

**Nanaimo  
Homelessness Partnering Strategy  
Action Plan  
2007-2009**

**Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness**

*Condensed from the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy  
(HPS) Community Plan Framework, November, 2007*

## “Snapshot”

On December 19, 2006 the Federal Government announced the creation of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), replacing the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The Homelessness Partnering Initiative (HPI), a cornerstone of the HPS, takes a "housing first" approach: that is, finding safe, affordable, appropriate housing as the first step in no longer being homeless. Funding under the HPI began in 2007.

In March 2007, the Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness (WGH) held a strategic planning session to identify funding priorities through the HPI. Given the numbers and needs of the homeless in the City as evidenced by four homeless censuses and a very low vacancy rate, the WGH determined HPI funds would most impact the situation if used to provide: safe, affordable transitional, supportive and rental housing for homeless/at-risk men, women and their families; support programs that assist people in finding and maintaining housing; and culturally appropriate supportive emergency shelter and support services for Aboriginal youth. To assist its planning in addressing homelessness, the WGH also identified: the need to raise public awareness and involvement by implementing their communications plan; and to monitor/evaluate progress.

Under the NHI, the WGH developed a community plan in 2001 and updated it in 2003. With the creation of the HPS in 2007, a national framework was developed for updating community plans for the 2007-09 funding phase. This document, the *Nanaimo Homelessness Partnering Strategy Action Plan*, is a condensed version of the 2007-09 Nanaimo Community Plan Framework. The Community Plan Framework's format is difficult to follow. This Action Plan was developed to provide a more readable and accessible document.

The Action Plan includes key social, economic and policy trends in the Nanaimo Census Agglomeration, as well as information on the homeless drawn from the 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 Homeless Censuses. It also includes a short discussion of housing, programs, and services for the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness.

The Action Plan's five priorities are outlined with their objectives, rationales, indicators, and targets so the WGH will know "the job is getting done". To assist the Action Plan's implementation and sustainability, various ways are identified to make the best use of available resources during the 2007-2009 timeframe. These include leveraging funding, enhancing human resources (within both the WGH and the homeless serving sector), and communicating the Plan.

A number of outcomes are anticipated by the end of the funding phase in March 2009: 4 renovated/improved transitional housing units, 2 additional transitional housing units, 86 individuals will have obtained greater housing stability; 58 will have maintained their housing for at least 3 months after receiving housing placement services; 110 will have retained their housing for at least 3 months after receiving housing loss prevention services; 67 will have experienced greater housing stability as a result of housing placement services prior to discharge into the community from a health facility, the criminal justice system, or the child welfare system; 43 individuals will have improved income due to receiving relevant services; and 23 individuals will have improved employment status, participate in volunteer work, or improved educational attainment.

To obtain HPI funding for 2007-2009, the Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness was required to submit the Community Plan Framework to the Federal Government for approval. The Plan was submitted and Ministerial approval was obtained in November 2007.

It is important to note that neither the Community Plan Framework nor the Action Plan is intended or considered to be a comprehensive community homelessness plan. Rather they provide guidance for the allocation of funds available from the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy for 2007-2009.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SECTION</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>SNAPSHOT</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>DEVELOPING THE ACTION PLAN</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>COMMUNITY PROFILE</b>	<b>5</b>
Population, Housing and Income Dynamics	6
Policy and Structural Trends	6
Homelessness and At-Risk of Homelessness Trends	9
Community Assets	10
<b>ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES</b>	<b>10</b>
Action Plan Priorities 2007-2009	11
Priority # 1: Enhanced transitional housing capacity for women	11
Priority # 2 : Transitional housing and support services for adult men and women and women and their families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness	12
Priority #3: Appropriate supportive emergency shelter and support services for Aboriginal youth	13
Priority #4: Data collection and public awareness	14
Priority #5: Evaluation	15
<b>IMPLEMENTING AND SUSTAINING THE ACTION PLAN</b>	<b>16</b>
Financial Resources	16
Human Resources	16
Communicating the Action Plan	18
<b>MOVING FORWARD</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>TABLES</b>	
Table 1: Summary of Socio-Economic Trends	7
Table 2: Policy and Structural Trends	8

## INTRODUCTION

The *Nanaimo Homelessness Partnering Strategy Action Plan* covers the next funding phase (2007- 2009) of the Federal Homelessness Partnering Initiative (HPI), administered through the Community Initiatives and Policy Directorate of Service Canada.

In December 2006 the Federal Government announced the creation of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). Previously, federal funding for homelessness had been available under Phases 1 and 2 of the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). Development of a community plan on homelessness has been a requirement for funding under both programs.

With the creation of the HPS, a national framework (and template) was developed for updating community plans for the 2007-09 funding phase. The *Nanaimo Homelessness Partnering Strategy Action Plan* is a condensed version of the Community Plan Framework which received Ministerial approval in November 2007. Information includes the development backdrop (e.g. key social, economic and policy trends in Nanaimo, as well as information on the homeless (drawn from the Homeless Censuses conducted in 2005, 2006, and 2007), community priorities, and implementation strategies.

At the end of 2009, Service Canada will commission a full evaluation of the Community Plan Framework to determine if the identified goals and objectives have been accomplished. At that time a full report will be made to the community. In the interim, the Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness (WGH) will provide information on the Plan's progress and receive feedback from the community.

