

May 14, 1999

Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg
Minister of Alberta Family
and Social Services
104 Legislature Building
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Honourable Iris Evans
Minister of Alberta
Municipal Affairs
424 Legislature Building
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Mayor Bill Smith
City of Edmonton
1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, AB T5J 2R7

Dear Ministers Oberg and Evans and Mayor Smith:

The Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness is pleased to provide you with its final report, *Homelessness in Edmonton: A Call to Action*.

The report includes our short and long-term recommendations and highlights the collaboration that led to our conclusions. We believe our *Call to Action* makes it clear that homelessness is a serious issue in Edmonton – and that concerted effort is needed to address it. Our recommendations provide the next steps, and build on the work already done by the community and government in this area.

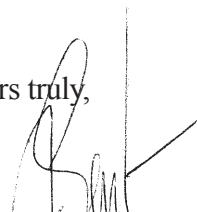
Throughout our work, we were impressed by the dedication and concern expressed by the community – the homeless themselves, agency representatives who support the homeless and the business sector. Our report includes quotations from participants at our public forum in an effort to bring the issue to life.

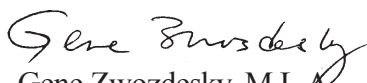
We trust the report will be released and communicated to participants and the public.

As co-chairs, we appreciated the energy and commitment provided by the members of the Task Force. We also benefited greatly from the advice and activities of our Working Group.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important initiative.

Yours truly,


Jim Taylor, Councillor
City of Edmonton
Co-Chair
Edmonton Task Force
on Homelessness


Gene Zwozdesky, M.L.A.
Province of Alberta
Co-Chair
Edmonton Task Force
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“ The scope of the problem is expanding. We see the trends in other cities... and we’re starting to see it in Edmonton. We need to act and need to act now. ”

— Christopher Smith
Edmonton Community
Foundation

The original logo used in this report was designed by Dan Henry, graphic designer with Planning and Development, City of Edmonton.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY ACTION IS NEEDED NOW

Homelessness is a reality in Edmonton. Its incidence and impacts are growing and will continue to grow if not addressed now through collaborative action by the community and governments.

The reality of homeless people's lives is chilling. Studies confirm direct connections between homelessness and wide-ranging health and social problems:

- higher rates of premature death, infectious disease, chronic conditions, mental illness and substance abuse
- poor nutrition, poor hygiene and a higher likelihood of experiencing violence or trauma
- lack of privacy and security, and reduced connections to the wider community.

Evidence gathered by the Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness reinforces the severity of the situation. The Task Force was formed in November 1998 in response to concerns shared by the Mayor of the City of Edmonton, the Minister of Family and Social Services and the Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Given the mandate to develop short and long-term solutions to homelessness, the Task Force looked to the community by:

- Counting the homeless in Edmonton on a cold winter day.
- Holding focus groups with agencies serving sub-groups of the homeless.
- Examining best practices throughout the world.
- Holding a public forum on homelessness.

Some key learnings resulted.

Homelessness affects many Edmontonians: 836 were counted on March 18, 1999

The count found 313 people living absolute homeless – *having no housing alternative* – and 523 sheltered homeless – *living in emergency accommodations*.

“*The homeless situation is over 100 times worse than when I was growing up... particularly with people with mental health problems.*”

– Gary Trudell
former homeless person



Edmonton's homeless are not a homogeneous group.

Many diverse groups are among the homeless: families (including 112 children), youth, single men and women, seniors, Aboriginals. They reflect equally diverse characteristics: mental illness, poverty, substance abuse, family breakdown, unemployment, lack of life skills. A combination of these factors often adds to the complexity.

There is no single solution to homelessness.

The diversity of people and situations requires an equally diverse and extensive set of solutions. Homeless solutions can reach far beyond the inner-city.

Homelessness is a symptom of broader systemic issues: we need to look beyond.

Community feedback showed the Task Force that its starting-point definition of homelessness – either having no housing alternatives or living in emergency shelters or condemned housing – was too narrow for the reality of what's happening in Edmonton. Members recognized that more emergency shelter spaces are not a lasting solution to homelessness; low-cost affordable housing and associated support are what will make a difference.

The Edmonton community has the capacity to address the affordable housing issue, if governments provide adequate funding and supports.

The Edmonton community – the non-profit and business sectors – has the ability, the experience and the desire to provide more low-income affordable housing, but needs the resources. Assistance from all levels of government – federal, provincial and municipal – is needed. Government can demonstrate its leadership by providing the resources and supportive policies that will engage the non-profit and private sector as partners in implementing the needed projects.

These conclusions form the basis for the Task Force's Call to Action recommendations.



SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

EMERGENCY SHELTER SPACES

Recommendation:

1. **The City of Edmonton and Province of Alberta to provide short-term funding to agencies for additional emergency shelter spaces, based on evaluation of the Task Force's 1998-99 short-term initiative, until longer-term solutions appropriately deal with the need.**

Specific actions:

- 1.1 Provide adequate funding to maintain the level of improvement achieved in 1998-99.
- 1.2 Ensure additional funding for 1999-2000 addresses the needs of families with children in addition to singles.
- 1.3 Involve the agency community in establishing priorities, as was done for the Task Force's 1998-99 shelter spaces initiative.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

The Edmonton Homelessness Task Force recognizes that the provision of more emergency shelter beds is a necessary, but 'band-aid' solution. To meet the need for low-income affordable housing, the Task Force developed longer-term broader solutions that would have more lasting impact toward resolving the issues. Recommendations and specific actions come under the headings of:

- Housing supply
- Support services
- Leadership and community involvement
- Policy development
- Funding

“Lack of adequate housing, or a reasonable safe and secure place, takes a mighty toll on one's health.”

– Lawrence Willier
Amisk Housing Association



HOUSING SUPPLY

Recommendation:

2. Support the provision of 500 additional housing units each year over the next five years (2000 to 2005) to accommodate a range of low-income priority needs through a continuum of emergency, transitional and long-term housing in Edmonton.

Specific actions:

- 2.1 Address low-income priority housing needs including those of singles, Aboriginals, mentally ill, families with children, seniors, women and youth.
- 2.2 Consider conversion of vacant or underutilized government buildings to low-income housing and better use of existing vacant social housing units.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Recommendation:

3. Enhance support services that will help people stay adequately housed within the community.

Specific actions:

- 3.1 Enact the underlying principle that people are not discharged from medical institutions without (1) a place to go and (2) community supports in place.
- 3.2 Ensure the range of staff supports needed by users of special needs or supportive housing options are provided along with the housing. Examples of such “special housing needs” target groups are:
 - low-income ‘hard-to-house’ seniors needing supervised, lodge-type accommodation,
 - mentally-ill persons in need of supportive management options,
 - persons with substance abuse histories requiring longer-term recovery accommodation,
 - homeless youth in need of transitional supportive housing, and
 - women with or without children leaving abusive relationships in need of second stage (six-month) or third stage (12-month) accommodation.

- 3.3 Reduce the impediments that security deposits present to both landlords and tenants of affordable housing. Options include an insurance program to reimburse landlords for the repair of damages that exceed the security deposit's value. Also, enhance education about security deposits for both landlords and tenants. The City's Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board role and resources could be strengthened to provide that service. (Also see Action 5.2).
- 3.4 Consider ways of assisting with transportation costs, such as through free bus tickets or provision of a transportation allowance, that would encourage the homeless to seek accommodation outside the inner-city.
- 3.5 Enhance drop-in child care for caregivers who have difficulty seeking affordable housing and employment.
- 3.6 Explore methods to assist the homeless with their financial management needs, such as a community bank or financial guardian.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Recommendation:

- 4. Engage the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing to lead implementation of the Task Force's recommendations. The Committee should review and expand its mandate and membership to ensure it functions as a decision-making body with adequate diversity of representation to carry out the required work.**

Specific actions:

- 4.1 Provincial and City members should be senior officials, such as Assistant Deputy Minister level or equivalent, to ensure decision-making ability.
- 4.2 Form an agreement and a budget to provide the administrative supports needed to carry out the work of the Committee, including a Housing Initiatives Coordinator. The coordinator would be co-funded by the three levels of government and accountable to the EJPCOH to support the Committee in implementing the recommendations. The budget would also cover implementation costs for such activities as the count, survey and database as outlined below.
- 4.3 Develop an action plan for implementation of the recommendations, including measures of success.

“ We have the knowledge, skill and capacity to duplicate any and all of these projects and to house more people. All that's missing is capital funds to build or lease these units. ”

– Martin Garber-Conrad
Edmonton City Centre
Church Corp.



- 4.4 Continue to conduct the homeless count initiated by the Task Force as a means of identifying and monitoring trends among the homeless. Follow-up counts are recommended for late August 1999, March and August 2000 and every second year thereafter.
- 4.5 Conduct a homeless survey to find out more about the homeless — demographics, characteristics, causes of homelessness, etc., within a year of this report. Include tracking of a few individuals to assess services used and costs involved.
- 4.6 Implement and maintain a computerized database of housing and services.
- 4.7 Undertake an advocacy/education role to assist the homeless, change public attitudes and build understanding and support.
- 4.8 As a longer-term objective, consider partnerships and joint ventures among facilities to create an even better organization of existing agencies.
- 4.9 Account for progress on established measures at least annually to the City of Edmonton, Alberta Family and Social Services, Alberta Municipal Affairs and the Edmonton Coalition on Homelessness.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation:

- 5. Review Supports for Independence (SFI) policies of Family and Social Services, with the intention of ensuring they provide sufficient support to meet recipients' housing needs.**

Specific actions:

- 5.1 Improve the provincial shelter allowance to allow people to obtain adequate housing in the marketplace. Revise current policy from providing one blanket rate across the province to having community-specific rates that reflect current market rents. For example, establish shelter allowances based on a portion of the average market rent (say 85%) for each community using annual rental rate surveys.
- 5.2 Look at alternative ways of ensuring security deposits aren't a hindrance to securing housing for SFI recipients. One such option is reinstatement of the policy of paying security deposits for all SFI recipients.



- 5.3 Consider a policy that SFI will be provided to people with no fixed address.
- 5.4 Examine age restrictions on the shelter allowance, so that youths under age 18 living without family support may qualify.

