to work with staff to set goals.	20 beds, 24 hr staff, minimum 2 staff/ shift	Emphasis on safety & family supports as well as goal setting Housing 1 st
	NOVA	16-24	Open ended	Lower expectations. Work on safer 'street' habits. Work on some goals with staff	20 beds Minimum 2 staff/ shift.	Emphasis on safety and harm reduction Housing 1 st
	E4C	14-17 yrs	2+ depending on age	Low expectations. Attend school, curfews	5 beds per home, 24 hr staff, 2 staff per shift.	Emphasis on safety. Housing 1 st

Ultimately transitional housing is a “stage in a progression from which residents are expected to graduate”⁴⁵ to independence. The challenge is identifying the best fit transitional home model for a community or municipality.

⁴⁵ Barrow, S., & Zimmer, R. (1999). Transitional housing and services: A synthesis. In L. Fosburg & D. Dennis (Eds.) Practical lessons: The 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research

Proposed St. Albert Youth Transitional Home

This section applies best practice and theory to the development of a youth transitional home in St. Albert. Based on the typology of homelessness among youth in St. Albert, a transitional home is an appropriate tertiary prevention response and an **advocacy model** with individualized supports is the best fit for St. Albert youth.⁴⁶ An advocacy model provides a safe place for youth to live with built-in supports which enable them to continue developing into healthy, independent adults.

Home Features/ Philosophy

The ages accommodated by a St. Albert Youth Transitional Home would mirror the ages of youth seen by City counsellors. The best fit for a St. Albert home is 16-24 years of age. Moreover, emulating other transitional homes, all genders would be accommodated. The St. Albert home could opt to design the home to separate genders by floor.⁴⁷

Length of stay is an important aspect of programming. Most homes are adamant about being flexible with the length of stay. Depending on the age of the youth when they first arrive, some youth may need to stay for 2+ years to be confident enough to be independent, while others may only need to stay 6 months. The Task Force is recommending that the St. Albert Youth Transitional Home adopt an open-ended length of stay model. This 'as long as needed' approach relies on the expertise of staff to establish goals with the youth and to support them to become independent adults.

The staff in an **advocacy-based** youth transitional home work with youth to set goals on their path towards independence. Each staff works closely with 3-4 youth for whom they take responsibility in all aspects of the youths' lives. These staff counsel the youth about healthy relationships and how to handle problems and emotions in healthy ways. Staff also teach the youth important life skills and ensure their day-to-day needs are met, while allowing the youth to make choices within a safe environment.

The recommended number of youth (beds) for the St. Albert home is influenced by the intensity of the operational model as well as the prevalence of homelessness among youth in St. Albert.

⁴⁶ Alternatives to an advocacy model include 'shift work' model in which youth have more independence to come and go and make their own plans, or scattered apartments with minimal supervision.

⁴⁷ Some City counsellors thought this might be a good option when designing the home. Other homes integrated rules of safety and communication, which they said prevented potential problems from the outset.

The Task Force recommends a maximum of 10 beds for the St. Albert Youth Transitional Home. This would balance the needs of existing homeless and at-risk youth in St. Albert while supporting the advocacy model approach.⁴⁸

Specific programming and supports within the St. Albert Youth Transitional Home can evolve over time as indicated by the youth and staff. Results from an informal focus group with youth at Outreach School include suggestions for programming:

- On-site mental health support
- Monthly group therapy
- Communal kitchen to learn cooking skills
- Healthy recreation options

Other features for the home as suggested by the youth include:

- All youth must feel safe in the home
- Gender separated bathrooms
- Quiet reading room and computer area
- Weekly room checks
- Maintain relationships after graduation

Finally, the acuity levels of many of the youth who seek support from counselling services, Outreach School, and the St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village, indicate that a housing first philosophy is an important feature of a St. Albert Youth Transitional Home. Housing first is an approach that emphasizes that housing is a precondition of recovery and not vice-versa.⁴⁹ Therefore, abstinence from drug use is not a requirement for housing. The Task Force recommends a housing first philosophy with rules and guidelines that fit the St. Albert context.

Potential Location Options

Careful inspection of the Land Use Bylaw and the City's definition of transitional housing, as well as optimal space for youth to attend school and access transportation, led to three location options for the home.

⁴⁸ While there is an argument for 'economies of scale' and supporting as many youth as possible with a higher number of beds, the typology of youth in St. Albert suggests that these youth would do well with a 'home-like' atmosphere with fewer residents. Both *The Loft* and *Shanoa's Place* have similar #s.