## DEVELOPING THE ACTION PLAN

This Action Plan was developed by the WGH, the primary structural element for planning, implementation and decision-making on priorities for federal funding for homelessness in the Nanaimo area. Since 2000, the WGH's primary role has been to identify community priorities and make recommendations for federal homelessness through public calls for proposals. Total HPS funding allocated to Nanaimo for the period of 2007-09 is \$1,118,650, which includes \$276,058 dedicated to Aboriginal projects.

Urban Aspects Consulting Group were contracted to draft the Action Plan, using the HPS Community Plan Framework, for review and approval by the WGH. The consultants based their work on the assessment of the previous Community Plan, the Homeless Censuses, results from WGH strategic planning sessions, and WGH meeting minutes, augmenting the data, where needed, from a variety of documented sources.

Throughout its development, Ann Susnik, from the BC Regional Office of Service Canada, assisted in facilitating and coordinating the process, as well as providing advice and information.

The Working Group is a broadly-based community committee, representing the key sectors involved in addressing homelessness in Nanaimo, including members of the public.

Organization	Lead
BC Housing	Malachy Tohill
ADAPT	Sue Howard
7-10 Breakfast Club Society	Gord Fuller
City of Nanaimo	John Horn (Co-Chair)
Clearview Centre	Jacqueline Johnston
Coastal Community Credit Union	Lorraine Richardson
Coldwell Banker Inc	Jim Johnson
Correctional Service Canada	Joanne Cooper

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Lead</b>
Community Member	Barbara Ann Rivers
Community Member	Ben C. Warrior
Service Canada HPS	Katherine Beavis
Service Canada Nanaimo	Shannon Odgers
Community Member	Melanie Morton
Red Cross Society	Dawn Dunphy
Downtown Nanaimo Partnership	Diane Brennan
Community member	Paul Farrow
Habitat for Humanity	Teresa Pringle
Haven Society	Anne Spilker
Island Crisis Care Society	George Weir
John Howard Society	France Tellier
Nanaimo Veterinary Hospital	Brett Hayward (Co-Chair)
Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA)	Janis Ruel
Nanaimo Affordable Housing Society	Jim Spinelli
Nanaimo & Area Resource Services for Families Programs Ltd.	Gordon Coté
Nanaimo & Region Disability Resource Centre	Tania Brzovic
Community Member	Lyle Rowe
Nanaimo Men's Resource Centre	Jonathon Van Der Goes
Nanaimo Mental Health: VIHA	Janet Walter
Nanaimo Women's Resources Society	Colleen Parsley
Nanaimo Youth Services Association	Steve Arnett
Nanaimo 7-10 Club Society	Gord Fuller
Downtown Nanaimo Partnership	Sharon Welch
RCMP	Inspector Jeff Lott
Salvation Army	Rob Anderson
Nanaimo Citizens Advocacy	George McGladrey
Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Society	Inga Neilsen Cooper
United Way	N. Lynne Brown
VIHA Mental Health & Addiction Nanaimo-Ladysmith: Alcohol & Drug Services (Adults)	Jonnie Tunnell
Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA)	Alison Millward
AIDS Vancouver Island	Dana Becker

The Working Group held a strategic planning session in March 2007 to select priorities for HPI funding, initiating the preparation of the Community Plan Framework, on which this Action Plan is based. Workshop outcomes and priorities for the next three years have been incorporated. The draft Action Plan was submitted to the Working Group for review. Where needed, the draft was revamped and the final version was prepared.

## **COMMUNITY PROFILE**

Homelessness is a complex issue. Understanding and acknowledging its many and varied socio-economic aspects, policy and structural elements, and resource needs is important if homelessness is to be addressed adequately and appropriately. The profile provides 'context' for informing and guiding the Action Plan's planning and implementation process.

## Population, Housing and Income Dynamics

Over the life of this Plan, 2007-2009, it is expected that the following trends are likely to continue in the Nanaimo area.

- *Increased population growth* will continue to put considerable pressure on the local housing market.
- *Housing affordability* will continue to be an issue for both renters and homeowners – housing costs are rising faster than incomes.
- *Affordable rental housing stock is in short supply* and will continue to be, especially in the absence of new rental and social housing being constructed in any significant numbers (if at all).
- *The rise in construction costs* will continue to exert cost pressures on new/ renovated housing.
- *Low vacancy rates*, exacerbated by the real estate boom, will continue to make it more profitable for owners to sell, rather than rent income generating properties.
- *Rising employment levels* will continue to mean more demand for rental suites.
- *Considerable numbers of people*, lacking sufficient income to access affordable and appropriate housing, *will remain in core housing need* without significant intervention.
- *Increasing homelessness* will continue to put pressure on facilities and services, including rising numbers of people turned away from shelters.

Table 1 provides a list of key points respecting the Nanaimo community profile.<sup>1</sup>

## Policy and Structural Trends

There are a number of initiatives currently underway that suggest an increased commitment to/interest in addressing affordability and homelessness. These have a long-term potential to impact the housing and support needs of low income and homeless individuals and families positively. However, most of these are in their early stages of development and it will take longer than the next two years to realize significant benefits. Undeniably the need is great and requires more concerted effort and investment if Nanaimo's homelessness situation is to be adequately addressed.

Recent changes and anticipated trends providing direction for the Plan are summarized in Table 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The information is drawn from a number of sources including: the Canada Census (1991, 1996, and 2001) and preliminary 2006 Census data, local service agency staff, and local/ government reports. The Data Tools Series A of the *Community Plan Assessment (CPA)*, completed as part of the HHBSC funding requirements and available from the Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness provides further information.