Recommendation:

6. Review current social housing policies managed by Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Specific actions:

- 6.1 Consider a graduated formula for Rents Geared to Income, rather than the standard by which all individuals or families pay 30% of their gross income toward rent.
- 6.2 Ensure policies support a transition from subsidized to non-subsidized housing.

FUNDING

Recommendation:

7. Support the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund as a mechanism to generate predictable, sustainable and dedicated funding to meet affordable housing needs in Edmonton.

Specific actions:

- 7.1 Reinvest in housing the City of Edmonton’s annual savings, arising from eliminated subsidies for provincial social housing, which in 1998 was \$1.3 million and in some cases would have continued for 30 years. This would bring the City back to its base level from which additional funding could be determined. The funds would be contributed to the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund to assist in development of the housing units specified in Recommendation No.2, and would be matched by the provincial and federal governments.
- 7.2 Designate a percentage from the sale of city and provincial-owned land to the development of low-income housing, and contribute it to the Trust Fund to assist with the development of 500 additional housing units annually (Recommendation No. 2).

“ The system (of group homes and half-way houses) does work - there’s just not enough of it. ”

– Sharon Springer
Schizophrenia Society



7.3 Engage the private sector in matching the funds dedicated by governments to additional housing projects.

Recommendation:

8. Urge the three levels of government – federal, provincial, municipal – to commit additional funding to meet the housing and support needs in Edmonton as outlined in the previous recommendations.

Specific actions:

- 8.1 Agree to funding levels and clarification of roles in housing for each level of government within a Memorandum of Understanding.
- 8.2 Support the national initiative to establish a national housing policy.



FULL REPORT

1. ESTABLISHING THE EDMONTON TASK FORCE ON HOMELESSNESS

The Ministers of Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Municipal Affairs and the Mayor of the City of Edmonton agreed to review the issue of homelessness in Edmonton through the formation of a jointly-chaired Task Force in the fall of 1998.

The Task Force's terms of reference noted, "Solutions to homelessness require a community response and the Task Force will involve the community in developing a strategy to address both the short-term and long-term issues."

Twelve members were appointed to the Task Force, representing the private industry, the non-profit community and government sectors. A Working Group also was appointed to assist the Task Force.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE TASK FORCE:

Short-Term:

1. To determine the nature and magnitude, causes and impacts of immediate needs of homeless in Edmonton.
2. Based on the outcomes of this review, to bring forward a community-based funding solution to meet priority needs in Edmonton, no later than November 30, 1998.
3. To assess the existing inventory of accommodation to meet the needs of homeless persons in Edmonton.

Long-Term:

1. To develop a sustainable mechanism to carry out a homeless count every two years. The first homeless count to be completed within 3 months from Task Force start-up (Feb. 1, 1999).
2. To develop a strategy to meet identified homeless needs in Edmonton, including specific partnership initiatives and project proposals. To be developed within 6 months from Task Force start-up (by May 1, 1999).
3. To develop an implementation plan to ensure the goals of the strategy are achieved.

“ Today I'm addressing not just the homeless, but those in danger of becoming homeless... Shelters aren't the answer. We need safe, affordable housing for all. ”

— Deanna Shorten
Poverty in Action



METHODOLOGIES

Some methodologies to be considered were outlined for the Task Force:

1. To include and make use of existing networks, coalitions and alliances concerned with homeless needs in the City of Edmonton.
2. To undertake research into municipal and regional experiences in this area, including a review of “best practices” elsewhere in Alberta and Canada.
3. To facilitate new linkages and partnership opportunities in the development of solutions.

DEFINITION

The Task Force established the following definition* of the homeless for its work:

1. Individuals and families who are absolutely homeless (having no housing alternatives) and
2. Individuals and families who are the sheltered homeless (living in emergency accommodations or condemned housing and expected to be ‘on the street’ at the end of their stay).

ACTIVITIES

To fulfill its mandate and objectives, the Task Force developed an extensive research program. Activities included:

- A count of the homeless in Edmonton on March 18, 1999.
- Focus groups with agency representatives supporting various sub-groups of the homeless.
- An agency survey.
- Literature review of best practices for homelessness throughout the world.
- A public forum on homelessness on April 9, 1999.

The Task Force involved the Edmonton community in all of these activities except the literature review, and benefited from tremendous participation and input.



* See Section 5, “Definitions”, page 42

2. MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

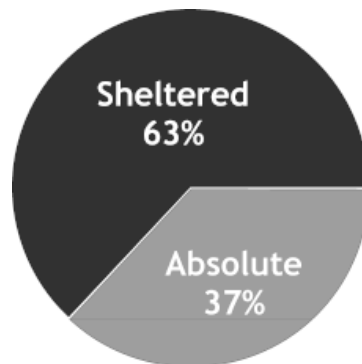
'SNAPSHOT' OF THE HOMELESS

A community-supported count on March 18, 1999 – the first official count ever held in Edmonton – provides a 'snapshot' of the homeless in the city.

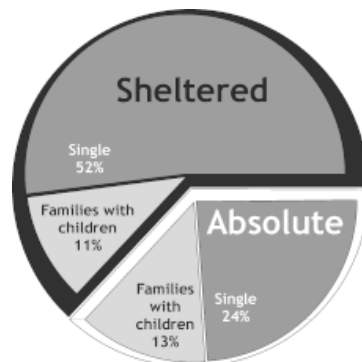
Who were the homeless that day? In brief:

- 836 persons
- 313 with no permanent place to stay; 523 in shelters
- About 70 families, including 112 children
- Majority single males
- More than half Caucasian, 42% Aboriginal

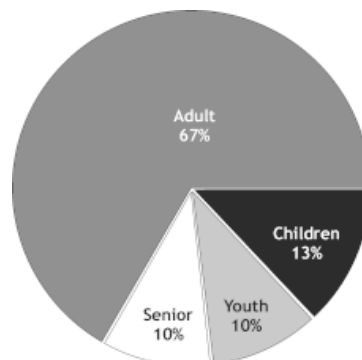
Participants counted 836 homeless persons – 313 absolute homeless with no housing alternative and 523 sheltered homeless, living in emergency accommodations.



While the majority of the homeless were single, about 70 families also were counted. The families included 112 children and 91 caregivers – 55% of them were absolute homeless while 45% stayed at shelters. Caregivers included men, women and seniors.



Children were the second largest group, accounting for 13%, following adults (67%). Youth and seniors both accounted for 10% of the homeless population.

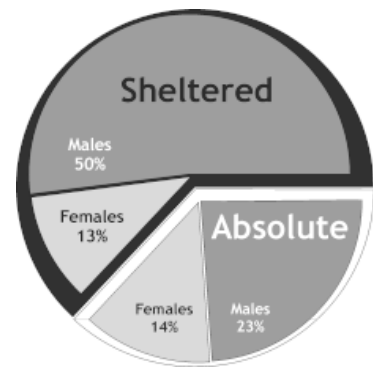


“The key to the answer to homelessness is to build more housing.”

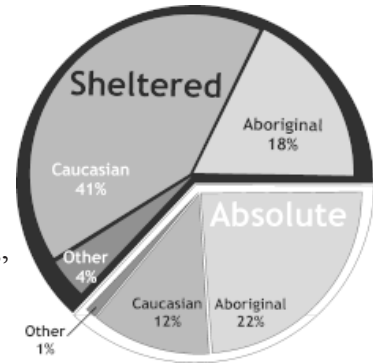
– Debbie Saidman
Edmonton Housing
Trust Fund



A majority of the homeless were male. Among females, almost half were absolute homeless — a higher proportion than among the males.



Caucasians formed the highest percentage (53%) for observed race among the homeless, followed by Aboriginals (42%). Only 5% were observed as “other.”



THE BIGGER PICTURE

There is much more to homelessness and its impacts than statistics on the sheer number of homeless. As participants at the April 9 Public Forum on Homelessness emphasized, it is important to “put a face” on the homeless. The Task Force obtained considerable insight into the health and social implications of homelessness through feedback at the public forum and focus groups as well as through the literature search.

The reality of homeless people’s lives is chilling. Studies* confirm direct connections between homelessness and wide-ranging health and social problems. Compared to the general population, homeless people face higher rates of premature death, infectious disease, acute illness and chronic conditions and dental problems. They are prone to higher rates of injury and violence as well as depression, risk of suicide, mental illness and alcohol or substance abuse. Their situation is worsened by poor nutrition and hygiene. Homelessness also contributes to the development of treatment-resistant tuberculosis and other diseases such as Hepatitis C and HIV/ AIDS.

* Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto, the Report of the Mayor’s Homelessness Action Task Force, January 1999, and specifically Appendix H to the Report: Interim Report of the Task Force, “*Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness.*”

The social impacts of homelessness are many and varied; they include a lack of privacy, threats to personal safety, security risks to personal property, a loss of social and employment skills, and reduced connections to the wider community.

Specific health and social impacts vary greatly among the diversity of people who experience homelessness. For example, undernourishment, developmental delays and lower visual/motor skills compared to other children may be issues affecting homeless families; prostitution or the return to abusive situations are likely to be concerns affecting homeless youth and women leaving abusive relationships.

People most negatively affected by homelessness are often those with multiple problems, such as mentally ill persons who are also substance abusers and may have physical health problems.

Without stable and affordable housing and support services, the unmet needs of the homeless can result in excessive demands on police, hospitals and community agencies.

Input to the Task Force also showed that to focus on the narrowly defined homeless and their emergency shelter needs would be too limiting. As described above, issues influencing homelessness are much more far-reaching and affect the poor and members of various sub-groups such as the mentally ill, Aboriginals, women leaving abusive relationships, youth and seniors.

Agencies, the homeless and the community serving the homeless clearly pointed to the lack of low-income affordable housing, along with other supports, as the root of the problem. A New York University study* supports this premise. A key finding was that regardless of social disorders, 80% of formerly homeless families with subsidized housing stayed permanently housed.

* Shinn, Marybeth, Weitzman, Beth, C., et.al. "Predictors of Homelessness Among Families in New York City: From Shelter Request to Housing Stability", The American Journal of Public Health, American Public Health Association, Volume 88, Number 11, November 1998.