⁴⁹ Gaetz, Stephen. (2017). *THIS is Housing First for Youth: A Program Model Guide*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

- i. Braeside Church (6 Bernard Dr, St. Albert) – this site would be ideal for youth to attend the Outreach School across the street. Transportation would also be accessible for the youth. However, the ‘transitional residential services’ definition in the Land Use Bylaw does not align with the proposed operational model of the St. Albert Youth Transitional Home.⁵⁰ Redistricting this Public Service (PS) site to Institutional Facilities (IF) would accommodate ‘permanent supportive housing’ or ‘supportive housing’ and would allow the home to be constructed on this site. The cost of redistricting is \$6,151 and would take approximately six months and would require a public hearing. The Task Force has been in discussions with the church about leasing unused parking space on their property for the construction of the youth home.
- ii. Construction attached to the new fire hall site at the former Village Landing transit station. This is a viable option for the youth transitional home and there are examples of this partnership elsewhere including Vancouver and Seattle. This site may be more amenable to community residents and would still have adequate access to transportation.
- iii. A third option could incorporate the Youth Transitional Home into the proposed construction on St. Thomas Street. This option would provide access to transportation and may support youth to find local employment opportunities within this business district. This option could also support a future social enterprise development operated by the youth home within the same building site.



*Social housing attached to a fire hall.
Vancouver, BC*

Funding/ Revenue Options

Constructing and operating a new youth transitional home is a significant undertaking. Depending on the size of the home and staffing models, there is also a significant range in capital and operational costs. Funding and revenue options can also vary widely.

Some homes have ongoing contracts with Children’s Services which allow the home to use the per diem funding to support those youth in the home. Many of the younger youth that are homeless in St. Albert (16- and 17-year-olds) do not have support from Children’s Services.

⁵⁰ ‘Transitional Residential Services’ definition for the Public Service district in the LUB allows for ‘temporary’ stays only. An alternative could be to add ‘permanent supportive housing’ to the PS district in the LUB.

Other options for funding would have to be found to support youth who neither qualify for CS funding, nor are old enough for Albert Works support.

Further, if the St. Albert home operates a budgeting and savings program within the home, then whatever streams of income the youth have are funneled into their secured savings accounts rather than going to living expenses within the transitional home.⁵¹ **The St. Albert Youth Transitional Home may opt to reduce the range of youth from 16-24 yrs to 16-21 yrs and create one or two independent suites for individuals from 22-24 yrs.** These youth could then pay rent for their accommodations and still receive the supports they need to become fully independent.⁵²

There are three streams of funding from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)⁵³ that the St. Albert Youth Transitional Home could access:

- i. **Seed funding** – interest-free loans and non-repayable contributions to develop and preserve affordable housing. Supports costs for completing predevelopment activities related to the construction of new affordable housing supply. All tenure types and building forms are accepted and must have a minimum of five affordable units (beds). Contribution is up to \$150,000 and/or an interest-free loan of up to \$350,000.
- ii. **National Housing Co-Investment Fund** – low-cost repayable loans and capital contributions to create new or repay existing affordable housing that covers a broad range of housing needs. Offers long-term low-cost loans and/ or contributions to ensure that new, high-performing, affordable housing is built close to needed supports and amenities such as public transit, jobs, daycares, schools and health care. Supports all types of housing including transitional housing. The term is a 20-year loan with a 10-year term, renewed for another 10 years. Up to 50-year amortization period for new construction. For new construction, \$1,000,000 minimum federal investment (loan and contribution).
- iii. **Mortgage Loan Insurance (MLI) Flex** – Offers flexibilities to encourage the construction, preservation and improvement of affordable rental properties. Flexibilities include higher loan-to-value ratios, lower debt coverage ratios and reduced premiums. Includes standard apartments, retirement housing, supportive housing, and single-room occupancy. Municipalities and not-for-profit developers as

⁵¹ The YMCA-YWCA home in Ottawa does take a token rental fee from youth who receive ON supports. The rent is based on what the ON gov't allots for rent in their subsidies.

⁵² The variations of rental payment plans and age groups provides opportunities for St. Albert to design a transitional home that fits the needs of St. Albert youth and other residents.