**Table 1 - Summary of Socio-Economic Trends**

**Demographic Trends**

- The population growth rate has increased significantly in recent years (at 7.8% between 2001 and 2006, more than twice the rate of the previous 5 years. The estimated 2006 Census Agglomeration population is 92,361.
- Growth is primarily the result of in-migration (mostly intraprovincial and interprovincial) as deaths outnumber births.
- Visible minorities were estimated to comprise 6% of the population in 2006; Aboriginal People comprised 5%. Aboriginals, however, comprise a significant portion of the homeless population.
- The population is aging, with persons aged 65+ comprising a significant proportion (at nearly 24% one of the highest of any Canadian urban area).
- Non-family households accounted for 31% of all households in 2006, an absolute increase over 2001.
- The proportion of couples with no children at home is higher than for BC and Canada. There is also a higher proportion of lone parent families.

**Housing Trends**

- Between 2001 and 2006, the number of owned housing units and housing units below at least one standard of adequacy, suitability and affordability standards increased.
- The proportion of owned housing units in core housing need increased absolutely, but declined proportionately between 2001-2006.
- Average owner shelter costs between 1991 and 2001 rose by 39.5%.
- Since 2001, single family and condo (apartment) prices have increased due to low interest rates, economic recovery provincially and locally, and from increased in-migration. Average single detached house prices increased from \$148,746 in 2001 to \$425,979 in 2007; average condo (apartment) prices rose from \$97,373 in 2001 to \$154,785 in 2005.
- The number of rented units rose between 2001 and 2006, but their proportion of total housing stock decreased.
- In 2001, 54.2% of rented units were below at least one standard of adequacy, suitability or affordability, with 46% of units below the affordability standard
- In 2001, 34.6% of rental units were in core housing need.
- Between 1991-2001 average renter shelter costs rose by 17.2%. Average rents for apartments increased by 6.4% overall with the largest increase in rent found for 1 bedroom row housing.
- Rental vacancy rates have decreased in Nanaimo over the past five years. Nanaimo had the most significant decrease in vacancy rates for Vancouver Island. Limited supply has resulted in higher rental costs, and lower vacancy rates. Recent trends indicate vacancy rates continue to remain low but stabilized at 1.4% in 2005 (2004 rate was 1.4%).
- Over the past half decade there has been a significant reduction in new apartments and row houses built specifically for rental purposes. Combined with the aging of the existing rental housing stock and its replacement by condominiums and other forms of development, affordable rental housing stock is increasingly limited.

**Income Trends**

- Home owner income rose between 2001 and 2006 by 1%. The percentage of average owner household income spent on rent was 19% in 2001.
- Renter income rose between 2001 and 2006, but renter incomes were considerably lower (53% of owner income levels).
- The percentage of renter household income spent on rent in 2006 was 34%.
- Core housing need renter income rose by less than 1% between 2001 and 2006, but core housing renter incomes were significantly lower (less than 47%) of other renter income levels.
- For core housing need renters, average monthly shelter costs declined between 1996 and 2001, but rose between 2001 and 2006. The proportion of household income spent on shelter declined from 51% to 47% between 2001 and 2006.
- The labour force grew considerably between 1991 and 2006 (by 44%), as did the number of employed individuals (by 54%).
- While the shift from a resource based economy (traditionally relying on natural resources), towards an information, knowledge and service based economy has created new opportunities, not everyone has benefited equally. Levels of personal income are lower and rates of income assistance, poverty and unemployment are higher than for the Province.
- Unemployment decreased between 1991-2006 from 12.8% to 6.8%.
- The proportion of people aged 19-64 on BC Basic Income Assistance in September 2006 in the City of Nanaimo (2.5%) was higher than the BC average (1.1%). Income supports, which were already inadequate, have not kept pace, with no substantial increase offered by provincial legislators to compensate.
- Median total income for Nanaimo residents in 2004 was \$23,529 – 1.6% lower than the BC median of \$23,914.

**Table 2 – Policy and Structural Trends**

**Local Government/Community**

- In 2005 the City of Nanaimo amended its bylaws to permit unlicensed secondary suites. This should have had a positive impact on rental vacancy rates, however the vacancy rate has continued to decline.
- Businesses in the core have become increasingly vocal in their opposition to homeless services located in the core. At the same time, some in the business community are looking for solutions and action, for more strategic ways to fit homelessness into their businesses, e.g. through marketing campaigns, human resources issues, etc. that would give them “more bang for their investment”.
- The increase in NIMBY-ism has also been felt in neighbourhoods surrounding the downtown core. These areas have become increasingly unwilling to see more programs or services for the poor located in their area.
- Over several years, the Social Planning Advisory Committee has: helped organize community forums on poverty and affordable housing; worked with Council and staff on a range of social issues including the sexual exploitation of youth, substandard housing, homelessness, and the social impacts of gambling.
- The 2004, *Social Development Strategy for Nanaimo* defined a social vision for Nanaimo, goals to achieve that vision and strategies to achieve those goals. It was commissioned in response to a number of significant social issues that threaten resident quality of life, including high rates of income assistance, increasing homelessness and poverty, persistently high unemployment levels and substance misuse issues. The focus areas included: employment and income; community and health services, housing and shelter, safety and security.
- The City of Nanaimo Social Development Grant Program supports collaborative community projects that address poverty.
- In 2007, the 10-year review of Nanaimo’s Official Community Plan (Plan Nanaimo) was initiated, with an increased emphasis on social issues.
- In 2007, an Extreme Weather Protocol was developed and provincial funding secured.
- In 2007, the Safer Downtown Nanaimo Project was initiated to reduce public disorder in the downtown and alleviate some pressure areas.