“ *The issue of racism needs to be addressed. One of the biggest barriers to housing is racism.* ”

— Valerie Kaufman
Edmonton Aboriginal
Urban Affairs Committee



3. WHAT WE FOUND: *Showing The Need For Action*

THE REALITY OF HOMELESSNESS

Information gathered by the Task Force breaks many of the preconceptions or myths people may hold about homelessness and what can be done about it. The reality is:

A. Homelessness affects many Edmontonians.

Even with the narrow definition of homeless, the March 18 count captured more than 800 persons. Anecdotal input and lessons learned from the count lead the Task Force to believe that is an underestimation.

B. Edmonton has a diverse homeless population.

While many of Edmonton's homeless are single males, the homeless population also includes a disproportionately large share of Aboriginals, as well as families with children, youth, single women, mentally ill persons and seniors.

C. Homelessness affects people for varying lengths of time.

Homelessness may be a temporary condition for some; more often it is periodic (for example, for welfare recipients who run out of money) or chronic (for mentally ill persons poorly connected to support systems, for example).

D. Most homeless situations stem from a profound and sustained lack of positive choice options.

Conditions such as family breakdown, abuse, lack of life skills, physical disability or mental illness, discrimination, poverty, substance abuse/addictions – or frequently some combination of these – severely limit the options of many of the homeless.

E. Homeless solutions can reach far beyond the inner-city.

Given the diversity of people affected and situations involved, solutions should be equally diverse and wide-ranging.



F. Emergency shelters are important but are not the sole response to the diversity of homeless needs in Edmonton.

Emergency spaces meet the immediate needs of some homeless persons. However, their effectiveness is limited in addressing needs that contribute to homelessness. Many homeless persons, such as youth, avoid shelters because they prefer less structured environments. Homeless caregivers with children often avoid emergency settings for fear their children will be apprehended if they go there. On the other hand, shelters can become long-term housing replacements for some people, and create a bottleneck, because of the lack of low-income affordable housing. Long-term affordable housing and improved social support systems are needed to address the homeless needs in Edmonton.

G. Homeless needs in Edmonton are significantly linked to the lack of low-income affordable housing.

Low turnover rates and repeat users in emergency shelters are evidence of the lack of low-income affordable housing options in the city and the declining rental housing vacancy rate (expected to reach 1% by the end of 1999). Many of the periodic and chronic homeless would be better served in transitional and long-term housing than in emergency shelter spaces.

H. The Edmonton community has the capacity to address the affordable housing issue, if governments provide adequate funding and supports.

The Edmonton community – the non-profit and business sectors – has the ability, the experience and the desire to provide more low-income affordable housing, but needs the resources. Assistance from all levels of government – federal, provincial and municipal – is needed. Government can demonstrate its leadership by providing the resources and supportive policies that will engage the non-profit and private sector as partners in implementing the needed projects.

“ I worry about the children. I don't believe they'll show up in the counts. Many of the things we do now are primarily for the single. ”

– Brian Bechtel
Edmonton Social
Planning Council



RESEARCH FINDINGS

Agency focus groups and best practices

The Task Force's research into best practices among worldwide homeless initiatives, along with the agency focus groups and survey, provides valuable insight into the homeless.

General conclusions that apply equally in all jurisdictions include:

- **The homeless are not a homogenous group.**

Typically, the homeless population is differentiated across two dimensions:

- demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, family status or race
- factors affecting homelessness, many of which are health-related such as mental illness and physical disabilities, addictions or family violence

The combination of these two dimensions yields a very diverse set of homeless populations.

- **Social support networks have evolved to reflect the diversity and meet the demands of the homeless.**

Such an evolution results in what often appears to be a patchwork set of agencies and programs.

- **There is no single solution to homelessness.**

This conclusion held true for every jurisdiction examined. It was also true for specific agency design. The diversity of the homeless population requires a diversity of solutions at every level.

- **Best practices are changing to reflect diversity in populations.**

Best practices recognize the reality that no single solution to homelessness exists. Rather, best practice is now characterized by:

- diverse agency and program design
- integrating mechanisms designed to network and coordinate



Some answers to the question of why people are homeless come from the literature research:

- **Individual circumstances:**
 - family breakdown
 - substance abuse
 - mental illness
 - physical disability
 - unemployed/unemployable
 - poverty
 - insufficient life skills
- **Structural/Systemic characteristics:**
 - **De-institutionalization:** The current trend to de-institutionalization has placed people in the community who need supports to make the transition successful.
 - **Housing affordability and availability:** Despite trends in interest rates, housing is expensive and beyond the range of many in the lower income levels. Even the lowest cost housing alternatives present significant barriers including the up-front costs such as security and utility deposits.
 - **Economic conditions:** There has been a general economic trend toward growth in Alberta (driving housing prices up) combined with greater variation in the types of jobs available. More temporary, contract and similar job arrangements are affecting either levels or income or the stability of income.
 - **Public attitudes:** A range of public attitudes – such as perceived employability and the ‘not-in-my-backyard’ attitude to solutions — affect the ability of individuals or agencies to help address homelessness issues.
 - **Public policy & programs:** Levels of supports available to many have been limited or reduced.
 - **Social support network:** Because support agencies are stretched to the limit financially, many are no longer able to provide the range or depth of support required.

About 50 participants in eight Edmonton focus groups proposed a myriad of suggestions (see details in Appendix 3, *A Review of Strategies and Best Practices*). They can be categorized into five areas:

- **Advocacy**, dealing with the need to change attitudes, address myths and build public understanding and support.

“ *The sense of homelessness goes beyond people on the street. People in poverty feel it too.* ”

— Richard Welch
Alberta Mental
Health Board



- **Funding**, dealing with current funding levels toward either individuals or agencies and organizations whose mandates are to support the homeless.
- **Policy**, dealing with policy issues of either the federal or provincial governments concerning the delivery of support to the homeless.
- **Programming**, dealing with ideas for such things as additional shelter and housing, support services and financial supports.
- **System design**, dealing with how current programs and agencies could improve effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.

Public Forum on Homelessness

In addition to the agency-based research and literature review, the Task Force's Public Forum provided a considerable range of input. The views of 29 individuals or organizations focused on two things:

- **Issues** involved with or contributing to homelessness
- **Solutions** that could reduce homelessness.

Throughout, four low-income groups were mentioned as being particularly affected by housing issues:

- Aboriginals
- Families with children
- Mentally ill
- Hard-to-house seniors

Common themes emerged.

Issues influencing the homeless and affordable housing included:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of financial supports to help low-income people obtain affordable housing
- Lack of government commitment and the political will to focus on housing
- The need for more coordination among agencies and service departments
- Cultural and societal factors including racism and safety concerns



Proposed solutions also fit into five main categories:

- The need for leadership from three levels of government primarily, then the community
- Capital funding for new developments and renovations, as well as funding at the support level. In particular, reinvestment of the City of Edmonton's saved \$1.3 million into housing
- Development of more assisted or affordable housing of all types
- Target-group specific solutions for Aboriginal, families with children, mentally ill and seniors
- Education to change deep-rooted prejudices and attitudes within society

“ *The lack of affordable housing and lack of income to afford housing create the problem. That's true for the most vulnerable, but also for those whose incomes are close to the poverty level. The issues of housing and homelessness can't be viewed in isolation.* ”

– Frank Manzara
Quality of Life
Commission



TRADITION OF COLLABORATION NEEDS RESOURCES BOOST

The Task Force's research also shows that the Edmonton community has accomplished many housing initiatives and continues to work together to make improvements – but resources are the significant limiting factor. The issues involved with homelessness are generally well understood, the need for more affordable housing of all types is recognized, and a proud tradition of collaboration exists. Collaboration has proven successful among government, the community and private sectors in planning and implementing initiatives, as well as on a day-to-day basis within the community of agencies and organizations that serve the homeless.

The community is eager and willing to do more, but needs government resources and support to put their collaborative capabilities into further concrete action.

The **Edmonton Coalition on Homelessness (ECOH)** is an example of the collaborative efforts underway in Edmonton, and the collective energy that would be available for new housing initiatives.

ECOH is a community-based group with more than 100 member agencies. It was formed by about 30 agencies in 1986 out of a common concern for the problems of homelessness in Edmonton, with the threefold mandate of identifying the scope of homelessness in the City, identifying a range of solutions and developing an implementation plan for those solutions. In 1987, ECOH released its major report, *No Place Like Home – Homelessness in Edmonton*, which included 43 recommendations to address homelessness, support services and housing affordability issues in Edmonton.

Today, ECOH continues to represent the views of its wide membership base which includes such organizations as The Alberta Mental Health Consumer Network, McCauley Community League, Edmonton Inner-City Housing Society, The Mennonite Central Committee and People In Need Shelter (PINS) Society.



Representatives continue to meet monthly to generate and provide information and advocacy services on behalf of homeless needs in Edmonton and to develop active responses to provincial policy initiatives, including various Alberta Municipal Affairs Business Plans. ECOH also undertakes specific projects to meet homeless and affordable housing needs. For example, in 1997 the Coalition applied for and received funding under the CMHC *Homegrown Solutions* program to look at the development of an Edmonton-based Housing Trust Fund.

ECOH appoints four persons to represent its membership on the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing.

The **Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing** (EJPCOH) is an interjurisdictional group that meets regularly to review and approve low-income and special housing needs assessments, and to develop short and long-term plans to address priority needs. Its membership includes representatives from all three levels of government, private industry and community agencies (through ECOH). The Committee is chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs; other representatives come from such organizations as Alberta Solicitor-General, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, The Greater Edmonton Home Builders Association, The City of Edmonton, and the Greater Edmonton Foundation. The Committee is supported by a Working Group.

The initial mission of the EJPCOH, established in 1991, included six goals:

1. To develop initiatives to meet the identified needs of the Edmonton Inner-City Housing Need and Demand Study with emphasis on permanent, long-term housing.
2. To coordinate and integrate the related governmental, interdepartmental, and non-profit organizations, policies, programs and budget processes.
3. To ensure input and involvement of the community and private sector in the development and implementation of plans and initiatives.
4. To encourage stabilization of the homeless.
5. To prevent at risk groups from becoming homeless.
6. To evaluate and adjust the EJPCOH Three-Year Plan (to meet priority low-income and special housing needs in Edmonton).