⁵³ CMHC Housing Solutions. Conversation with CMHC rep Oct 2, 2019.

well as for-profit developers are eligible. Operators must have at least five years' experience operating a housing property of similar type and size.

Finally, "a 10-year agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta was signed on March 8, 2019. The agreement will invest \$678 million to protect, renew and expand social and community housing in Alberta."⁵⁴

Through this funding, the St. Albert Youth Transitional Home may be eligible for funding under the 'Affordable and Specialized Housing Program,' which "creates new affordable housing projects that provide supportive social or health services for Albertans."⁵⁵ Eligible applicants include housing management bodies, housing management agencies, non-profit housing organizations and community-based organizations.

Some planning tools may be applied to support financing the construction of the home:

- i. Density bonusing is a set of zoning provisions that allows a landowner to develop land at a higher density (than would otherwise be allowed) in return for specific community amenities which can include affordable and transitional housing.
- ii. Waive development charges. Following the Mississauga example, a waiver of development charges could provide an incentive valued at approximately \$32,000 to \$76,000 per residential unit, depending on the development typology and suite mix.⁵⁶
- iii. Allow development fees to be used for affordable and transitional housing.⁵⁷

Other non-traditional funding options include:

- i. Social finance initiatives such as social impact bonds and social impact investing. The advantage of this type of financing is it allows community members to be personally invested in the housing development and to make the housing development accountable for specific social outcomes. This requires underwriters to donate money to cover community members' investments.
- ii. Soliciting donations through crowdfunding.
- iii. Home Depot Open Door program - provides grants up to \$50,000 to charities working to prevent and end youth homelessness in Canada. Funding is provided for renovation projects, prevention initiatives and employment/life skills programs. Opened January

⁵⁴ <https://www.alberta.ca/canada-alberta-affordable-housing-agreements.aspx>

⁵⁵ <https://www.alberta.ca/funding-affordable-housing.aspx>

⁵⁶ <https://www7.mississauga.ca/documents/pb/main/2016/appendixoneOct2016.pdf>

⁵⁷ Currently the MGA only allows fees to be used for construction of municipal service buildings such as police stations, fire halls, or libraries. Would need amendment to the MGA.

2020. The Home Depot Canada Foundation is committed to taking action on youth homelessness by supporting the housing needs of Canada's youth. As such, preference is given to projects that support the development of affordable housing and community improvement projects that benefit homeless youth.⁵⁸

- iv. Realtors Community Foundation - focus on charities that are local to the Edmonton Area who work to alleviate hunger and homelessness, provide shelter and prevent crime.⁵⁹
- v. Donations from local industries - utility, oil companies, etc.

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⁵⁸ <https://www.homedepot.ca/en/home/corporate-information/our-community/the-home-depot-canada-foundation.html>

⁵⁹ <https://www.realtorscommunityfoundation.com/>

Task Force to End Homelessness - Commitment to Leadership

These commitments align with the mandate and vision of the Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness. This section describes the role of the Task Force in advancing homeless prevention actions in St. Albert.

Leadership Role

Homelessness is often called a 'wicked' problem. It is a very complex issue that has moving targets in which similar strategies may have different outcomes in different contexts. For example, what works in Medicine Hat may not work in Red Deer. It takes committed and empowered local leadership to identify the 'right fit' strategies for their community. Researching, fine-tuning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating homelessness prevention strategies can be arduous and time-consuming tasks, which require very diverse skill sets throughout the process.

It takes a skilled and committed leadership team to be 'in it for the long haul' to:

- coordinate resources among local and regional partners,
- develop consistent messages that bring people together from the private and public sectors,
- advocate for community members who can't advocate for themselves,
- bring experts to the table, including those with lived experience, and
- be the force that drives strategies from concept to fruition.

The Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness is committed to leading the City of St. Albert in the development of homelessness prevention strategies to ensure that all St. Albert residents can thrive and grow in their community.

Coordination of Partnerships

Task Force members and City staff have stakeholder engagement expertise to mobilize and coordinate community leadership to advance homelessness prevention strategies in St. Albert. Coordinated actions must extend to all orders of government as well as the public and private sectors.

Currently in St. Albert, there is a network of informal relationships among agencies and organizations that are working to support homeless and at-risk families and individuals. However, there is a need to develop a systematic approach to ensure coordinated actions meet the needs of all vulnerable groups at any stage along the prevention continuum.