**Senior Governments**

- In 2001 a number of shifts in provincial policy and funding priorities occurred. The adoption of a more formal contract awarding/ review process reduced or eliminated funding for many programs serving low-income and homeless individuals and families. Significantly affected areas included income assistance, employment, life skills and social housing.
- The withdrawal of the federal government from funding new non-profit housing in 1994 and the more recent shift by the provincial government from funding non-profit housing targeting all ages to funding assisted living units targeting the frail elderly has resulted in little new social housing construction for low income families and seniors.
- In April 2002, the Province transferred the delivery of addiction health services to the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) aligning addictions services with mental health services.
- In September 2004, the Premier’s Task Force on Homelessness was established, bringing more attention to finding solutions to homelessness.
- In 2006-07, changes to MEIA policy and regulations were introduced to assist low income and homeless individuals and families, including an increase in income assistance. MEIA is in the process of enhancing its outreach and linkages capacity and approach with both clients and service agencies on Vancouver Island.
- In October 2006, *Housing Matters BC* launched a number of programs serving the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness. Included were the Rental Assistance Program, Homeless Outreach Teams, Independent Living BC, and the Provincial Homelessness Initiative.
- In 2006, responsibility for shelter programs was transferred from MEIA to BC Housing.
- In March 2007, the Province announced an increase in income assistance rates– the first in 12 years.
- In 2006, BC Housing developed policy, procedures, and guidelines for shelter services in extreme weather conditions.
- In Fall 2007, Nanaimo Mental Health and Addictions Services developed a 5-year action plan titled, *Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness*. The plan highlights the need for low barrier and substance free housing and client-centred support programs.

## Homelessness and the At-Risk of Homelessness Trends

The Working Group has conducted four homelessness censuses (in April 2005, November 2005, July 2006, and September 2007). While the numbers of homeless have varied from census to census (300 in June 2006 and 173 in September 2007), there is remarkable consistency in the characteristics of the city's homeless population.

- The majority of the population is male and males appear to be an increasing portion of the homeless population.
- The identifiable minority proportion of the population has stayed remarkably consistent over four counts: 32% on three of the counts and 27% on one.
- The population age range has remained fairly consistent from the mid-teens to the mid-seventies.
- Mean or average age (36) has a variance of only 2.4 years cross four censuses and median age (36.7) also shows a tight variance of only three years.
- Homeless men continue to be older, on average, than women; this shows up in the mean, the median, and the predominance of females in the 20-29 age group and males in the 40+ age groups.
- The majority of Nanaimo's homeless people are from the city, not already homeless people drawn here from elsewhere.
- The proportion homeless for less than a year hovers in the 64-68% range on each count.
- Being alone (not accompanied by anyone) continues to characterize 75-80% of the homeless population. This is truer of males than females, but the margin fluctuates.
- Addiction and financial factors (no or inadequate income and high housing costs) are consistently the leading factors on the path to homelessness.
- One-third of Nanaimo's homeless population is sleeping outdoors at least during the spring and fall counts; half, however, were sleeping rough on the summer 2006 census.
- Self-assessments of physical health continue to show 1/4 in poor health and/in fair health.

On the other hand, there are also a number of shifting patterns over the four censuses:

- Length of homelessness for males and females shows no consistency with males showing the higher average figure twice and females showing a higher average twice.
- The latest count shows more positive self-assessment on mental health: the 42% checking "good" is the highest seen yet and the 20% checking "poor" is the lowest seen thus far.
- On the fourth count, a larger proportion have jobs (about 23%), but a larger percentage are also earning their livelihood through illegal means (10%).
- The latest count finds a substantial increase in the proportion receiving no public assistance - about 45%.

Recent estimates done by the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) in December 2007 of the current number of homeless in Nanaimo using local homeless count statistics and clinician client loads suggest that approximately 300 individuals are currently without a home and require housing immediately. Approximately 40% of these individuals are at risk of homelessness due to their unstable or inadequate housing situation, couch surfing, staying with family or in emergency shelters. Nanaimo Mental Health and Addictions Services' (NMHAS) Downtown Crisis Team nurses estimate that most (96%) of the 256 clients on their current caseload have a problem with substance use and concurrent mental illness. Few suffer from a diagnosable mental illness alone. Substance use problems negatively affect relationships and finances and the ability to maintain stable housing and employment. Many of the remaining individuals are impacted by significant cognitive impairments that limit their employability and many of the total population are functionally illiterate.

## Community Assets

An Assets Inventory was compiled in 2001 and updated in 2003, establishing a base from which to assess existing resources for addressing homelessness, providing information on facilities, programs, and services serving and accessible to the homeless population, and those at-risk of homelessness in Nanaimo. In addition the *Surviving Nanaimo* and *Community Resource Directory* provide additional information.

In Nanaimo there is a network of agencies and organizations that serve the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness. They vary by size – some are large, some smaller, and some very small. Some provide services only within the City; others provide services throughout central and upper Vancouver Island. Most are not-for-profit organizations, though some are major public institutions and many are faith-based organizations. Some services have paid staff, others are run by volunteers. Some serve a variety of people; others focus on a specific group within the population. Some provide a range of services, others have a more ‘specialized’ focus, e.g. housing, food, or employment. This "web" of agencies is linked through partnerships, collaboration and networking.