“Aboriginals face multiple barriers in access. They are increasingly becoming marginalized.”

— Janet Trottier
Boyle Street Community
Service (Housing Registry)



Its accomplishments are significant. From 1992 to 1994, EJPCOH-approved housing plans resulted in the commitment of a \$10.8 million capital program involving 242 housing units under Federal/Provincial Social Housing Programs. This initiative was cited at the Task Force's public forum as an example of what the community can accomplish when given adequate resources.

More recently, EJPCOH activities have focused more on priority housing needs updates and plans to meet those needs than housing projects because of a lack of resources. In 1998, a EJPCOH report was released by Alberta Municipal Affairs, the City of Edmonton and ECOH: *Supply and Demand Update on Affordable Housing for Low-Income and Special Needs Households*. In September 1998, the EJPCOH approved the report "*Recommended Actions for the Short-Term Plan (1998-1999) and the Long-Term Plan (1999-2001) for Housing in Edmonton.*"

Another active community group is the **Urban Corps Support Network (UCSN)**. It is a national organization of front-line agencies that work in the inner cities. The Edmonton chapter has existed for about 20 years and focuses on inner-city concerns such as health and support services. Specific issues it has dealt with include street prostitution and non-beverage alcohol use. Accomplishments include advocating for and starting an additional shelter and obtaining a community worker to help with providing input to the area redevelopment plan. When significant housing issues arise, UCSN refers them to ECOH – another indication of the collaboration taking place in the Edmonton community.



4. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE: *Call to Action*

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

(Objectives A1-3)

EMERGENCY SHELTER SPACES

Recommendation:

1. **The City of Edmonton and Province of Alberta to provide short-term funding to agencies for additional emergency shelter spaces, based on evaluation of the Task Force's 1998-99 short-term initiative, until longer-term solutions appropriately deal with the need.**

Specific actions:

- 1.1 **Provide adequate funding to maintain the level of improvement achieved in 1998-99.**
- 1.2 **Ensure additional funding for 1999-2000 addresses the needs of families with children in addition to singles.**
- 1.3 **Involve the agency community in establishing priorities, as was done for the Task Force's 1998-99 shelter spaces initiative.**

In response to the short-term objectives of the Task Force, \$177,000 funding was provided for 56 additional emergency spaces in existing inner-city shelters; funding covered the cost of the additional beds or mats, meals and support on a one-time basis for six months, ending May 15, 1999. The \$177,000 funding was provided by the provincial and municipal governments and the private sector.

Inner-city shelter representatives collaborated in the development of the short-term solution. Single men and women, with and without immediate substance abuse problems, were identified as having the highest priority needs at that time. It was also recognized that other homeless needs in Edmonton were not included in these groups.

The needs of families with children are also urgent. The Task Force therefore recommends that some funds be devoted to a short-term solution for families. Some possible ways of providing spaces for families include using available spaces that exist outside the inner-city in social housing facilities or leasing motel rooms.

“As people get older, health decreases; there are disability, literacy, a lot of security issues. To be senior on the streets is probably a bit harder.”

— Heide Velluw
Operation Friendship



Ideally, the need for these shelter spaces will decline as longer-term solutions take effect, but they will be needed in the short-term.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

(Objectives B1-3)

The Edmonton Homelessness Task Force recognizes that the provision of more emergency shelter beds is a necessary, but ‘band-aid’ solution. To meet the need for low-income affordable housing, the Task Force developed longer-term broader solutions that would have more lasting impact toward resolving the issues. Recommendations and specific actions come under the headings of:

- Housing supply
- Support services
- Leadership and community involvement
- Policy development
- Funding

HOUSING SUPPLY

Recommendation:

- 2. Support the provision of 500 additional housing units* each year over the next five years (2000 to 2005) to accommodate a range of low-income priority needs through a continuum of emergency, transitional and long-term housing in Edmonton.**

Specific actions:

- 2.1 Address low-income priority housing needs including those of singles, Aboriginals, mentally ill, families with children, seniors, women and youth.**
- 2.2 Consider conversion of vacant or under-utilized government buildings to low-income housing, and better use of existing vacant social housing units.**

A long-term needs assessment conducted by the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing (EJPCOH) in mid-1997 estimated the demand for additional low-income and special needs housing at 2,600 units. About 70% of that demand is for independent living options, with the

* See “Housing Unit” definition in Section 5, “Definitions”, page 42.

remaining 30% for a range of long-term and transitional special needs/supportive housing options. The needs assessment identified eight target groups, with specific solutions for each.

Edmonton housing market conditions since 1997 show that the need is increasing; 2,600 is therefore a conservative estimate of housing needs over the next five years. For example, when the needs assessment was done, Edmonton's rental housing vacancy rate was 4.6% and there was no waiting list for housing managed by the Capital Region Housing Corporation. Today, the average vacancy rate has declined to 1.8% (with projections it could fall to 1% by year-end 1999) and there are more than 700 approved applications on the CRHC waiting list.

As reinforced by the Task Force's research, the lack of affordable housing is a significant part of the homelessness problem. Other observations are that the homeless are not a homogeneous group and there is no single solution. The 500 additional units annually must therefore respond to the wide range of needs that exist. For example, focus groups and best practice research revealed that youth often do not want a structured environment and therefore avoid agencies with some form of recovery program. More of a non-judgmental environment is needed to meet their specific needs. Similarly, caregivers with children are often reluctant to go to shelters for fear their children will be apprehended if they go there. Longer-term alternatives are required. Aboriginal persons, who may be included in priority housing needs groups like the mentally ill, families with children, women and seniors, may also have special needs such as sufficient space for extended families.

Conversion of existing vacant buildings was suggested to the Task Force as one way of providing additional housing units. Such buildings as the Charles Camsell Hospital could be examined as potential housing sources.

Better use of existing residential facilities could also help to meet this demand. The recent conversion of McCauley Lodge from a conventional Senior's Lodge to accommodate "hard-to-house" inner city seniors has enabled this formerly under-utilized facility to meet a high priority housing need.

“ With affordable housing, people can stabilize their home. Physical health is better, medications go down, they have food. They can start going to school and getting jobs. ”

— Betty Farrell
Edmonton Inner-City
Housing



SUPPORT SERVICES

Recommendation:

3. Enhance support services that will help people stay adequately housed within the community.

Specific actions:

- 3.1 Enact the underlying principle that people are not discharged from medical institutions without (1) a place to go and (2) community supports in place.
- 3.2 Ensure the range of staff supports needed by users of special needs or supportive housing options are provided along with the housing. Examples of such “special housing needs” target groups are:
 - low-income ‘hard-to-house’ seniors needing supervised, lodge-type accommodation,
 - mentally-ill persons in need of supportive management options,
 - persons with substance abuse histories requiring longer-term recovery accommodation,
 - homeless youth in need of transitional supportive housing, and
 - women with or without children leaving abusive relationships in need of second stage (six-month) or third stage (12-month) accommodation.
- 3.3 Reduce the impediments that security deposits present to both landlords and tenants of affordable housing. Options include an insurance program to reimburse landlords for the repair of damages that exceed the security deposit’s value. Also, enhance education about security deposits for both landlords and tenants. The City’s Landlord and Tenant Advisory Board role and resources could be strengthened to provide that service. (Also see Action 5.2).
- 3.4 Consider ways of assisting with transportation costs, such as through free bus tickets or provision of a transportation allowance, that would encourage the homeless to seek accommodation outside the inner-city.
- 3.5 Enhance drop-in child care for caregivers who have difficulty seeking affordable housing and employment.
- 3.6 Explore methods to assist the homeless with their financial management needs, such as a community bank or financial guardian.

Input to the Task Force clearly showed that homeless or low-income people need many supports in addition to actual housing to make it possible and feasible to live in accommodation of all types. Many supports already exist in the community, but they are so overtaxed that people cannot access them.

The Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing's 1997 housing needs assessment showed that 30% of the estimated 2,600 unit demand for additional housing units is for a range of long-term and transitional special needs housing options. Persons with those needs require support services not normally provided in housing, and without which, they would be unable to live independently.

Support services need to be targeted to specific groups to deal directly with the nature of their coping issues, whether recovery from addictions, dealing with mental difficulties including the brain injured or difficulty managing finances. Even for people not classified as 'special needs,' different kinds of assistance and financial support are often required to ensure they can live independently, thereby reducing the risk of becoming homeless again.

In the case of people leaving medical institutions, the type of support services needed includes support within transitional housing or group homes or services with an emphasis on community outreach, home care, counselling or housekeeping.

Other homeless or low-income groups require support services that will help them achieve some stability in their housing arrangements. These supports are wide-ranging. The Task Force's public forum and focus groups brought forward significant concern about security deposits.* For many people, security deposits are a significant impediment to securing and keeping affordable housing. Many potential tenants cannot afford the security deposit required for rental accommodation; in other cases, security deposits are not administered or refunded according to regulations. Landlords are sometimes reluctant to venture into low-income housing because of potential difficulties with deposits and damage.

For other people, assistance with transportation costs could make it possible to live outside the inner-city where

* See "Security Deposit" definition in Section 5, "Definitions", page 42.

“ Our building is not big enough to meet the needs. Night after night we have to turn people away. ”

— Sedrick Vassell
Inner-City Mission



accommodation may be more readily available. Enhancement of drop-in child care for the homeless or sheltered homeless would particularly help caregivers who are unable to look for housing or employment because of their family obligations. The need for financial management assistance was also mentioned in the focus groups as a much-needed support.

Enhancing supports that exist, increasing the availability of overtaxed services and filling the gaps would ensure a continuum of care approach to services – and save efforts and resources in the long run.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Recommendation:

- 4. Engage the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing to lead implementation of the Task Force’s recommendations. The Committee should review and expand its mandate and membership to ensure it functions as a decision-making body with adequate diversity of representation to carry out the required work.**

Specifications:

- 4.1 Provincial and City members should be senior officials, such as Assistant Deputy Minister level or equivalent, to ensure decision-making ability.**
- 4.2 Form an agreement and a budget to provide the administrative supports needed to carry out the work of the Committee, including a Housing Initiatives Coordinator. The coordinator would be co-funded by the three levels of government and accountable to the EJPCOH to support the Committee in implementing the recommendations. The budget would also cover implementation costs for such activities as the count, survey and database as outlined below.**
- 4.3 Develop an action plan for implementation of the recommendations, including measures of success.**
- 4.4 Continue to conduct the homeless count initiated by the Task Force as a means of identifying and monitoring trends among the homeless. Follow-up counts are recommended for late August 1999, March and August 2000 and every second year thereafter.**

- 4.5 Conduct a homeless survey to find out more about the homeless — demographics, characteristics, causes of homelessness, etc., within a year of this report. Include tracking of a few individuals to assess services used and costs involved.**
- 4.6 Implement and maintain a computerized database of housing and services.**
- 4.7 Undertake an advocacy/education role to assist the homeless, change public attitudes and build understanding and support.**
- 4.8 As a longer-term objective, consider partnerships and joint ventures among facilities to create an even better organization of existing agencies.**
- 4.9 Account for progress on established measures at least annually to the City of Edmonton, Alberta Family and Social Services, Alberta Municipal Affairs and the Edmonton Coalition on Homelessness.**

The Task Force sees the need for quick, collaborative action on its recommendations and believes that engaging an existing organization with proven capability will be the best approach. The Task Force recommends the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing (EJPCOH) for this role: the Committee has a proven track record from previous housing initiatives and continues to meet regularly. One of the major roles of the EJPCOH will be to determine how, and for which specific low-income priority needs groups, the additional 500 housing units identified in Recommendation No. 2 will be provided over each of the next five years.

A review and strengthening of the Committee’s mandate and membership will ensure it has the authority to be a quick-acting, decision-making body and add to its credibility. The Task Force also suggests that Assistant Deputy Minister or equivalent level of representation is needed to ensure decisions can be made and action taken. Expansion of membership to include significant representation of the Aboriginal community would also be beneficial. Given that homeless issues are not restricted to the City’s boundaries, a regional focus could also be considered in the future.

Providing a budget for the EJPCOH’s expanded role will be an important step in ensuring it can realistically

“ We play a significant role in prevention. If not for the programs offered, many of the people we serve would be homeless today. ”

– Gerry Raymond
Excel Resources Society



accomplish its objectives. Hiring of a Housing Initiatives Coordinator will also be essential. The Coordinator would provide administrative support and coordinate the implementation of such activities as the homeless count, survey and database.

The Task Force suggests a number of activities for the Committee. In addition to continuing the count, and conducting a survey to find out more information about the homeless, development of a computerized database is recommended. The database could include lists of housing providers and up-to-date vacancy status reports, as well as lists of service providers such as mental health or addiction counselling agencies. It would be accessible to all management bodies and non-profit organizations and, through them, to individuals in need of affordable housing or related services. Specifics of the database should be determined through a collaborative process to ensure it meets the needs that exist.

The need for advocacy on behalf of the homeless and education of the public also was emphasized throughout the Task Force's focus groups and public forum. Racism and discrimination were often cited as barriers to accessing affordable housing, which will only be overcome through changing society's attitudes.

EJPCOH would also receive any additional feedback and input that is likely to come after dissolution of the Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation:

- 5. Review Supports for Independence (SFI) policies of Family and Social Services, with the intention of ensuring they provide sufficient support to meet recipients' housing needs.**

Specific actions:

- 5.1 Improve the provincial shelter allowance to allow people to obtain adequate housing in the marketplace. Revise current policy from providing one blanket rate across the province to having community-specific rates that reflect current market rents. For example, establish shelter allowances**



based on a portion of the average market rent (say 85%) for each community using annual rental rate surveys.

5.2 Look at alternative ways of ensuring security deposits aren't a hindrance to securing housing for SFI recipients. One such option is reinstatement of the policy of paying security deposits for all SFI recipients.

5.3 Consider a policy that SFI will be provided to people with no fixed address.

5.4 Examine age restrictions on the shelter allowance, so that youths under age 18 living without family support may qualify.

The Task Force often was told at the Public Forum that inadequate Supports for Independence benefits present a real barrier for low-income recipients wanting or attempting to maintain affordable housing, especially in larger urban centres and high growth communities. For example, the payment of the same shelter allowance across the province doesn't account for rents that vary widely by community.

Public Forum participants noted that low SFI payments are inadequate to meet basic expenses. Either there is not enough left for shelter, or often money needed for other basics (such as food) ends up going to cover accommodation costs.

As recommended in the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing report: *“Recommended Actions for the Short-Term Plan (1998-1999) and the Long-Term Plan (1999-2001) for Housing in Edmonton”*, more extensive and flexible supports would enhance access to housing for many Albertans.

Recommendation:

6. Review current social housing policies managed by Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Specific actions:

6.1 Consider a graduated formula for Rents Geared to Income, rather than the standard by which all individuals or families pay 30% of their gross income toward rent.

6.2 Ensure policies support a transition from subsidized to non-subsidized housing.

“ We are here to house the ‘hard-to-house.’ We don’t ask for references or credit references. We try to be flexible as possible about security deposits. ”

— Paul Sinclair
Metis Urban Housing



The public forum and focus groups also provided an opportunity for people to emphasize to the Task Force the need for more flexibility in the Rents Geared to Income formula. The 30% across-the-board approach can create problems for some families, particularly those at the far end of the low-income spectrum, large families or those with additional medical expenses. 30% of the average \$8,000 low-income in Edmonton (as compared to \$15,000 in Calgary) leaves very little income for other basic living expenses. A graduated approach, with rents adjusted according to income, would be more realistic.

Innovative ideas to encourage transition out of subsidized housing also need to be encouraged and explored. For example, a portion of tenants' rent could be put into an account to assist them when they leave subsidized housing.

FUNDING

Recommendation:

- 7. Support the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund as a mechanism to generate predictable, sustainable and dedicated funding to meet affordable housing needs in Edmonton.**

Specific actions:

- 7.1 Reinvest in housing the City of Edmonton's annual savings arising from eliminated subsidies for provincial social housing, which in 1998 was \$1.3 million and in some cases would have continued for 30 years. This would bring the City back to its base level from which additional funding could be determined. The funds would be contributed to the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund to assist in development of the housing units specified in Recommendation No.2, and would be matched by the provincial and federal governments.**
- 7.2 Designate a percentage from the sale of city and provincial-owned land to the development of low-income housing, and contribute it to the Trust Fund to assist with the development of 500 additional housing units annually (Recommendation No. 2).**
- 7.3 Engage the private sector in matching the funds dedicated by governments to additional housing projects.**

Housing trusts are a proven model for financing affordable housing. As community-based initiatives, they are widely used in the United States and are being established in five Canadian cities (Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Montreal, St. John and Calgary).

In Edmonton, the Edmonton Coalition on Homelessness (ECHO) initiated the Housing Trust Fund. Alberta Municipal Affairs, the City of Edmonton, Capital Region Housing Corporation and Greater Edmonton Home Builders Association participate on its steering committee. It is now being formalized into a legal entity. When operating, it will provide a range of assistance: housing providers may receive bridge financing or development capital, while individual households may be offered direct assistance through rent supplements or repayable loans. Emphasis will be on those most in need.

Calls for the City of Edmonton to return previous housing subsidy funds to housing came from all areas of the Task Force's research; this would provide an opportunity for the City to support the Edmonton Housing Trust Fund. In 1998, through remortgaging of social housing mortgage debt, the provincial government eliminated the requirement for municipal subsidies toward provincial-owned family social housing. In Edmonton, the saving was approximately \$1.3 million in 1998; in some cases, the savings continue annually for the next 30 years. The province suggested municipalities reinvest the savings to meet low-income housing needs. Instead, the City of Edmonton did not earmark the funds for housing but rather put it back into general revenue. The indirect impact of the savings is larger than face-value in view of the potential ability of those funds to leverage other funds. In Calgary for example, the City leveraged its savings from the same source into \$4.4 million and established a trust fund.

Reinvestment of this historic level of funding to housing would send a clear message to the community, as well as to other levels of government and private industry, that the City takes the housing issue seriously. Provincial and federal governments should be encouraged to match the City's contribution to the fund, as a start toward funding the housing needs of Edmonton.

“ Home has many meanings for Aboriginals... personal safety and security, cultural identity. Home provides space for all members to be accommodated. With extended families, elders have contact with the children.”

— Geordy Saulteaux
Amisk Housing Association



The Trust Fund also provides a valuable community-based mechanism to solicit donations from the private sector. The Fund needs to develop “champions” within the business community who will raise the profile of the issue and bring the private sector on board.

Recommendation:

- 8. Urge the three levels of government – federal, provincial, municipal – to commit additional funding to meet the housing and support needs in Edmonton as outlined in the previous recommendations.**

Specific actions:

8.1 Agree to funding levels and clarification of roles in housing for each level of government within a Memorandum of Understanding.

8.2 Support the national initiative to establish a national housing policy.

The Task Force repeatedly heard that tremendous capability exists in the Edmonton community – non-profit and private – to collaborate and put ideas into action. Implementation is a funding issue. The community has the energy and the interest in making progress happen, but needs assistance with the resources to do so. It became clear through input to the Task Force that funding low-income affordable housing is principally the responsibility of governments.

A commitment to funding and clarification of roles and accountability in housing needs to be formalized, clearly articulated and agreed to by the three levels of government.

Each level of government has a role to play:

- Federal government: Its responsibilities come primarily in the areas of capital assistance for new construction and rehabilitation of existing affordable housing. Because it is largely responsible for Aboriginals, the federal government should also fund projects to prevent and reduce homelessness within that group.
- Provincial government: The province has the constitutional responsibility for housing. There is a public expectation that the province will exercise its responsibility and provide policy and funding leadership in housing. Homelessness is largely caused by poverty and the province also is responsible for income maintenance and support programs. Because



the homeless population has a high incidence of health, mental health and addictions problems, the province has a key role to play in funding supportive programs and enhancing access to health care.

- Municipal government: The need for leadership from the City of Edmonton was often mentioned by the Task Force’s focus groups. Areas for municipal involvement include property tax incentives, per unit grants for construction of new affordable rental housing, more flexible bylaws to allow innovative use of existing housing stock such as secondary suites and fees on new development to assist with new affordable rental housing.