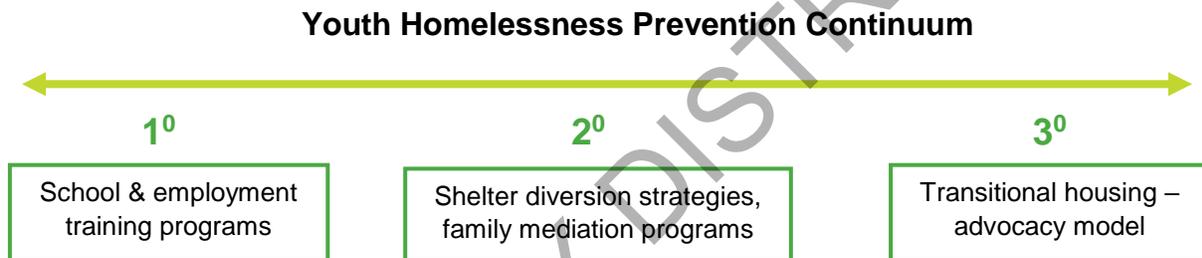
The work of the Task Force is embedded in existing initiatives and strategies in St. Albert. The Housing Coalition of St. Albert is positioned to launch a HomeShare program in the fall of 2020 which will be operated by the St. Albert Community Village. The Task Force is committed to supporting this program and to aligning future initiatives with the work of the Coalition. Moreover, the Task Force is positioned to complement the housing rental supports and subsidies provided by Jessie's House, the St. Albert Housing Society, and Homeland Housing. Moving forward, the work of the Task Force will align with these organizations to maximize housing support for vulnerable groups.

Task Force Recommendations

The discovery and investigation of the housing needs of vulnerable groups in St. Albert has led to three main recommendations by the Task Force. These recommendations reflect the commitment of the Task Force to end homelessness in St. Albert.

1. St. Albert Youth Transitional Home

The Task Force identified youth as the vulnerable group in St. Albert with the fewest housing resources and the greatest current housing need. **The Task Force is recommending developing a business plan for the construction and operation of a new youth transitional home using the advocacy model.** As a key tertiary prevention strategy, this youth transitional home will be embedded within a continuum of upstream homelessness prevention strategies.



Secondary youth homelessness prevention strategies include ‘shelter diversion’ programs that target at-risk youth in school. Depending on the approach, these mediation programs could partner with existing programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters or YouCan Youth Services. Upstream prevention initiatives are critical to ensuring the transitional home is not overwhelmed and can work within its capacity. Moreover, primary prevention strategies work further upstream with younger youth to support healthy relationships to ensure these youth do not become at-risk for homelessness. Primary prevention strategies may also work with older at-risk youth who need employment and training programs.

2. Social Housing Position

Moving forward, the Task Force is recommending **the creation of a new Social Housing position within the City.** The purpose of the position is to advance the social housing needs of all vulnerable groups in St. Albert including youth, seniors, newcomers, women fleeing domestic violence, Indigenous people, people with chronic mental illness, and people with mental and physical disabilities. Each of these distinct populations requires support and engagement to

meet their specific housing needs. For example, the Social Housing position would be responsible for engaging all orders of government and regional Indigenous groups to support self-directed housing initiatives for Indigenous people in St. Albert. Similarly, the Social Housing position would leverage stakeholders and other housing initiatives to maximize housing options for *all* vulnerable populations in St. Albert.

The Social Housing position would work collaboratively with the existing Affordable Housing Liaison to bring a community development approach to homelessness prevention strategies for vulnerable populations in St. Albert.

3. Task Force Moving Forward

The third Task Force recommendation is to empower **the Task Force to be the leader of coordinated partnerships and actions** among local, regional, provincial and national organizations. Several local agencies and groups are working hard to address the needs of St. Albert's vulnerable residents. However, in order to leverage limited resources and to maximize impact over the long term, coordination is required. The Task Force is well-positioned to lead this coordination and to advance long-term homelessness prevention strategies along the prevention continuum and across the spectrum of vulnerable populations.

Conclusion

There is a persistent myth that homelessness in St. Albert is not an issue. The Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness has advocated strongly since its inception to not only discount this myth but to end homelessness in St. Albert. Since January 2018, the Task Force used the 'service-based estimation approach' to confirm the numbers of homeless individuals in St. Albert. From these data, four vulnerable population groups were identified as most in need of housing support.⁶⁰ Subsequent mapping of existing services to the four vulnerable groups showed that youth are in the greatest need compared to seniors, women and families fleeing domestic violence, and newcomers.