In 2001, the focus of provincial housing programs shifted to an increased emphasis on supportive/assisted housing projects for seniors and persons with disabilities and less on family housing. The number of new affordable social family housing projects has since decreased and waitlists for family housing have grown. At the same time, shifts in provincial policy and funding priorities and practices occurred. Funding for some existing programs was reduced or eliminated. Many agencies found themselves struggling to cope and adapt to an increase in needs and the fast pace and number of changes occurring both within their organization and the external environment.

The situation in 2007 has both similarities with and differences from the situation in 2003. There appears to be more agency stability. NHI funding, leveraged into additional funding has had a positive impact on capacity (e.g. the creation of the New Hope Centre and the provision of support services). To some extent agencies have rebuilt their programs and some gaps have been narrowed. However this has come with a cost, requiring a significant continuous commitment from agencies serving the homeless. Some agencies are also facing the possibility of reduced provincial support. Given the lack of new social and rental housing construction, the availability of transitional, supportive, and affordable housing generally, and SRO units specifically, is limited and increasingly difficult to access.

Existing programs are doing the best they can, but generally resources, particularly mental health and addictions services, are stretched beyond capacity. In its recently developed 5-year plan, *Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness*, Nanaimo Mental Health and Addictions Services set as a priority the development of 250 units of low barrier housing, 50 units of substance free housing and client centre support programs such as an Assertive Community Treatment Team, Health Access Centre and Tenant Support programs.

## ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES

Solutions to homelessness require involvement by all levels of government, both at discussion and funding tables, through private/public partnerships, partnerships between various levels of government, within the homeless serving sector, and from amongst the homeless themselves.

For the 2007-09 HPI funding phase (the timeframe for this Action Plan), a number of priorities have been identified by the Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness. For each of these priorities, objectives, rationales, targets, indicators, and funding conditions have been established.

## Action Plan Priorities 2007- 2009

### Priority # 1:

#### Enhanced transitional housing capacity for women

##### Issue

With an increasing homeless and at-risk population, there is a continued and growing need for more transitional housing in Nanaimo. In the past, efforts by the NWGH to leverage funds and municipal and business support, along with NIMBY-ism in the downtown core and elsewhere, has severely hampered the ability to use NHI funds to increase the supply of beds/units – resulting in an outstanding need to provide improved and additional transitional housing for women.

##### Objective

To provide enhanced and increased transitional housing service capacity to serve women who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.

##### Rationale

Long-term housing solutions for individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness must be found. Currently there are fewer transitional housing units available in Nanaimo than there are people who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness. As reported in the 2006 Homeless Census, there are over one hundred women currently accessing homeless shelters and services and living on the street. There are currently 78 transitional housing beds and 16 units of transitional housing in Nanaimo for both men and women. The opening of the New Hope Centre will provide eight self-contained studio units for transition and supportive housing for men, but there is a need to provide comparable improved and additional transitional housing for women.

In Nanaimo's tight rental market (with a 1.4% vacancy rate) and increasing rent levels, many people have difficulty accessing affordable and appropriate housing. The situation is exacerbated by low income: in Nanaimo there are an estimated 4,662 people on social assistance (a higher proportion of people than the BC average) and more than 17 thousand people below LICO (\$20,000) in the region. The 2006 Homeless Census found that economic poverty (lack of money or a job) is looming larger and larger over time amongst major barriers to getting a place of one's own.

In the 2006 Homeless Census, women, on average, had been homeless for 16 months (4 months longer than the average for men). The most common conditions leading to homelessness amongst women included: addictions (67%), high rents (43%), and eviction (40%). Women represented 91% of those gaining income from the sex trade.

Providing safe, transitional housing, developing appropriate housing solutions for this population group will reduce the pressures placed on the shelter system and will promote greater housing stability among some of Nanaimo's most vulnerable citizens.

##### Indicators of Success

- \* Transitional Housing: Number of beds and number of units added at the end of the HPS (March 31, 2009).
- \* Transitional Housing: Number of beds and number units improved at the end of the HPS (March 31, 2009)

##### Targets

- \* 2 units and 2 beds added at the end of the HPS (March 31, 2009)
- \* 4 units and 4 beds improved at the end of the HPS (March 31, 2009)

##### Funding

\$100,000 will be used to address this priority (8.94% of total HPS funding)

## Priority # 2:

### Transitional housing and support services for adult men and women and women and their families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness

#### Issue

With an increasing homeless and at-risk population, there is a continued and growing need for transitional housing with support services, access to stable housing and for wrap-around services that support adults and families in making the transition from the street and shelters into more permanent housing and assisting them to maintain their housing. The summer 2006 Homeless Census identified the most common factors leading to homelessness as addictions (60%) and high rent (36%). Other factors contributing to homelessness included access to a secure income, evictions, relationship break-ups, substandard housing and job loss.

#### Objective

To provide integrated support and wrap around services within housing or service facilities to homeless and at-risk adult men and women and women and their families to address barriers to accessing, maintain housing and prevent homelessness.

#### Rationale

Long-term solutions must be found for individuals and families in the city who are experiencing chronic homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness.

The 2006 summer Homeless Census identified a number of barriers that make it difficult for this population to obtain and maintain housing: *Financial factors* (no money, no job, too few affordable units, low Social Assistance benefits, etc.) were by far and away the number one issue. *Personal issues* (addiction, mental illness, pregnancy, dependents, need for accessible housing) came second. Problems in the *rental process* (bad record, lack of references, ID, credit, and lack of transportation) were cited many times. Others noted their own behaviour as a barrier.