Efforts to establish a national housing policy will help provide the needed clarification of roles and accountability by all levels of government in housing. Examples of initiatives underway are the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) Housing Policy Statement and the *National Housing Policy Options Paper* of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Big City Mayors Caucus. Both of these policy statements recognize that all three levels of government must be involved in housing and recommend specific senior government roles. With government leadership, the community-based, non-profit and business sectors will then help implement projects, provide some funding or services-in-kind and continue the collaborative efforts for which they’re known in Edmonton.

“ Support has to go hand-in-hand with the housing.”

— Heidie Velluw
Operation Friendship



5. Definitions

Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing (EJPCOH)

The Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing is a broad-based committee of representatives from all three levels of government, community agencies and private industry that focuses on issues surrounding low-income and special housing needs. Established in 1991, the Committee's approved plans have resulted in the development of a wide range of housing projects and related initiatives targeted to Edmonton's highest priority low-income and special housing (including homeless) needs.

Hard-to-house

Hard-to-house persons are individuals or families whose often multi-problem lifestyles make them extremely difficult to house. Problems experienced by these persons often include substance abuse, mental illness and/or unpredictable behaviours.

Homeless

The Task Force established the following definition of the homeless for its work.

- **Absolute homeless:** Individuals and families who are absolutely homeless (having no housing alternatives). During the March 18 count, this was represented by people who, when asked on the street or within agencies like drop-in centres or the food bank, self-reported that they had no permanent place to reside. They may have ended up sleeping 'on the street' or in a stairwell that night, or alternatively they may have stayed with a friend or found an emergency shelter space.
- **Sheltered homeless:** Individuals and families who are the sheltered homeless (living in emergency accommodations or condemned housing and expected to be 'on the street' at the end of their stay). During the March 18 count, this was represented by people who were registered to stay in approved emergency shelters.

Housing Trust Fund

Housing trust funds are community-based initiatives, used to raise funds that are dedicated to the financing of affordable



housing. Funds are generally collected from all levels of government as well as the private sector and broad community. Funds are used to assist housing providers as well as individual households. For example, bridge financing or development capital may be provided for a housing provider, whereas an individual may qualify for such direct assistance as rent supplements or repayable loans. Housing trust funds are led by community-based boards of directors. All three levels of government are the designated beneficiaries of any funds remaining upon dissolution. The Edmonton Housing Trust Fund is in the formative stages and is being formalized into a legal entity. When operating, the fund will place emphasis on meeting the highest priority needs.

Housing units

Housing units is a broad term that represents the full spectrum of options for affordable accommodation. It encompasses the full range: mats or beds in emergency shelters, short-term transitional housing, special needs housing, long-term low-income affordable accommodation – and everything in between.

Security Deposit

A security deposit is a safety net for landlords. A security deposit (also known as damage deposit) is money, often equal to the first month's rent, or something of value that a tenant gives to a landlord at the start of a tenancy period. The landlord gives the security deposit back to the tenant when the tenant moves out. If the tenant damages the place, doesn't clean it or moves out without paying the rent, the landlord can keep part of the security deposit.

Special needs/supportive housing

This type of housing serves the needs of people who require support services and/or physical design in addition to the housing itself. Examples include supervised, lodge-type accommodation for seniors or group homes for the mentally ill. Services are generally provided by staff support persons who provide the care or supervision required to help the residents live as independently as possible.

“ *The Community expects all three levels of government to support it. We in the community are willing to do our part.* ”

– Martin Garber-Conrad
Edmonton City-Centre
Church Corp.



6. APPENDICES: *Input Toward Action*

1. Count of Homeless Persons in Edmonton,
March 18, 1999 47
2. Public Forum on Homelessness,
April 9, 1999 57
- 3 A Review of Strategies and Best Practices 65

“ Don’t forget the
people. ”

– Gary Trudell
former homeless person



SUMMARY

The first official count of the homeless in Edmonton found 836 homeless* persons in the city. Of these, 313 were absolute homeless – having no housing alternative – and 523 were sheltered homeless – living in emergency accommodations.

The Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness organized the count to provide a current ‘snapshot’ of the homeless population and to establish a baseline against which changes in the homeless population can be monitored. March 18, 1999 was selected as count day because it was a winter weekday. The community serving the homeless, as well as many volunteers, helped the Task Force partners conduct the count.

- About 70 families were counted, encompassing 112 children under the age of 18 and 91 caregivers. Among the families, 55% of the individuals were absolute homeless, while 45% stayed at shelters.
- A majority of the homeless were single – 633 of the 836 total. Among them, 32% were absolute homeless compared with 68% staying at shelters.
- From the perspective of gender, most of the homeless were male (73% or 530, not counting children in families) and 27% or 194 were female. Among both males and females, more individuals were sheltered than absolute homeless. There was a higher proportion of females than males in the number of absolute homeless.

* **Definition:**

The Task Force established the following definition of the homeless for its work.

- **Absolute homeless:** Individuals and families who are absolutely homeless (having no housing alternatives).
During the March 18 count, this was represented by people who, when asked on the street or within agencies like drop-in centres or the food bank, self-reported that they had no permanent place to reside. They may have ended up sleeping ‘on the street’ or in a stairwell that night, or alternatively they may have stayed with a friend or found an emergency shelter space.
- **Sheltered homeless:** Individuals and families who are the sheltered homeless (living in emergency accommodations or condemned housing and expected to be ‘on the street’ at the end of their stay).
During the March 18 count, this was represented by people who were registered to stay in approved emergency shelters.

Appendix 1

Count of Homeless Persons in Edmonton

conducted by the

Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness

March 18, 1999



- Slightly more than half (53%) were observed to be Caucasian followed by 42% Aboriginal and 5% “other.” Most Caucasians were sheltered whereas slightly more than half of all Aboriginals were absolute homeless.
- Age groups ranged from the majority being adults (561 or 67% between 19 and 54 years) to the next largest group being children (112 or 13%), 87 youth (10%) and 76 seniors (9%) age 55 years or over.
- A count of people turned away by providers and crisis services identified 113, while an additional 32 individuals were discharged or ready for discharge from facilities but without a permanent residence.

The Task Force recommends that the count be continued on a regular basis to monitor trends among the homeless.

BACKGROUND

The Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness determined in late 1998 that a count of homeless persons in Edmonton would be an important step in fulfilling its terms of reference. The count would serve two purposes:

1. Provide a current snapshot of the homeless population, its size and characteristics.
2. Provide a baseline against which changes in the homeless population can be monitored.

As with all of the task force’s work, the following definition of the homeless was used:

“1. Individuals and families who are absolutely homeless (having no housing alternatives) and

“2. Individuals and families who are the sheltered homeless (living in emergency accommodations or condemned housing and expected to be ‘on the street’ at the end of their stay).”

March 18, 1999 was count day — a winter weekday.

Organizing and implementing the count involved all task force partners: the City of Edmonton, Alberta Family and Social Services, Alberta Municipal Affairs and the community serving the homeless as well as many volunteers.

METHOD

Preparations for the formal count began with a trial run on February 18, 1999. The trial led to changes and a finalized methodology for the actual count.

The method included a direct and indirect count to ensure as much thoroughness and accuracy as possible.

The **direct count** involved:

- count of people in emergency shelter beds

The **indirect count** attempted to capture the invisible homeless through:

- **street and 'snowball' count**, asking people on the street:
 - if they have a permanent residence to return to that night
 - how many people they know who don't have a permanent residence on that night
- **agency count**, asking people at agencies (such as the food bank and drop-in centres) if they have a permanent residence for that night
- **turnaway count** of people turned away by providers and crisis services because no appropriate housing was available
- **discharge count** of people either discharged or ready for discharge from facilities but with no permanent residence to go to

Demographics gathered during the count included gender, observed race and age. Family status (whether single or a family) was also documented; number of caregivers, single or multi-caregiver, and number of children were captured for families.

Participants faxed the results of their counts, documented on two forms, to a central number the next day.

The 'snowball' count is not reflected in the count results because of its unreliability. However, a high percentage of interviewed people indicated they knew many other homeless people.

The Task Force acknowledges that the count has inherent limitations and notes it is a point-in-time estimate. The data could be an under-representation of the actual number of homeless persons in Edmonton. For example, the count may not have included those who stayed with friends or family on the day of the count, and did not include people living in condemned housing. For safety reasons, on the advice of the Edmonton Police Service, condemned housing properties were not accessed for the count. At the same time, some people could have been counted twice. Nevertheless, as the first official count of the homeless in Edmonton, the Task Force sees it as an important step forward.

Implementation of the count relied on the cooperation and involvement of the community serving the homeless and a team of volunteers. The community was sub-divided into 15 groups, with a coordinator assigned to each:

- institutions (hospitals)
- inner-city agencies
- street
- shelters (adult and families)
- Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
- mental health homes and shelters
- adult group homes
- youth group homes

- youth shelters
- seniors facilities
- subsidized housing
- aboriginal agencies and housing
- malls
- food banks
- other miscellaneous crisis and assistance services

COUNT RESULTS

A total of 836 homeless persons were counted on March 18, 1999 in Edmonton: 313 absolute homeless (37 %) and 523 sheltered homeless (63 %). This includes singles as well as the adults and children within families.

| TOTAL HOMELESS | | |
|--------------------|------|------|
| | NO.* | %* |
| ABSOLUTE HOMELESS | 313 | 37% |
| SHELTERED HOMELESS | 523 | 63% |
| TOTAL HOMELESS | 836 | 100% |

* INCLUDES - SINGLES, ADULTS IN FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN FAMILIES

Family status

A majority of individuals counted were single. Among the single homeless, 202 (32%) were absolutely homeless compared with 431 (68%) who were staying at shelters.

| SINGLE HOMELESS | | |
|--------------------|------|------|
| | NO.* | %* |
| ABSOLUTE HOMELESS | 202 | 32% |
| SHELTERED HOMELESS | 431 | 68% |
| TOTAL HOMELESS | 633 | 100% |

* INCLUDES SINGLES WITHOUT CHILDREN

About 70 families were counted, encompassing 112 children under the age of 18 and 91 caregivers. Among families, 55% of the individuals were absolutely homeless, while 45% stayed at shelters. There were 61 children and 50 caregivers among the absolute

homeless; 51 children and 41 caregivers among the sheltered homeless families.

Families were almost equally divided between having one caregiver (48) or multi-caregivers (43). Among the absolute homeless, 24 families had one caregiver while approximately 13 had two-or-more caregivers. At shelters, three-quarters (24) of the families had one caregiver while about 8 had two-or-more caregivers. Caregivers included men, women and seniors.

| HOMELESS IN FAMILIES | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|-----|--------|----------|-----|-----|-------|------|
| | CAREGIVERS BY CATEGORY | | | CHILDREN | | | TOTAL | |
| | 2 OR MORE | % | SINGLE | % | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| ABSOLUTE HOMELESS | 26 | 13% | 24 | 12% | 61 | 30% | 111 | 55% |
| SHELTERED HOMELESS | 17 | 8% | 24 | 12% | 51 | 25% | 92 | 45% |
| TOTAL HOMELESS | 43 | 21% | 48 | 24% | 112 | 55% | 203 | 100% |

Gender

Three-quarters (73%) of the homeless were male, totalling 530 compared to 194 females. Sheltered males accounted for 50% of the total counted. Among both males and females, more individuals were sheltered than absolute homeless. In females, though, a higher proportion was absolute homeless; almost half of all women compared to about one-third of all males were absolute homeless.

| HOMELESS BY GENDER | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|-----|---------|-----|-------|------|
| | MALES | | FEMALES | | TOTAL | |
| | NO.* | %* | NO.* | %* | NO.* | &* |
| ABSOLUTE HOMELESS | 165 | 23% | 87 | 12% | 252 | 35% |
| SHELTERED HOMELESS | 365 | 50% | 107 | 15% | 472 | 65% |
| TOTAL HOMELESS | 530 | 73% | 194 | 27% | 724 | 100% |

* DOES NOT INCLUDE CHILDREN IN FAMILIES

Race

Through observations, only 5% of the homeless were not classified as being either Caucasian or Aboriginal. Caucasians formed the highest percentage (53%), while 42% were observed as Aboriginal. Most Caucasians were sheltered (301 compared to 84 absolute homeless), whereas slightly more than half of all Aboriginals were absolute homeless (164 compared to 143 sheltered).

Among the absolute homeless, the majority were Aboriginal (164) compared to 384% Caucasian. The opposite held for the sheltered homeless, with the majority (301) being Caucasian compared to 143 Aboriginal.

| HOMELESS BY OBSERVED RACE | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|-----|----------|-----|-------|----|-------|------|
| | CAUC.* | | ABORIG.* | | OTHER | | TOTAL | |
| | NO.* | &* | NO.* | &* | NO.* | &* | NO.* | &* |
| ABSOLUTE HOMELESS | 84 | 12% | 164 | 23% | 4 | 1% | 252 | 35% |
| SHELTERED HOMELESS | 301 | 42% | 143 | 20% | 28 | 4% | 472 | 65% |
| TOTAL HOMELESS | 385 | 53% | 307 | 42% | 32 | 5% | 724 | 100% |

* DOES NOT INCLUDE CHILDREN IN FAMILIES

Age

Adults between 19 and 54 years old were the predominant age group among the homeless, at 561 or 67%. The next largest group was children (112 at 13%), then youth 15 to 18 years (87 at 10%) and seniors (76 at 9%).

For children, the majority (61 of 112) were absolute homeless compared to 51 sheltered. Among all other age groups, a higher percentage were sheltered rather than absolute homeless. Among seniors, almost all (69 out of 76) were sheltered. Among adults, more than two-thirds (343 of 561) were sheltered. About two-thirds of counted youth were sheltered (60 of 87).

In both the absolute homeless and the sheltered homeless groups, about two-thirds of the individuals were adults. Children accounted for a higher proportion of the absolute homeless than the sheltered, whereas seniors were a higher proportion among the sheltered.

| HOMELESS BY AGE CATEGORY* | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | CHILDREN | | YOUTH | | ADULT | | SENIOR | | TOTAL | |
| | NO. | & | NO. | & | NO. | & | NO. | & | NO. | & |
| ABSOLUTE HOMELESS | 61 | 7% | 27 | 3% | 218 | 26% | 7 | 1% | 313 | 37% |
| SHELTERED HOMELESS | 51 | 6% | 60 | 7% | 343 | 41% | 69 | 8% | 523 | 63% |
| TOTAL HOMELESS | 112 | 13% | 87 | 10% | 561 | 67% | 76 | 9% | 836 | 100% |

* CHILDREN (IN FAMILIES). YOUTH = 15-18YRS. ADULT = 19 - 54 YRS. SENIOR = 55+ YRS.

Turnaways and Discharges

A tally was also taken of the number of people denied a bed because the facility was full or the client didn't meet entrance standards (by, for example, exhibiting violent behavior) and who declared having no home to return to. On count day, 113 individuals were turned away from housing providers (56%) and shelters (44%). Discharges totalled 32 people, including 91% from jails, hospitals or group homes and 9% from shelters. These people were not knowingly included in the absolute or sheltered homeless count.

| COUNT OF TURNAWAYS AND DISCHARGES | | | | |
|------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| | TURNAWAYS | | DISCHARGES | |
| | NO.* | %* | NO.* | %* |
| HOUSING PROVIDERS | 63 | 56% | | |
| JAILS/HOSP/GRP HOMES | | | 29 | 91% |
| SHELTERS | 50 | 44% | 3 | 9% |
| TOTAL | 113 | 100% | 32 | 100% |

* TURNAWAYS AND DISCHARGES DECLARING NO HOME TO RETURN TO

Shelter-by-shelter numbers: registered and turnaways

The number of homeless who were housed or turned away by each participating shelter on March 18 is outlined in the table below. Herb Jamieson Centre housed the highest number, at 158 (30%); George Spady Shelter turned away the highest number, at 15 (30%).

| REGISTERED AND TURNAWAYS FROM SHELTERS | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| SHELTER NAME: | AVAIL. SPACES | NO. REGSTRED | % OCCUP. | % OF TTL REGISTERED | NO. TRND. AWY | % OF TOTAL |
| HERB JAMIESON CTR. | 176 | 158 | 90% | 30% | 0 | 0% |
| W.E.A.C. | 62 | 61 | 98% | 12% | 0 | 0% |
| SALLY ANN. - MATS | 20 | 19 | 95% | 4% | 9 | 18% |
| GRGE SPADY - SHELTER | 62 | 88 | 142% | 17% | 15 | 30% |
| URBAN MANOR | 62 | 62 | 100% | 12% | 7 | 14% |
| WIN 1 | 20 | 19 | 95% | 4% | 14 | 28% |
| WIN 11 | 25 | 25 | 100% | 5% | 5 | 10% |
| LURANA SHELTER | 25 | 20 | 80% | 4% | 0 | 0% |
| SAFE HOUSE | 6 | 10 | 167% | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| PROT. SAFE HOUSE | 5 | 4 | 80% | 1% | 0 | 0% |
| S.F.I. HOTELS | ?? | 9 | ?? | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| INNER CITY YOUTH | 20 | 11 | 55% | 2% | 0 | 0% |
| YOUTH EMERG. SHLTR | 28 | 21 | 75% | 4% | 0 | 0% |
| YOUTH RECEIVING | ?? | 16 | ?? | 3% | 0 | 0% |
| TOTAL | 511 | 523 | 98% | 100% | 50 | 100% |

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Task Force recommends that the count be continued on a regular basis so trends can be monitored.

The recommended schedule for future counts is:

- late August 1999
- March and August 2000
- every second year thereafter

Experience from the March 18 count also led to recommendations for improvements in methodology and documentation. Two main areas for change are (1) lead time and (2) youth count. More lead time would greatly improve coordination and thoroughness. Changes to how the youth count is taken, by involving other agencies and exploring other options, would increase the representativeness of that data. More extensive involvement with the Edmonton Police Service and agencies within malls also needs to be explored.

In conjunction with improvements, the same process should be used as much as possible to ensure consistency of results.

THANKS TO THE COMMUNITY:

The Task Force thanks the many agencies and individuals who helped with the count.

SUMMARY

The Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness organized a public forum on April 9, 1999 as part of its information-gathering process. Twenty-one presenters spoke to the Task Force, representing a diverse sample of the people involved with homelessness – from homeless people to non-profit housing organizations to specific target group associations — and providing a wide range of perspectives. Seven additional papers were provided following the forum.

Presenters tended to focus on two things:

1. **Issues** involved with or contributing to homelessness.
2. **Solutions** that could reduce homelessness.

In the full day of presentations, speakers had 20 minutes each to present their views and answer questions from Task Force members. Many participants provided written documents to supplement their presentations. A list of participants is provided at the end of this report.

Four low-income groups were mentioned within a number of presentations as being particularly affected by housing issues:

- Aboriginals
- families with children
- mentally ill
- hard-to-house seniors

Within the diversity of participants, common themes emerged.

Issues influencing the homeless and affordable housing included:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of financial supports to help low-income people obtain affordable housing
- Lack of government commitment and the political will to focus on housing
- The need for more coordination among agencies and service departments
- Cultural and societal factors including racism and safety concerns

Proposed solutions could also be grouped into five main categories:

- The need for leadership from three levels of government primarily, then the community
- Capital funding for new developments and renovations, as well as funding at the support level; in particular, reinvestment of the City of Edmonton's saved \$1.3 million into housing
- Development of more assisted or affordable housing of all types
- Target-group specific solutions for Aboriginal, families with children, mentally ill and hard-to-house seniors
- Education to change deep-rooted prejudices and attitudes within society.

Appendix 2

Report on the Public Forum on Homelessness

Sponsored by

Edmonton Task Force
on Homelessness

April 9, 1999



ISSUES PRESENTED

Issues that contribute to or affect the homeless and affordable housing fell into five main categories:

- Housing
- Financial
- Government commitment
- Agency coordination
- Cultural/societal

HOUSING

Presenters who addressed this issue all agreed: lack of affordable housing is the root of the problem. Evidence of the lack comes through

- low vacancy rates
- long waiting lists
- 100% occupancy rates
- people living in shelters for extended periods.

Although speakers generally focused on long-term housing, their comments showed a lack of facilities at all levels – emergency shelters, group homes, crisis centres and social housing for example.

FINANCIAL

Financial supports do not adequately help people in need obtain affordable housing, speakers emphasized. Primary concerns included:

- inability to pay security (damage) deposits
- social assistance shelter payments that are too low to cover rent
- higher costs associated with Edmonton's economic revival
- lack of credit
- lack of awareness about eligibility for benefits
- persistent problems with poverty

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

Lack of the political will to make changes and focus on housing was mentioned in various ways. Many participants expressed concerns that policies within existing health care, social assistance and priority-setting processes at all levels of government do not adequately emphasize or support housing. Examples included:

- City of Edmonton's channeling of \$1.3 million savings from housing into general revenue rather than housing
- shift from institutions to community care without adequate preparation and supports provided
- inadequate services to help the mentally ill

AGENCY COORDINATION

A few speakers highlighted the inefficiencies that currently exist within the existing public housing system and among Aboriginal organizations. They expressed concern about the lack of coordination among agencies and associated lack of long-range planning. Lack of coordination among service departments that deal with the poor, unemployed and homeless also was cited.

CULTURAL/SOCIETAL

Presenters often mentioned cultural and societal factors that contribute to or exacerbate homelessness, including:

- racism and discrimination against Aboriginals
- “not in my neighborhood” attitudes toward potential solutions
- attitudes toward people who look or act differently, often affecting the mentally ill
- safety concerns in inner-city neighborhoods
- lack of appreciation for cultural differences, such as Aboriginal extended families

SOLUTIONS PROPOSED

Presenters suggested many solutions to the issues surrounding homelessness. Consistently, the emphasis was on long-term solutions as opposed to short-term “quick” fixes.

Proposed solutions can be grouped into five main categories:

- Leadership
- Funding
- Housing
- Specific groups
- Societal/cultural

LEADERSHIP

Many presenters emphasized the need for leadership as an essential first step. From their comments, leadership could be interpreted as being necessary at many levels – from governments, agencies and community.

The highest level of leadership was seen to be needed from government. No single level of government was pinpointed as being the best to lead any efforts. Rather, participants urged all three levels – federal, provincial and municipal – to get involved, work together and make housing a priority.

A multi-dimensional approach to leadership was recommended. Formation of a group including the community and multi-levels of government was envisioned; names suggested included the Edmonton Housing Task Force or Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing. Such a group could build on the successful organization used when housing funding was provided years ago, with perhaps some additional representation. Edmonton's Safer Cities process – involving government, community and business — was also cited as an effective model.

Adequate funding by all levels of government was seen as a tangible sign of leadership; policies and programs that assist the poor, unemployed and homeless (such as damage deposit payments or increased shelter payments) would be interpreted the same way.

Speakers who addressed the issue suggested that business could not take a lead on housing. Rather, they suggested that after adequate funding is provided by government, then the business community could get involved through further financial assistance and involvement in implementing housing projects.

Partnerships and collaboration were seen to be essential at all levels. Coordination among agencies and programs that serve the homeless or poor would lead to greater efficiency and improved service. The potential for mergers or partnerships among agencies serving the homeless and Aboriginals was suggested.

FUNDING

Presenters emphasized that adequate funding and financial programs are needed along with leadership if any real improvements for the homeless are to occur.

Capital funding was seen as the first priority, for developing new or renovating existing buildings. The senior level of government (federal) needs to provide capital funds, speakers agreed. A speaker also recommended that all three government levels increase their spending on housing by 1%.

Re-investment toward low-cost housing of the City of Edmonton's \$1.3 million saving from social housing was urged many times. Besides providing funding, this would also be seen as a sign of leadership, speakers implied.

A Housing Trust Fund model – used elsewhere in Canada and recently started in Edmonton – was mentioned and recommended by a few speakers. Such a fund, involving government, business and community, could provide a pool of capital that would ensure predictable sustainable funding to meet housing needs.

Government needs to help the housing problem by providing money, not getting involved in administration, a speaker noted.

Presenters made other specific recommendations related to funding at a support level:

- Raise shelter allowance levels to cover costs of rent.
- Cover damage deposits for people on social assistance.
- Provide a subsidy for people paying more than 35% of their incomes toward rent; subsidy would be for 90% of the difference.
- Reinstate tax credits for renters (particularly for the working poor and homeless).
- Make low-cost homes available to social service recipients, by allowing their incomes to qualify for mortgages.
- Increase the lodge assistance program to make the Provincial “per occupied unit grant” provided to the Greater Edmonton Foundation, equivalent to that received by other Senior’s Lodge Foundations.

HOUSING

With adequate funding and leadership provided, development of more public housing should be possible, speakers asserted. They favored the provision of more public housing, recognizing that private developers will not fill the need.

One speaker suggested that a realistic start would be to add about 500 units for people with the highest need and lowest incomes. Housing of all types seemed to be required.

Specific suggestions included:

- Using vacant buildings (such as former Charles Camsell and General hospitals or vacant federal buildings)
- Converting vacant or under-used seniors’ housing into low-cost housing
- Building more group homes and halfway houses for the Aboriginal community
- Developing low-cost housing for the poor and working poor

Representatives of various current housing providers indicated they had an ability to manage more housing if given financial assistance to develop it. A speaker also noted that other initiatives already underway, but not represented, require support.

SPECIFIC GROUPS

Suggestions that related to specific groups also were made during the public forum. In addition to the global recommendations already outlined in this report, some of the comments relating to specific target groups, both directly and indirectly relating to housing, included:

Aboriginal:

- Develop more transitional housing, shelters, family and student housing.
- Be sensitive to unique needs relating to extended families, students, transient population
- Develop a women’s shelter.
- Develop two and three-bedroom units as permanent housing, not an emergency program.
- Pay attention to the need for student housing.

Families with children:

- Provide safe affordable housing.

Mental health:

- Improve community care; people shouldn't be released into the community without adequate plans and supports being available.
- Develop an outreach team of mental health professionals.
- Increase housing for discharged people able to go into supported living environments.
- Provide more group homes and half-way houses.
- Institute mandatory treatment, through community treatment orders, to help stop the 'revolving door syndrome'.
- Improve communication and coordination among health care and assisting professionals.

Hard-to-house seniors:

- Provide lodge care that really works (including health care).

SOCIETAL/CULTURAL

Problems will continue until some of the deep-rooted prejudices and attitudes within society are addressed., many speakers emphasized. They called on government to:

- Provide more education to encourage people to open their minds and change their attitudes about the mentally ill or Aboriginals.
- Educate people about housing and social needs in the community.
- Educate people against racism and discrimination.
- Involve people who are affected by policies in setting the policies.

PUBLIC FORUM PARTICIPANTS

Agency Represented

Presenter

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Edmonton Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee | Valerie Kaufman, Assistant Executive Director |
| 2 | Excel Resources Society | Dr. Gerry Raymond, President John McGee, Chairman |
| 3 | Poverty in Action/Edmonton Social Planning Council | Lawrence Loyek |
| 4 | Edmonton Social Planning Council | Brian Bechtel, Executive Director |
| 5 | On behalf of several homeless | Edil Pirbhai |
| 6 | Quality of Life Commission | Frank Manzara, Chairman Don Mayne, Volunteer |
| 7 | Edmonton Community Foundation | Christopher Smith |
| 8 | Edmonton City-Centre Church Corporation | Martin Garber-Conrad, Executive Director |
| 9 | Alberta Mental Health Board | Richard Welch, Manager, Community Rehabilitation Services |
| 10 | Boyle Street Community Service (Housing Registry) | Janet Trottier, Social Practicum Student |
| 11 | Human Resources Canada | Monica Philips-Beck, Programs Outreach Officer |
| 12 | Inner-City Mission | Sedrick Vassell, Pastor |
| 13 | Schizophrenia Society | Sharon Springer, Executive Director |
| 14 | Landlord | Harry Satdeo |
| 15 | Has been homeless | Gary Trudell |
| 16 | Amisk Housing Association | Geordy Saulteaux, Treasurer |
| 17 | Edmonton Housing Trust Fund | Debbie Saidman, Executive Director |
| 18 | Poverty in Action | Deanna Shorten |
| 19 | Edmonton Inner-City Housing | Betty Farrell, Board Member Mary Amerongen, Project Manager |
| 20 | Metis Urban Housing | Paul Sinclair, President of the Board of Directors |
| 21 | Operation Friendship | Heidie Velluw, Community Liaison Coordinator |

Written submissions only:

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 22 | Inner-City Volunteer | Gloria Sawchuck |
| 23 | Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing | Sub-group |
| 24 | Metis Regional Council Zone IV | Stephen Montgomery |
| 25 | Inner City Pastoral Ministry | Reverend Faith Brace |
| 26 | Central Edmonton Community Land Trust | Emil van der Poorten, President |
| 27 | The George Spady Centre | Lorette Garrick, Executive Director |
| 28 | Joseph Whatman | |

TASK FORCE REPRESENTATIVES TO THE FORUM

Gene Zwozdesky, MLA, Co-Chair

Jim Taylor, Councillor, Co-Chair

Lynn Hannley, Executive Director, The Communitas Group

Norm Palmer, Staff Supervisor, Urban Manor Housing Society

Lindsay Cherney, Executive Director, Urban Development Institute

Don Moulds, Senior Advisor - Assisted Housing, Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation

Ronald Odynski, Q.C., Managing Partner, Ogilvie and Company

Dennis Freeman, Director, Community Services, City of Edmonton

Gary Gordon, Manager, Housing Programs Policy and Research, Housing and Consumer Affairs Division, Alberta Municipal Affairs

Ken Gurski, Manager, Alberta Job Corps - Edmonton, Alberta Family and Social Services

Rob Martin, Regional Director, Housing and Consumer Affairs, North Field Services, Alberta Municipal Affairs

Appendix 3

Summary Report on Homelessness: A Review of Strategies and Best Practices

Prepared by

Converge Consulting Group

for the Edmonton Task Force
on Homelessness

May, 1999

*More detailed reports from the focus groups and best practices review are available upon request from:
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