The Task Force recommends that a youth transitional home is the most appropriate prevention strategy for homeless youth in St. Albert and should be complemented by upstream prevention strategies. A Social Housing position would lead the development of homelessness prevention initiatives for all vulnerable groups in St. Albert.

Finally, the Task Force recommends the continuation of its work to leverage partnerships and resources, to advocate for coordinated homelessness prevention strategies, and to lead the City of St. Albert in advocating for the housing needs of all St. Albert residents, so that all residents can thrive and grow in their community.

⁶⁰ First Nations and Metis as well as people with chronic mental illness and disabilities were also identified. The Task Force recommended that housing supports for these groups was beyond the scope of the work of the Task Force in the first stage.

Acknowledgements

The City of St. Albert would like to acknowledge several people for their dedication to the work of the Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness. Their commitment and expertise enabled the Task Force to advance the critical work of ending homelessness in St. Albert.

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- Mayor Cathy Heron – City of St Albert
- Dean Kurpjuweit- Chairperson Mustard Seed Edmonton
- Christina Davis – Albert Health Services
- Florence Gaucher – Metis Child & Family Services Society
- Kathi Campbell – Children's Services, Government of Alberta
- Ken MacKay – City of St Albert
- Lorette Garrick – George Spady Centre
- Marie Renaud – MLA St Albert
- Pamela Robinson - RCMP
- Sharon Morin – Michif Cultural Connections
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Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness

Investigating Homelessness in St Albert

July 13, 2020

Presented by:

Dean Kurpjuweit

Catriona Gunn-Graham

Dianne Gillespie



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Outline

- Task Force Background
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Discussion & Questions

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Background

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Review of Timeline



Jan 2018
Task Force
Created



**Mar 2018 to
Nov 2018**
Scope of
Work
Finalized



**Jan 2019 to
Jun 2019**
Research
Options and
Data
Verification



**Jun 2019 to
Sep 2019**
Researched
Housing
Options for 4
Vulnerable
Groups



**Sep 2019 to
Dec 2019**
Mapped
Existing
Resource to
4 Groups
Emphasis
on Youth



**Jan 2020 to
Apr 2020**
Research Youth
Transitional
Home Models
and Upstream
Homelessness
Prevention
Strategies

Task Force - Process

- The Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness includes representatives from:
 - The City of St. Albert Council and Administration, MLA for St. Albert, the RCMP, AHS, St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village, Children's Services, Metis Child & Family Services Society, as well as St. Albert residents with social housing expertise.
- The Task Force adopted the service-based estimation approach to estimate the numbers of homeless individuals in St. Albert.
- Data from the St. Albert Food Bank indicated that as of December 2019, there were roughly 167 homeless people in St. Albert.

Task Force - Process

- The Task Force investigated four vulnerable populations:
 - Women and families fleeing domestic violence
 - Newcomers
 - Seniors
 - Youth
- We mapped existing resources as well as overall need to each group and identified homeless and at-risk youth in St. Albert as the highest priority.

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Task Force - Findings

- Review of literature and interviews with several agencies who work with youth indicate that a youth transitional home is the best course of action for homeless youth in St. Albert.
- Based on interviews with COSA youth counsellors, Outreach School, SACV social workers, St. Albert Public Library, and St. Albert RCMP, a number of youth in St. Albert are '**unstably connected**' with their family and natural supports.
- Literature indicates that transitional housing with advocacy support is the best support for this 'typology' of homeless youth
- Women and families fleeing domestic violence have some existing supports such as SAIF, Jessie's House or another local shelter.

Task Force - Findings

- Seniors and newcomers are best supported with innovative development and funding supports to enable seniors to downsize into accessible housing, and newcomers to enter market rental and ownership housing.
- Based on the interview data from agencies supporting youth in St. Albert, an advocacy transitional home model with 10 beds for youth is the best option for the transitional home.
- Complemented by upstream homelessness prevention actions, a transitional home with 10 beds will support the numbers of homeless youth in St. Albert, while optimizing the approach of an advocacy model.

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Recommendations

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Task Force - Recommendations

1. The development of a business plan for the construction & operation of a St. Albert Youth Transitional Home.
2. That Administration create a new Social Housing position.
3. That Council approve the Task Force to continue working as the St. Albert leader of coordinated partnerships and actions.

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Discussion & Questions

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