Nanaimo has experienced success in the past with providing life skills support and wrap-around services within existing housing and service facilities to assist people in securing and maintaining long-term tenancy in independent market rental housing. However, without ongoing long term funding to assist with operational expenses, the provision of effective and efficient services will severely curtail services to homeless and homeless at-risk individuals. Ongoing sustainability is required to support people and the organizations who help them.

#### Indicators of Success

1. Transitional housing: Number of beds and number of units added
2. a) Transitions in housing status: Number of men who have experienced transitions toward greater housing stability as a result of housing placement services prior to discharge into the community from a health facility
2. b) Housing maintenance: Number of individuals (from above) who have maintained their housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services
3. a) Transitions in housing status: Number of women /children moving from homelessness to greater housing stability (in transitional housing)
3. b) Number of individuals (from above) who have maintained housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services
4. a) Number of successful referrals to other housing (e.g. from transitional housing to supportive/independent housing) (in market housing)
4. b) Number of individuals (from above) who have maintained housing for a 3-month follow-up period

after receiving housing placement services

5. Number of placements in other social integration activities (e.g. education, volunteering, community participation, employment).

### **Targets**

1. Transitional housing: 12 beds and 12 units maintained

2. a) Transitions in housing status: 67 men have experienced transitions toward greater housing stability as a result of housing placement services prior to discharge into the community from a health facility

2. b) Housing maintenance: 43 men (from above) have maintained their housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services

3.a) Transitions in housing status: 36 women & 8 children have moved from homelessness to greater housing stability (in transitional housing)

3. b) 75% have maintained housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services

4. a) 110 successful referrals to other housing (e.g. from transitional housing to supportive/independent housing) (in market housing)

4. b) 75% of individuals and families (from above) have maintained housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services

5. 217 placements in other social integration activities (e.g. education, volunteering, community participation, employment).

### **Funding**

- \$707,592 will be used to address this priority (63.25% of total HPS funding)

### **Priority # 3:**

## **Appropriate supportive emergency shelter and support services for Aboriginal youth**

### **Issue**

Urban Aboriginal youth continue to require emergency support services in a culturally appropriate environment, where interaction with an older entrenched street population can be decreased and their ability to reconnect with their families, educational opportunities and the community and to transfer to appropriate housing can be improved. For many reasons Aboriginal youth face even greater barriers to accessing housing and supports than many other groups in the homeless population.

Homeless and at-risk Aboriginal youth struggle with issues of poverty, lack of employment, abuse, alcoholism, drug use and medical problems.

### **Objective**

To provide Aboriginal youth aged 12-18 with support services within a culturally appropriate housing environment to assist them in reconnecting with their families/ foster care, educational opportunities and the community, and their transfer to appropriate housing after their stay.

### **Rationale**

Aboriginal youth represent a large and increasing population group – in fact, the fastest growing segment of Canada’s youth population. For a variety of reasons many youth gravitate to urban centres such as Nanaimo, but they are often faced with significant challenges (e.g. lack of or poor housing, employment, education, and health) when they do.

It is clear that ways must be found to support urban Aboriginal youth to reconnect and transfer from the street and shelters to appropriate longer-term housing. There has been demonstrated success when support services are provided in a culturally sensitive and safe environment.

Providing a culturally appropriate supportive housing environment specifically focussed on the needs of Aboriginal youth will have a long-term benefit (e.g. emergency intervention, rehabilitation, and stabilization) for some of Nanaimo’s most vulnerable residents.

There are currently 78 transitional housing beds and 16 units of transitional housing in Nanaimo – largely for adults and not youth.

### **Indicators of Success**

1. Transitions in housing status: Number of individuals moving from homelessness to greater housing stability:
  - 1.a) Number of youth moving from homelessness to transitional housing
  1. b) Number of youth successfully placed in appropriate independent housing.
2. Number of individuals (from above) who have maintained housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services
3. Participation in education: Number of individuals whose educational attainment improved due to receiving relevant services
4. Number of youth reconnected with their families/ foster care.

### **Targets**

1. Transitions in housing status: Number of individuals moving from homelessness to greater housing stability:

- 1.a) 40 youth moving from homelessness to transitional housing
- 1.b): 6 youth successfully placed in appropriate independent housing.
2. 75% of youth (from above) have maintained housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services
3. Participation in education: 75 % of youth have improved educational attainment due to receiving relevant services
4. a) A minimum of 12 youth reunited with family and/or relatives.
4. b) A minimum of 10 youth placed in more appropriate and improved foster care.

### **Funding**

- \$276,058 will be used to address this priority (24.68% of total HPS funding)

## **Priority #4:**

### **Data collection and public awareness**

#### **Issue**

There is a continuing need for data collection and the implementation of a broad communication strategy to enhance awareness and understanding of homelessness issues and to find appropriate solutions for addressing homelessness.

#### **Objective**

To increase the level of awareness and understanding of homelessness amongst key stakeholders and the general public to mobilize key stakeholders and the broader community to find appropriate solutions to homelessness.

