

Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports: 2011 – 2015

Executive Summary

Introduction

Housing is a foundation for individual and family safety, security and stability. While the Edmonton area is widely regarded as one of the most livable and affordable metropolitan regions in the country, thousands of people in Edmonton and other municipalities in the region struggle to find and keep adequate, affordable housing. It is estimated that there are approximately 47,000 households in the Edmonton area that are paying too much for their housing relative to their incomes or living in housing that is not suitable for their needs or in need of major repairs. The shortage of affordable housing in the Edmonton area not only places considerable stress on many households, it also detracts from the quality of life the region offers and constrains the region's competitiveness in attracting people to support its growing economy.

A portion of those in the community facing challenges finding and keeping suitable, affordable housing are homeless. Although considerable progress has been made in reducing the incidence of homelessness in Edmonton in recent years, there are still many in the community without homes. The most recent homeless count in Edmonton conducted in Fall 2010 identified 2,421 homeless individuals. Although the decline of 600 from the homeless count two years earlier is worthy of celebration, the community is committed to drive this number down further. Both *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, the Government of Alberta's ten year plan to end homelessness and *A Place to Call Home*, Edmonton's ten year plan to end homelessness, have the goal of ending homelessness by 2019.

There is a strong tradition of community-based planning around issues of affordable housing and homelessness in Edmonton and the community is recognized for its leadership in collaborative action on these issues. The Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports: 2011-2015 is the third community plan to be developed by the community over the past decade. However, it is the first community plan to address housing and support needs in the broader Edmonton area, which includes not only the City of Edmonton, but also the other municipalities in the region.

A Plan to Address Priority Housing and Support Needs in the Edmonton Area

The population of the Edmonton area is growing. It is forecasted that by 2015 the region's population will be approximately 1,236,500, about 77,800 more than today. There are also some important shifts occurring in the region's demographics that affect housing and support needs in the community. The number of residents who are seniors is increasing, Aboriginal people are moving to the community in increasing numbers, and the community's immigrant population and cultural diversity are increasing.

The policy environment for housing and supports in the community has also shifted. The community has embraced the housing first approach to ending homelessness, with a focus on the rapid movement of homeless individuals and families into permanent housing, and then providing them with the supports they need to restore their stability and maintain their housing.

Ensuring our growing and diverse community has suitable, affordable housing and supports for all residents is complex. It requires strong

commitment and focused collaborative action on the part of governments, housing providers, management bodies, community organizations, businesses, and citizens.

The Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports: 2011-2015 outlines what the community intends to do to respond to priority housing and support needs in the Edmonton area for the next five years and strengthen the information base upon which funding, implementation and future planning decisions are made.

This plan is the product of a very collaborative, community-driven process. Its development was guided by a Community Plan Committee made up of representatives of a diverse group of public, non-profit, industry and community organizations, and informed by an extensive community consultation process that engaged over 350 people with a broad range of perspectives.

The vision guiding the development of this plan is that community partners work together so every person in the Edmonton area has the opportunity to live in a home that is:

- affordable;
- safe;
- adequate and suitable to their needs; and,
- situated in an area with access to supports that allow them to stay in their home and enjoy a good quality of life.

The Community Plan Committee is confident that through focused, collaborative action, this vision will become a reality.

The adoption of the housing first approach to ending homelessness in the community has fundamentally shifted how housing and

support needs are viewed and delivered in the community. To reflect this shift and frame the analysis done to support the development of this plan, a new housing and support framework has been developed. The framework distinguishes between non-market housing (i.e., housing constructed and/or operated with some financial subsidization) and market housing (i.e., housing constructed and/or operated with no financial subsidization). Within the non-market housing category, there is further categorization by expected length of tenure, type of housing and associated supports.

The analysis of current and future housing and support needs in the community identified the following gaps requiring action over the next five years. Descriptions of the different housing and support categories can be found in the glossary in Appendix A.

Housing and Support Category	Current Gap	Forecasted Gap
Short Term Accommodation	1,300	1,300
Permanent Supportive Housing	2,100	1,150
Supported Housing	3,000	2,000
Affordable Housing	19,000+	22,000

All of these gaps are of concern, and all call for collaborative action from the community, with funding support from both the provincial and federal governments.

Through the consultation process and the Community Plan Committee's work, five factors were identified as foundations for the success of this plan. These are:

- Collaboration, dialogue, and engagement;
- Enhanced strength of sector and use of resources;
- Effective monitoring and evaluation;
- Community and region-wide inclusion; and,
- Harm reduction and client choice.

This plan has five key areas of focus, and establishes goals for each. Implementation strategies to guide the community in taking action to achieve the plan's goals are outlined in Section 4.2.

FOCUS AREA: HOUSING SUPPLY

Goals:

1. Increase opportunities for home-ownership and equity building for low-income families
2. Increase the supply of market and non-market rental units that are suitable, adequate, accessible, and affordable
3. Restore and adapt the existing stock of non-market housing to make facilities and units suitable, adequate, and accessible
4. Acquire and commit land for future non-market housing developments
5. Develop short-term and flexible approaches to increase the affordability of housing for people in need
6. Develop a balanced approach for both building new units, as well as buying existing stock, in order to meet the overall needs of those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness

7. Engage neighbourhoods and communities in achieving positive outcomes for housing and service delivery across the region
8. Mobilize underutilized non-market housing units to address system gaps

FOCUS AREA: SHORT-TERM AND PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Goals:

1. Create more interim and permanent supportive housing units for those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness
2. Address the needs of vulnerable populations that do not have access to transitional, interim, or permanent supportive housing
3. Increase housing and culturally appropriate support services for Edmonton's increasing Aboriginal population
4. Collaborate with government bodies to ensure regulatory measures do not prevent the creation of further permanent supportive housing

FOCUS AREA: SUPPORT SERVICES

Goals:

1. Increase accessibility of information, resources, and access points for housing and support services
2. Develop a coordinated approach to appropriately match people to the range of housing and support services available in the region
3. Improve access to treatment, continuing care, and managed transition from institutional care
4. Increase housing and culturally appropriate support services for Edmonton's increasing Aboriginal population.

FOCUS AREA: PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Goals:

1. Develop early intervention services to prevent homelessness or harm resulting from crises or emergency situations
2. Enhance and coordinate outreach programs to connect people to housing and support services
3. Support and implement initiatives that prevent homelessness and/or remove barriers to accessing housing.
4. Enhance rapid exit and re-housing programs to improve timeliness of access to housing and support services

FOCUS AREA: CAPACITY BUILDING AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Goals:

1. Increase the capacity of the non-profit sector to develop and/or maintain non-market housing units and deliver a range of support services for people
2. Increase systems-level planning and information exchange that includes government, the non-profit sector, and the private sector
3. Conduct research and data analysis to determine the best practices for intervention and prevention responses for people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.
4. Promote knowledge sharing and evidence-based decision-making across the housing sector

This Plan will play an important role in supporting and complementing many municipal, regional, provincial, and federal plans, initiatives, and policy objectives.

The development of this plan, while a significant accomplishment, is only a beginning. We will continue to collaborate in developing detailed plans for accomplishing the Plan's ambitious goals. We will also be vigilant about monitoring our progress toward achieving these goals.

This Plan will be adjusted as needed if circumstances change or new information becomes available to ensure we are responding appropriately to housing and support needs in our community over the next five years.