#### **Rationale**

Nanaimo has undertaken three homeless censuses in the last few years. These have provided much needed information about the city's homeless population, but as the 2007 Community Plan Assessment (CPA) noted, in addition to the censuses, service providers would benefit from more in-depth data about homeless persons and regular data collection and dissemination by one entity. Systemic data is also absent on what strategies, conditions, forms of assistance, etc. most strongly account for the movement of some persons out of homelessness. The increase in numbers of homeless in the community has also prompted the media and public to raise concerns around the issue and the censuses have been useful in dispelling myths and focusing attention on what needs to be done. Knowing more about the homeless population and keeping abreast of significant pattern changes is important for planning purposes and for raising public awareness, understanding, and involvement.

In its March 2007 strategic planning session, the WGH identified the following priority: to enhance public awareness, e.g. to make presentations to key umbrella organisations, ask for in kind multi-media support, create a public action plan, frame addressing homelessness within economic benefit, and dispel the myths about the homeless population. The results of the CPA Community Development Survey further highlighted the need for an on-going communications strategy, particularly one with targeted messages geared to promoting specific actions. As well, past efforts, such as the Homelessness Action Week that broadened participation and public relations efforts, provided opportunities for improved sharing of information on activities, and strengthened relationships with policy makers and the media, have demonstrated how the development and implementation of an effective communications strategy can help to address homelessness in Nanaimo.

#### **Indicators of Success**

- Number of funded research projects (e.g. Homeless Census)
- Number of press releases
- Number of public awareness activities
- Number of presentations made to influence key decision-makers

### **Targets**

- Two homeless censuses sponsored during the life of the Plan
- An in-depth report is prepared on the findings from the Homeless Census and presented in the media and on the City's web site
- The *Nanaimo Homeless Partnering Strategy Action Plan* is posted on the City's web site
- A homelessness action week takes place annually
- A minimum of five presentations are made to key decision-makers during the life of the Plan

### **Funding**

- \$14,000 will be used to address this priority (1.25% of total HPS funding)

## **Priority # 5:**

### **Evaluation**

#### **Issue**

The requirements of the HPS dictate the need for comprehensive planning and ongoing evaluation, including a full assessment of the Community Plan Framework in 2009. Evaluation is a critical component of the need for long term sustainability. A community plan and corresponding series of projects that cannot produce and demonstrate positive results in the long term is limited at best.

#### **Objective**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Community Plan Framework.

#### **Rationale**

Service providers would benefit from more in-depth data about homeless persons. Evaluation results can serve as the basis for future community planning, the development of new partnerships, improvements in existing service provision and new initiatives to help the homeless. The Working Group recognizes that the demonstration of positive outcomes will be the basis for future community support and the effectiveness of projects.

#### **Indicators of Success**

- Number of formative and outcome evaluations of HPS funded projects
- \$ amount from different funding sources
- Implementation of the Community Plan Framework's recommendations

#### **Data Sources**

- Reports to Service Canada from funded projects
- Feedback from WGH members
- Results of any formative or outcome evaluations of funded projects

#### **Targets**

- A full outcome evaluation of the Community Plan Framework is conducted
- Evaluation outcomes are positive and support continuation of the HPS or similar program after 2009
- New and increased operating dollars are in place for the continuation of HPS funded projects

#### **Funding**

- \$21,000 will be used to address this priority (1.88% of total HPS funding)

## IMPLEMENTING AND SUSTAINING THE ACTION PLAN

If the Action Plan is to have immediate and longer-term effect, its priorities must be implemented and sustained. Achieving the Plan's priorities will be determined by the ability to obtain and leverage financial resources and support for and mobilization of the community's human resources. Communications will be a critical component for ensuring these resources are available.

*The following strategies have been identified to guide the Plan's overall implementation.*

### Financial Resources

Assessments of previous WGH activities indicate that a number of areas require improvement and attention, including: agency ability to adapt to situations of limited resources and high demand for services; increasingly limited volunteer resources; coordination of resources; sufficient funding partners to ensure adequate financial resources for addressing homelessness; and stronger relations between governments, non-profit and private sectors and community agencies.

#### Strategies for maximizing financial resources and sustainability:

- issue a public Call for Project Proposals, a requirement of federal funding
- through capital investment in one or more projects, seek to increase the number of transitional housing units for women who are at-risk of homelessness, amongst the hidden homeless, living on the street, short-term or crisis sheltered
- require project proponents to bring/seek other financial and in-kind resources (e.g. capital assets, computer software, applicant-owned assets, insurance, printing, materials and supplies, organization infrastructure, volunteer labour) from all levels of government, homeless serving agencies, private businesses and, area citizens
- require project proponents to demonstrate broad base of relationships and/or partnerships, e.g. ranging from collaboration, cooperation, coordination, and networking
- develop partnerships with key sector representatives through participation in the Working Group
- continue to be involved in the BC/Yukon Sustainable Communities Partnership Committee with the aim of increasing private sector action on solutions to homelessness
- serve as a framework for enabling services of the homeless and at-risk populations
- foster relations at the political level to gain, support, legitimacy and credibility

### Human Resources

The Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness (WGH) will oversee the Action Plan's implementation, particularly with respect to ensuring Federal Government administrative and funding requirements are met.

Assessments of previous WGH activities indicated that members feel there has been an improvement in their skills and knowledge. The development of the Communications Plan provided an opportunity for the Group to discuss in-depth many issues and broaden their knowledge of media and communications. On the other hand, there is still a need to improve funding levels and diversity, to continuously work on strategic planning and communications, and to develop a human resources or succession plan.

## **Strategies for further developing WGH knowledge and skills:**

### **Strategic Planning**

- incorporate strategic planning into regular monthly meetings and at special longer sessions
- broaden the participation in strategic planning sessions beyond the Working Group
- review the WGH's vision and guiding principles
- revisit the continuum of strategies and how each point of the continuum is/ or is not being addressed
- work with the City of Nanaimo in the development of along-term strategic plan to address homelessness, building on the Action Plan

### **Local Knowledge/ Research**

- continue to undertake homeless censuses on an annual basis and refine the methodology used
- undertake evaluation and monitoring of the Community Plan Framework and Action Plan

### **Leadership/ Membership**

- identify leadership opportunities within the WGH
- continue to use a broadly-based community working group for plan delivery and providing a forum for sharing/ receiving information and, developing policy and strategies for addressing homelessness
- continue to review WGH membership to broaden the range of people involved, specifically the inclusion of ethnic and cultural groups and the faith community
- develop a succession/ human resources plan;
- continue to seek out workshop/ training opportunities for WGH members and encourage their participation
- use task-based committees to share responsibilities more deliberately within the WGH and engage more members directly in the work of the Group
- engage a contractor to assist the WGH in implementing the Action Plan
- develop terms of reference to engage 'expert consultants' for 'special' projects

Over the past few years, there has been an improvement in the coordination of resources and there are good working relationships between organizations and agencies, agencies and organizations that help homeless people. However, the demand for services is outstripping agency ability and resources to cope effectively, agencies are finding it harder to adapt to situations of limited resources and high demand, and volunteer resources have not been growing.

## **Strategies for developing human resources within the homelessness sector:**

- develop a 'citizen involvement strategy to develop a pool of volunteers for special events, homeless counts, assisting individual agencies in service delivery, i.e. a cold wet weather strategy, involving recruitment, training, etc.
- strengthen agency capacity through hosting/ sponsoring joint training, partnering, joint advocacy, co-location, and information sharing
- support project sustainability (shared ideas/resources, coaching, mentoring)
- develop and implement communication and education strategies to increase community awareness, ownership and support of activities, e.g. Homelessness Awareness Week, showcasing funded projects
- support community advocacy work aimed at addressing housing and poverty issues
- support research and best practices (e.g. establish a WGH committee to work with Malaspina University College, UVIC and expert consultants
- identify ways to involve the homeless in community events

- support projects that improve inter-agency cooperation, coordination and collaboration

## Communicating the Action Plan

In October 2005, the WGH developed a communications plan, whose aims included: realizing genuine outcomes with significant results in bringing safe, affordable, accessible housing on stream for low income /working poor citizens; educating the community about the work done by the various WGH agencies and the value to the community of the WGH; dispelling the myths about the homeless population; and framing homelessness within economic benefit

Implementation of the Communications Plan included: the development of ‘branding’ materials, increased networking within the wider community, with media, government officials and politicians, and business leaders; and using numerous public relations opportunities created to raise the profile of homelessness in the public realm. Eliminating homelessness will require the concerted efforts of the whole community, together with government bodies at all levels.

### Strategies for communicating the Action Plan:

- continue to implement the Communications Plan proactively
- create a public action
- post the Action Plan (and updates) on the City’s web site and link to local agency sites
- develop/ maintain on-going positive relationships with key target audiences
- make presentations to key umbrella organizations (e.g., service clubs), using professionally prepared materials for presentations to community groups and to engage the media
- develop/ use (e.g. press releases, appearances on community television and on radio, op-ed columns)
- seek in-kind support, pro bono assistance and materials
- participate in such activities as Homelessness Action Week
- use events such as the launch and completion of the Homeless Census to highlight issues
- maintain the WGH’s broad membership and encourage members to provide feedback to their clients, customers, and constituents (e.g. through an email list)
- continue to incorporate information-sharing in conjunction with regular monthly meetings and investigate other ways to achieve effective information-sharing
- use agency open houses or “fairs” where multiple agencies have information booths to share information

## MOVING FORWARD

Over the course of the Action Plan (April 1, 2007- March 31, 2009), it is expected that there will be a number of outcomes.

- Reduction of homelessness and transitions to housing stability
  - Changes in housing status: Number of individuals who have moved from homelessness toward greater housing stability – Target 86
  - Housing maintenance: Number of individuals who have maintained their housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services – Target 58

- Prevention of Homelessness
  - Housing Retention: Number of individuals who have retained their housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing loss prevention services – Target 110
  - Housing Placement: Number of individuals who have experienced transitions toward greater housing stability as a result of housing placement services prior to discharge into the community from a health facility, the criminal justice system, or the child welfare system – Target 67
  - Housing maintenance: Number of individuals) who have maintained their housing for a 3-month follow-up period after receiving housing placement services – Target 43
  
- Social Integration
  - Changes in income: Number of individuals whose income improved due to receiving relevant services - Target – 43
  - Number of individuals whose employment status improved, who went from non-participation to participation in volunteer work, or whose educational attainment improved – Combined Target 23
  
- Improvement in service quality or service capacity
  - Number of renovated or improved transitional units – Target 4
  - Number of added transitional units – Target 2
  - Number of additional services offered in the community – Target 1

As a result of the Action Plan's short-term horizon (2007-09), these outcomes, while positive, are relatively modest. As noted, the Plan's priorities, objectives, and targets focus on the next federal funding phase of the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

This Action Plan is not intended or considered to be comprehensive. It can, however, be used as a starting point for a more complete and effective strategic planning process. Effectively addressing homelessness, identifying and linking current and needed initiatives and resources, will require a larger community effort and a longer time frame. The development of a broader action plan is currently being considered by the Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness.