

# **Forum Proceedings: Creating Housing Choice in Metro Vancouver**

**October 23, 2008  
Firefighters Club – Banquet and Conference Center  
6515 Bonsor Avenue, Burnaby BC**

**Co-hosted by:  
Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy and  
Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness**



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BC Housing, the City of New Westminster, the City of Surrey, the City of Vancouver and the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance.



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**OTHER PARTNERS -** Other forum partners provided in-kind contributions:

BC Non-Profit Housing Association, James Pratt Consulting, Lookout Emergency Aid Society, and Shelter Net BC.



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Karen O'Shannacery, Lookout Emergency Aid Society  
Karen Hemmingson, Senior Manager, Research and Corporate Planning, BC Housing,  
Marg Gordon, CEO, BC Apartment Owners and Managers Assoc  
Peter Fedos, OPTIONS Services to Community  
Judy Graves, City of Vancouver  
Martha Lewis, Executive Director, TRAC Tenants Resource Advisory Center

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Jonathan Bird, City in Focus  
Michael Anhorn, BC Housing  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (GVSS), in partnership with the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH), co-hosted a dialogue primarily focused on the future role of the emergency shelter sector in the housing continuum. This forum was divided into three, one day events: May 1 and May 2, 2008 and October 23, 2008. (*For proceedings of the May dialogues, see website: [metrovancover.org/planning/homelessness](http://metrovancover.org/planning/homelessness)*).

### **Intention**

The Creating Housing Choice forum set out to develop a shared sense of how the various parts of our changing housing continuum could work together more effectively to help eliminate and prevent homelessness. Providers of shelter and transitional, supportive, and affordable housing, along with providers of support services that help people obtain and maintain housing (e.g. addictions, mental health, income assistance, job skills and life skills training) participated. Service users and members of the GVSS and RSCH also participated. *A list of participants is attached as Appendix 2.*

The results of the May discussion produced five clear themes for discussion at the October 23 event:

1. Keeping the conversation going
2. Investment in transitional, supportive, and affordable housing
3. Building capabilities on the front line
4. Connecting the continuum of shelter, housing and support services
5. Preventing evictions.

### **Context**

Creating Housing Choice was co-designed by the Greater GVSS and the RSCH with the intention to build on and support related initiatives that are underway or were completed in recent years. These include:

- ◇ Revamping of the Emergency Shelter Program in BC, moving to 24-hour, full service operations
- ◇ Presentations and discussion of the “Housing First” approach first developed in the U.K. and the U.S.
- ◇ *3 Ways to Home* - Regional Homelessness Plan.
- ◇ Metro Vancouver Homeless Count (2008 & 2005)
- ◇ *2008-2010 Service Plan & Including Homeless Voices*
- ◇ Homelessness Action Week
- ◇ *Homeless Action Plan* - City of Vancouver  
[www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/housing/pdf/hap05jun.pdf](http://www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/housing/pdf/hap05jun.pdf)

*Additional resources and links are attached as Appendix 3.*

## OPENING

**Facilitator:** James Pratt

**Number attending:** 100 including 13 that have at some time in their lives been without a home or no fixed address.

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### 1. Opening prayer: Danny Charles, Sto:lo Nation

- *Commented on the high rate of Aboriginal poverty, homelessness, education, and addictions.*
- *Offered prayers for all people suffering because of these issues.*
- *Be thankful and grateful for the food and water we have today and to pray for those around the world without.*
- *Blessings and guidance for all attending today and the good work done by all and to be done by all.*

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### 2. Session Overview – James Pratt

James outlined the agenda for the day, the presenters, the goals of the small group discussions, and the final presentations from the small groups for consensus on action.

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### 3. Karen O'Shannacery - Summary of May Forum results

Outlined the speakers and panel from the May event; the action plan and outcomes that created the five themes for this follow-up forum:

1. Investment in transitional, supportive, and affordable housing.
  2. Building capabilities on the front line.
  3. Connecting the continuum of shelter, housing, and support services.
  4. Preventing Eviction.
  5. Keeping the conversation going across sectors and stakeholder groups.
- Shared goal is to eliminate and prevent homelessness with actions based on the *3 Ways to Home* Regional Homelessness Plan and the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy 2008-2010 Service Plan.
  - Outcomes: wanted an understanding of the direction of the province and to recognise local systems, accessing housing and services at the level that the clients were willing to accept and utilize.
  - Need to clarify the future role of the emergency shelters in meeting the needs of the homeless.
  - Recent changes to the shelter program include the shift of responsibility to BC Housing, shelters open 24/7, and examination of housing first models especially from the USA.
  - Shelters are taking on a greater part in the role of prevention by linking clients to housing and other services in order to break they cycle.
  - Need to increase awareness of the variety of shelter and to strengthen the relationships among all the service providers.

## 4. PRESENTATIONS

### 4.1 Investment in transitional, supportive and affordable housing: by government

**Karen Hemmingson, Senior Manager, Research and Corporate Planning, BC Housing**  
(power point available upon request)

- BC Housing is guided by the Housing Matters BC, provincial housing strategy:
  1. Homeless have access to stable housing with integrated support services
  2. Most vulnerable receive priority for assistance
  3. Aboriginal housing needs are addressed
  4. Low-income households have improved access to affordable rental housing
- The provincial government is spending 70% more on housing and shelters than 5 years ago.
- Responding to the trends such as the change from episodic homelessness to long term and recurring homelessness and are dealing with a broad range of clients with special needs and supports.
- Provincial Homelessness Initiative, the Aboriginal Housing Initiative, Tenant Supports, Local Government Partnerships, and protecting existing housing stock.
  - ◇ Province purchased 19 Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels at risk of redevelopment
  - ◇ 1,122 units purchased for \$69M
  - ◇ Important low-income housing stock
  - ◇ Upgraded for safety and security
  - ◇ Non-profits to operate and provide support services
- Programs and partnerships are becoming more complex.
- Strategic partnerships are key to successful initiatives and projects.

### 4.2 Investment in transitional, supportive and affordable housing: by private sector

**Marg Gordon, CEO, BC Apartment Owners and Managers Association**  
(Power point available upon request)

Outlined the BC Apartment Owners and Managers Association history and function:

- ◇ Not for profit association established in 1964
- ◇ Member services based. Serves all rental property owners and managers throughout BC, whether public or private, urban or rural, owners of secondary suites, house(s) or managers of several hundred units (1,200 landlords representing over 100,000 rental units province-wide). Also provides lobbying and advocacy on behalf of owners and tenants.
- ◇ Dedicated to providing services to help members succeed as rental owners.
- ◇ Volunteer board of 16 directors who collectively have 200 years of experience in the rental housing industry.

- Very exciting to see the changes over the years and the number of partnerships with all stakeholder groups including government.
- Issues: complexity in zoning and permitting and taxes for rental accommodations; conversion and demolition policies can also be prohibitive to building rental housing. If an owner can't demolish and build at higher density or increase units then new units are not being built.
- 40% of condos built are rented out. (*Comments from audience: that's not what's being seen on the ground and certainly not at affordable rents*).
- Many condos have been bought but left empty because of the high housing value market but now that housing costs are starting to move down, many are looking to rent again. (*Comments from audience: rent again at a high rent and that some will rent but only for a short time because they're planning on selling quickly*)
- One upcoming lobbying challenge is to eliminate the restrictions on renting in condo buildings.
- Large tax barrier to rental property; not eligible for rollover tax deferral and no incentive to sell (which gets in the way of redevelopment at higher densities).
- CMHC 2007 report – required permits and other building government imposed costs can add costs of \$40,000 to \$50,000 per rental unit.

- **Barriers to rental housing supplies:**

Over the last 35 years tax changes have made investing in rental housing unattractive relative to other investments, and complex and burdensome planning and approval processes and conversion and demolition policies that prevent construction of newer and better rental housing.

**Taxes for multi-residential housing:**

The inability to defer the tax burden on the sale and reinvestment in rental real estate creates numerous economic problems and inequities. BCAOMA proposes that the Canadian tax system be changed to allow rental property owners to defer the tax on the sale of a property if the proceeds of a sale are reinvested in a replacement property within 12 months of the sale. If coupled with more direct financial assistance to low-income tenants, such tax reforms would improve the affordability and availability of rental housing.

**Planning process:**

The land development process has become increasingly complex and burdensome, which leads to two consequences: less housing and higher prices. A comprehensive detailed analysis is needed to better understand the impact of the planning and approvals process on housing costs.

- **Conclusion:**

- ◇ Remove the government imposed costs and regulations that discourage investment in housing supply;
- ◇ Create more opportunities for low-income households to access rent supplements or housing allowances;
- ◇ Improve rental housing affordability through tax fairness;
- ◇ Encourage growth of the entire spectrum of the housing market.

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### **4.3 Building Capabilities on the Front Line**

#### **Peter Fedos, Program Manager, OPTIONS Services to Community**

*(power point available upon request)*

*It is important to continue to strengthen the capacity of the shelter sector to assist people in the process of stabilizing their housing*

- Shelter, street outreach and related services operate with limited resources for staff training and professional development and it is crucial to professionalize the field
- We have been too busy in the doing of our practice to document our field of practice.
- Concepts of partnership and collaboration are now critical themes in our field and there is a need to define purposes, tasks and values that distinguish our field
- Forums help to exchange knowledge
- Develop ‘communities of practice’ with other groups and ourselves to deepen our knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis and to be able to transfer our learning with each other and across sectors.
- Training has an end result: Professional development is continuous and evolving
- Talk with Universities about credentialing for this field of practice and work on developing some form of certificate program.
- Workers deal with a myriad of issues: addictions, mental health, criminology, psychology, literacy, education, employment, social work, housing, poverty, social justice, health, counselling.
- Not documenting enough and pulling together all the mentors; collective knowledge; need to create our own identity to make it a professional field of work; credentials and certification. Need for documented best practices and standards in the field.
- Many of the service providers that worked so hard over the last 20-30 years are going to be retiring soon and we need to mine their experience to move forward.
- Youth worker to social worker; now have a certification for a youth worker and need to make sure that our front line workers get the same recognition.

### **4.4 Connecting the continuum of shelter, housing and supports**

#### **Judy Graves, Coordinator, Tenant Assistance Program, City of Vancouver**

- Those who have been in the business for 30 to 40 years have seen that Housing First works but it’s only in the last few years that others seem to have accepted this fact and because the USA is promoting it, it seems as something new. We have some examples to be proud of:
  - ◇ Low barrier shelters created 35 years ago - Lookout was the first of these. The design for the Alexander St. Lookout Shelter is the model now for shelters built all over the Province.
  - ◇ The front line workers used research to discover that 67 individuals in Vancouver, the hard to house, were eating up the most of emergency services and the first hard to house permanent housing - Cordova House - was built to house them: addictions, mental health issues and all. It was considered very radical for the times.
  - ◇ Veterans Memorial Manor – essentially those that were traumatized by the wars and were alcoholic but were allowed to continue drinking; no requirement that they must

- quit. Again, this was considered very radical and knowledge of their existence was kept very low key.
- ◇ Portland Hotel was then built as a model for the multi-diagnosed, very hard to house.
  - “House the worst first” - if you house the best first you end up never getting around to the worst, and the most vulnerable are in the streets forever.
  - Would like to see this history written and promoted as BC has the model and has been, and is, doing it better. What we have is radical compared to anything we see anywhere in the world: we just haven’t had the financial backing and number of housing units to meet the need.
  - Let’s start singing our own praises; we need to know and promote how exciting our work is. People from other cities and the US should be coming to Vancouver to see what we have done - rather than us looking to other cities and countries for solutions.

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#### 4.5 Preventing eviction

**Martha Lewis, ED and Supervising Lawyer, TRAC Tenant Resource & Advisory Center**  
(power point available upon request)

**There are 3 main reasons for eviction:**

- 1) Non payment of rent;
- 2) Behaviour; and
- 3) Evictions for renovations, which is a fairly new occurrence.
  - ◇ Non-payment of rent is reason for great majority of evictions. This is an economic issue and we are concerned about what will happen in current economy as people are laid off. Some landlords have capitalized on lack of knowledge or capacity of tenants, especially seniors or those with mental incapacities. These tenants are so afraid of losing their housing that they sign agreements for greater than mandated rent increase. Can’t blame landlords for wanting to make a profit but the law is there to protect tenants from being taken advantage of. Governments need to take more responsibility such as non-market housing, rent banks, rent supplements, realistic level of shelter allowance for people receiving benefits.
  - ◇ Behaviour is next most common but do not see this often. Difficulty is sometimes peoples with mental health challenges, and problem is where do these people end up living? On the street? In shelters? Need government to help provide appropriate housing with supports. Sometimes due to health of aging tenants. People who have become disabled in some way, staying in hospital beds because not enough supportive housing for them to move into.
  - ◇ Evictions for renovations are rare and are a recent occurrence. New landlords who paid too much for a building and need to get higher-paying tenants in order to get timely return on their investment. Any landlords who wanted to take advantage of tight rental market. Need for governments to encourage increase in rental stock by legalizing secondary suites, rate-of-change bylaws, etc.
  - ◇ Need to ensure tenant and landlord education and awareness as well as the general public and all levels of government.

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## **5. Breakout Group Recommendations**

Participants formed five groups: one for each theme of discussion. Each group had the benefit of a background paper that outlined the comments from the May forum, a summary of the issue, and a summary of actions that are currently being undertaken in BC or elsewhere to address that issue (see appendix 4).

### **Group A – Investment in Transitional, Supportive and Affordable (TSA) housing**

1. THAT a champion be identified to hold government accountable for creating the environment conducive to partnerships for the creation and financing of TSA housing (e.g. Mental Health Commission of Canada).
2. THAT the Government of Canada, in partnership with all other levels of government, develop, implement, and evaluate a National Strategy for TSA housing.
3. THAT BC Housing and partner organizations implementing ‘housing first’ strategies also develop integrated housing for clients - in a balanced manner - and ensure that existing tenants are not destabilized.
4. THAT there be one body to link all parties and to look at all the options/models for financing and creating TSA housing recommendations to all levels of government
5. THAT all levels of government improve partnerships and communication, including with stakeholders and among departments, to develop more TSA housing.
6. THAT all sectors work to explore, identify, and develop new models and options for financing and creating TSA housing, such as housing trusts, public-private partnerships, tax changes, and other incentives for investment;
7. THAT the federal government implement whatever strategies and policies are possible to support the development of TSA housing within their jurisdictions.
8. THAT the sector identify links between health and housing, and use this information to build public support for development of TSA housing.
9. THAT funding for housing and health should not be linked.

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### **Group B –Building Capabilities on the Front Line**

1. THAT GVSS develops training and professional development for front line staff in conjunction with funders and educational institutions.
2. THAT GVSS and BC Housing start creating capacity for communities of practice by establishing a leadership group to move this forward. Membership of this group could include: OPTIONS, City of Vancouver, RSCH, BC Housing, Lookout, Abbotsford Task Group, province, Catholic Charities.
3. GVSS to establish a subcommittee to move recommendations forward. Need mix of organizations such as well established plus new as well as diverse reps from the regional areas and sectors. Everyone has an opportunity to provide input into recommendations both from senior management and font line and client groups.

### **Group C – Connecting the Continuum of Shelter, Housing, and Support Services**

1. Co-location and share services
2. Reduce red-tape/barriers in accessing housing and services: (streamline application process/paperwork; ease policies, pets, accessibility, size of unit)
3. Identify bottlenecks and strategies to resolve them.
4. Increase coordination of services to prevent homelessness among those at risk and homeless who have recently been housed.
5. Continue to develop relationships between service providers on a project by project basis
6. Address gaps in housing and services for single mothers (eg second stage housing).

### **Group D – Preventing Eviction**

1. THAT the RSCH and FVHN engage BCNPHA, BCAOMA, TRAC and MHSD implement a public awareness campaign to landlords, tenants and the general public to know their rights and responsibilities and available resources.
  2. THAT Health Authorities, MHSD and mental health services support expansion of services related to maintenance of units and tenancy in non-profit and private rental housing in culturally appropriate ways. And, that these agencies consult with community groups to investigate models for service delivery including social enterprise models.
  3. THAT the MHSD and the RTO work with agencies and municipal partners to develop local information services (such as current model in DTES) to increase levels of service and reduce wait times and increase accessibility.
  4. THAT RSCH in conjunction with community groups research rent bank models and identify emerging local models and how they impact on preventing homelessness.
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### **Group E – Keeping the Conversation Going Across Sectors and Stakeholder Groups**

1. Solutions based approach.
2. Marrying business and humanitarian cases and messaging appropriately.
3. Multi-sectoral approach at two levels – policy and front line.

#### **How to engage?**

- Common goal – to end homelessness
- Messaging in new ways; creative messaging helps engage others
- Social marketing approach
- Build common understanding of different asses
- Frontline meetings across services, mutual referrals
- Cross sector committees
- Raise public awareness, engage the public
- Marrying business and humanitarian cases and messaging appropriately
- Articulate benefit for involvement for different groups
- Multi-sectoral approach at two levels – policy and front line

**Who needs to be at the table:**

**Policy**

First Nations government  
AHMA  
ShelterNet  
CFAA  
Police  
MHSD  
RTB

Mental health and addictions  
Corrections  
Attorney General  
BIA's and chambers of commerce  
Faith Communities  
Immigrant services  
Philanthropic organizations

**Front Line**

First Nations government  
Mental health and addictions  
Corrections – institutions and non-profits  
Casual labour  
Outreach  
Income Assistance  
Immigrant services

Police  
Health  
Education – school councilors  
Shelters  
Transition houses  
Faith Communities

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**7. Next steps, evaluation and closing**

The proceedings will be written up as well as an executive summary. As well, an Agenda for Action will be prepared and will be reviewed by the Forum Planning group and then sent out to the participants. It will be reviewed not only by RSCH and the GVSS but also by people who have experienced living with no fixed address, through the Homeless Voices process. It will also be reviewed by government representatives (those that attended the inter-government meeting in September). The final Proceedings and Agenda for Action documents will go out to all those invited, and will be posted on the RSCH and GVSS websites.

## APPENDIX 1: Flipchart Notes

### CREATING HOUSING CHOICE FORUM, OCTOBER 23, 2008 WORKGROUP NOTES FROM FLIPCHARTS

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#### **Group A – Investment in Transitional, Supportive, and Affordable Housing**

*TSA = Transition, Supportive and Affordable Housing)*

#### **Discussion of outcome statements from the May 2008 forum**

##### **Point 1 – “Shared Interest...housing and support services...”**

- How would someone ensure affordable rent? It would mean controlling the landlords. We don't have the power to 'ensure', but we need to take the responsibility.
- Define “Shared Interest” – does it mean “all citizens”; “we” as a society?
- Is this a vision statement?; regional issue; at-risk groups; doesn't necessarily mean social housing.
- Need to raise awareness to the homeless

##### **Point 2 - “...all levels of government...funding...federal strategy”**

- Disappointment that housing wasn't an issue in the recent federal election and needs to be a high priority for the municipal elections.
- There is a reluctance of government to act individually: they want the “others” to commit first.
- Fiscal/tax policies need to be included in discussion of solutions.
- Change to wording: should be a National strategy not just a Federal strategy (national is more indicative of partnerships between all levels of government for the good of the Nation, not just a federal program. Provinces and municipalities are now developing their own plans and would be better if those plans could be based on a National strategy.
- Affordable housing and homelessness don't seem to be linked in the eyes of the public.
- “Ensure” is too broad; “Funding” is specific. Have a broader description beyond funding. Having a link between health care and housing may generate more interest from the general public.
- No consistency within the levels of government (interdepartmental and across departments).
- A need for government to ensure that the funding can be provided vs direct funding.
- Government providing a social safety net is a Canadian view/history but the social funding is drying up. Need to draw from citizens, business, churches.
- Governments are offloading and expecting agencies to find other to pick up the balance.
- Need to develop new financing models; cross-sectoral
- Need a community ombudsman office; report to legislature, not a specific ministry. Liaise between all levels of government and community; unsure of what type of body; a public 'champion'.
- Have called for better cross government and inter-departmental communications before with little improvement.

- Municipalities and provinces have local strategies but federal is the responsible party and should have a strategy instead of piecemeal programs that communities can include in their planning.
- Link health and housing to increase public awareness and support; NOT to link the funding and the trend now is to split funding between housing and supports.

**Point 3 – “...housing choice...expand supply of TSA...” Not discussed**

**Point 4 – “...housing first...”**

- Timely to the current economic situation; the invisible homeless may become visible sooner rather than later.
- (There was a brief discussion on the definitions of Housing First).
- Need a roof over ones head before they can address problems.
- Focus on those most in need
- The homeless need to be offered options for housing and support as best meets those individuals needs.
- Consider implementing FEMA plans: treat it as the emergency that it is.
- Can't do housing first without ability to offer the full supports in place.
- Massive housing units (with supports) are not the best model; best are smaller, mixed client buildings.
- Provide tax breaks for developers for TSA housing in the large planned communities.
- Needs for pregnant inmates and addicted and pregnant.
- Need a balanced and integrated model.
- Don't destabilize existing tenants.

**Recommendations:**

1. THAT, a champion\* be identified to hold government accountable for creating the environment conducive to partnerships for the creation and financing of TSA housing (eg: Mental Health Commission of Canada).
2. THAT, the federal government, in partnership with all levels of government, develop, implement, and evaluate a National Strategy for TSA housing
3. THAT, (?), develop integrated housing for clients in a balanced manner when implementing housing first and to ensure that existing residents are not destabilized.
4. THAT there be one body to link all parties and to look at all the options/models for financing and creating TSA housing recommendations to all levels of government.
5. THAT all levels of government improve partnerships and communication, including inter-departmental, with stakeholders to develop more TSA housing.
6. THAT All Sectors work to explore, identify, and develop new models of financing, such as housing trusts, Public-private partnerships, tax changes, investment into TSA housing.
7. THAT the federal government implement whatever strategies and policies are possible to support the development of TSA housing within their jurisdictions.

8. THAT the sector should identify links to health and housing to build public support for development of TSA housing, but not to link the funding. (eg: social determinants of health, savings of health costs).
9. THAT funding for housing and health should not be linked.

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### **Group B –Building Capabilities on the Front Line**

- Lack of coverage for training
- Develop training (Identify needs)
- Gather, sort and prioritize skills that need to be shared
- How can we bring interested women into the field (recruitment and training)
- How do we retain workers? (burn-out, low pay, safe work sites)
- Identify good work
- How do we create a healthy environment
- Training needs for FAX etc. issued we face and don't know enough about
- Staff need to ask for the training they need
- What's the difference between training and professional development? We need to formalize and pass on knowledge
- Burnout can be prevented with adequate training and training can be used expeditiously for more than one program
- We don't formally recognize the skills we already have (we are the experts)
- No credibility with regards to front line worker skill level
- Need to remember not to re-invent knowledge when we have it
- Need respect from other professionals (need to be believed)
- Identify two kinds of training: basics and abilities (to work with other professionals)
- If we make inappropriate referrals we are damaging our credibility
- Having a board or other educational professional body could reduce the likelihood that front line workers are seen as the short comings of the system.
- "SW's??" may have been through the process of professionalization and the UK; we should look at that and make it BC specific.
- Training should be developed and provided by GVSS
- We need to be careful to avoid supplication and over-exhaustion of workers.
- Outreach is focused more on identifying problems, because long term follow-up may cause burnout and need to balance that with going the extra mile to ensure success.
- Networking and bringing services to clients is a piece of education that is meaningful for our clients and useful to front line workers
- Training should include the front line workers and other levels of the organization as trainers, facilitators etc.
- We need to develop certification/professional development
- We need financial resources to sustain an infrastructure
- Does unionization impact wages?

- We need to recognize the value of the work we do and reward it (will create gains in integrity)
- Does professionalism move us away from the idea of self sacrifice/volunteerism?
- Contracts for outreach need to specify what dollars are allotted to staff vs administration.

### **Possible Actions**

- Need to identify similar populations as lots of overlap with other groups, such as: mental health, hospital, addictions, city, advocacy groups, community services etc.
- GVSS to identify and invite interested providers to come together to create “communities of practice”. Need to discuss who wants to be involved; training needs, want to communicate with other professionals, lobby government, practice standards for populations being dealt with.
- GVSS taking on educational role with other groups; problem of finding and identification i.e. hospital social work dept and how outreach deals with homeless
- Presentations on how we help clients in commonality.
- Shelters always full and don’t need to advertise services, but beneficial to build relations with service providers.
- High workload – more funding needed and foster support i.e. RCMP will call with referrals and will in turn assist the outreach worker by dealing with clients such as taking statements in plain clothes etc to assist clients.
- Maple Ridge holds weekly meetings between MEIA, RCMP, shelter staff, outreach etc to discuss cases and manage needs.
- Bringing people to table to determine what kinds of learning are needed
- Funding to support this – BC Housing, Vancouver Foundation, Credit Unions – try to get a one year pilot.
- Need someone to facilitate/take leadership for this as service providers as they are always working off the side of the desk.
- One committee could deal with education training and community of practice
- Mentoring type of model can work both ways and have staff accompany workers to leave on front line.
- Internet – put information for distance training opportunities on website. Interactive chat type of tool that can be accessed by front line workers.
- DVDs with training modules
- Use regular staff meetings to introduce regular training
- ShelterNet may be viable option for delivery
- Define professional standards for shelter workers in road to establishing some certification program
- Online teaching through webinars

### **Recommendations:**

1. THAT GVSS develops training and professional development for front line staff in conjunction with funders and educational institutions.
2. THAT GVSS and BC Housing start creating capacity for communities of practice by establishing a leadership group to move this forward. Membership of this group could

include: OPTIONS, City of Vancouver, RSCH, BC Housing, Lookout, Abbotsford Task Group, province, Catholic Charities.

3. GVSS to establish a subcommittee to move recommendations forward. Need mix of organizations such as well established plus new as well as diverse reps from the regional areas and sectors. Everyone has an opportunity to provide input into recommendations both from senior management and front line and client groups.

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### **Group C – Connecting the Continuum of Shelter, Housing and Support Services**

- Bringing people together – F.L.A.W. – Front Line Advocacy Workers through End Legislative Poverty.
- Fraser Valley Housing Network, sub-regional task forces
- GVSS – shelter providers, funders, coordinators to meet monthly
- Homeless services/coalition tables, Urban Core, various agencies discuss common issues.
- Service provider inter-agency network
- Downtown South neighbourhood, SPIN, Vancouver Area Network of Women’s Service Providers
- BCNPHA represents non-profit housing providers.
- How can we better work together to provide a service? What is the next step?
- Need better coordination within/across service agencies
- Better coordination with existing resources
- Extending service hours
- Shelters need more follow-up with clients and outreach workers.
- Make courses available for non-profits/outreach workers
- Moving people from shelters in a coordinated way and appropriate types of housing:
- BC Housing- Prioritize SIL
- Intake Worker- Trust outreach worker
- Agencies- Post vacancies
- Providing services where people are comfortable
- Shelters co-locating health services, funders, government agencies, mental health, income assistance; important for hard to house, youth
- HUB model
- Provide homeless connect event on a more regular basis (quarterly or monthly) increase accessibility
- Increased accessibility
- Flexible timing to access services – dusk to dawn
- Multiple media for access – phone, email, in-person
- More homeless connect events
- Sharing services across agencies
- Accessibility to skill building; build on the clients abilities

- Encourage secondment across service providers/agencies
- Focus on relationships with individual rather than job title/agency
- Increase personal contacts with related services for referral purposes
- Look at each clients needs
- Recognize cultural diversity and Aboriginal awareness
- Learn from existing best practices in supportive housing
- Assist more through housing continuum within their community or where they want to be
- More co-management connections for long term and short term housing
- Increase case management among agencies; include clients goal setting, follow mentally disordered offenders.
- Coordinate housing registry and expand number of housing providers on registry.
- Bring agencies and funders together to strategize and take action
- Continue to develop relationships among providers, project by project
- Explore opportunities to engage with cultural communities for purpose of accessing continuum; Aboriginal, MOSAIC, SUCCESS
- Address gap in housing and services for single mothers; parallel to BCNPHA and transition housing initiatives. Expand resources – purpose built

**Recommendations:**

1. Co-location and share services
2. Reduce red-tape/barriers in accessing housing and services: (streamline application process/paperwork; ease policies, pets, accessibility, size of unit)
3. Identify bottlenecks and strategies to resolve them.
4. Increase coordination of services to prevent homelessness among those at risk and homeless who have recently been housed.
5. Continue to develop relationships between service providers on a project by project basis
6. Address gaps in housing and services for single mothers (e.g. second stage housing).

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**Group D – Preventing Eviction**

- Not a log being done
- There may be supports but people don't know about them
- Attitude that 'general public' doesn't need to know unless crises; need public education
- Considering introducing tenancy laws into schools
- Need to separate non-profit from private
- Language issues
- Non-profit tenant can lose housing if don't disclose proper income
- Many NP's are small, new landlords and new tenants don't keep up/know the law e.g. rent review and clear tenancy agreements
- Extreme cleaning needs for the hard to house ("hard on housing"). Other needs for hoarders, bed bugs etc.

- BC Housing has set up worker at Elizabeth Fry Society to work with chronic problem tenants as needed; can be up to 3 or 4 months to solve, provide help with access to other resources.
- Need more help for people who are vulnerable
- Funds should be available through health authorities or welfare system
- Aboriginal content
- Extended family program/policy
- What is structure, what are rights within law
- What income is applicable especially with foster children
- Child and home; could be weekends only
- Raycam has started a renters bank adapted from She-Way, Nevco, Nexus – neighbourhood groups coming together
- Illegal rent increases have been documented for thousands of units
- Landlords don't issue receipts or notices to tenants in order to hide income
- Some issues could related to life cycle and landlords/managers don't relate to this (Seniors Services Society provides training). Sudden change in behaviour could be sign something is wrong.
- DTES age is low because life expectancy is low
- Youth tenants – problems could follow throughout life
- BC Seniors Advocacy Network
- Not only evicted but not allowed to rent due to discrimination for ethnicity
- Not renting secondary suites to some groups or saving for only same ethnicity
- Mentally challenged fall through the cracks especially low IQ, low functioning; especially after leaving parents care
- Need better case management and assessments
- Change policy: if evicted for cause cannot access for one year
- Disputes tend to side with landlord; leads to downward spiral
- Need to bring agencies together to develop supports
- Aboriginal community works with anyone who requests help
- Families and individuals living within a hostel environment; combination of issues that can impact tenancy
- City councillors need to be educated regarding issues, tools, by-laws
- Standards of maintenance, inclusionary zoning, legalizing secondary suite
- FVHN is looking at rent banks
- Need a government representative giving information to both landlords and tenants.
- More residential tenancy branches are needed – province is opening two in Vancouver (downtown) but only part time and existing staff are doing outreach in pathways; could be a model to expand to other neighbourhoods. Could partner; different agencies providing staff, operations, building
- Richmond has affordable housing planner for policies and development

- Need stronger RTA mechanisms
- Law does not always change behaviour
- When talking about “all levels of government” should include band councils
- Education and awareness of issues and services; rights and responsibilities for landlords/property managers, housing tenants and all private market tenants.
- Need to deal with lifestyle and cultural issues
- Multilingual and ethnic media
- Ad campaign for public awareness: know your rights – know your responsibilities

**Recommendations:**

1. THAT the RSCH and FVHN engage BCNPHA, BCAOMA, TRAC and MHSD implement a public awareness campaign to landlords, tenants and the general public to know their rights and responsibilities and available resources.
2. THAT Health Authorities, MHSD and mental health services support expansion of services related to maintenance of units and tenancy in non-profit and private rental housing in culturally appropriate ways. And, that these agencies consult with community groups to investigate models for service delivery including social enterprise models.
3. THAT the MHSD and the RTO work with agencies and municipal partners to develop local information services (such as current model in DTES) to increase levels of service and reduce wait times and increase accessibility.
4. THAT RSCH in conjunction with community groups research rent bank models and identify emerging local models and how they impact on preventing homelessness.

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**Group E – Keeping the Conversation Going**

- Not a lot of cross sector involvement (primarily housing) articulated in background paper
- No single lens through which to view the issues, hard to capture the issues and players, especially for newcomers to the sector
- Backgrounder doesn't capture what non-profits are doing
- Learning from one another is an important piece
- Gaps in representation – good to have input from other sectors; identify who needs to be in the conversation, how do we engage with them (income assistance, mental health, corrections).
- Identify who needs to be in the conversation and how to engage them
- Need for creative channels for connecting and engaging
- Conversation needs to happen at multiple levels from the frontline to higher up
- Different groups have different assets and capabilities – partnering in different ways
- Think about strategic connections at a higher level, more than day to day
- Think of the timing issue – how often to meet? People are pressed for time and resources
- Have channels open for day to day conversations; tactics must differ for different levels
- Recognise different starting points of groups involved
- Kelowna example: partners in community care, multi agency organization provides continuity of supports to individuals.

- Harder with multiple boundaries – civic, organizational etc.
- For some individuals will cycle through the continuum and others will move on to permanent housing
- Often could be same organizations at the table, having different conversations (policy vs frontline)
- Having a common goal – eg Calgary has a 10 year goal – keeps the conversation going
- Where does accountability for keeping conversation going rest?
- **Who needs to be at the table:**

### **Policy**

First Nations government	Mental health and addictions
AHMA	Corrections
ShelterNet	Attorney General
CFAA	BIA's and chambers of commerce
Police	Faith Communities
MHSD	Immigrant services
RTB	Philanthropic organizations

### **Front Line**

First Nations government	Police
Mental health and addictions	Health
Corrections – institutions and non-profits	Education – school councillors
Casual labour	Shelters
Outreach	Transition houses
Income Assistance	Faith Communities
Immigrant services	

### **How to engage?**

- Common goal – to end homelessness
- Messaging in new ways; creative messaging helps engage others
- Social marketing approach
- Build common understanding of different asses
- Frontline meetings across services, mutual referrals
- Cross sector committees
- Raise public awareness, engage the public
- Marrying business and humanitarian cases and messaging appropriately
- Articulate benefit for involvement for different groups
- Multi-sectoral approach at two levels – policy and front line

### **Recommendations:**

1. Solutions based approach
2. Marrying business and humanitarian cases and messaging appropriately
3. Multi-sectoral approach at two levels – policy and front line

## APPENDIX 2: Forum Participants

### Creating Housing Choice Forum - October 23, 2008 Participants This list does not include presenters, facilitators, or staff

Marg	Gordon	BC Apt Owners & Managers Assoc.
Diane	Lees	BC Center for Disease Control
Sarah	Levine	BC Center for Disease Control
Gisele	Sabourin	BC Housing
Michael	Anhorn	BC Housing
Natasha	Jategaonkar	BC Non-Profit Housing Association
Jennifer	Foster	BC Parapelagic Assoc
Louise	Gaudry	BC Parapelagic Assoc
Carla	Samra	Burnaby Family Life
Kevin	Oxley	Burnaby Housing Task Force
Maddie	Addison	Canadian Mental Health Assoc., BC Division
Heather	Steele	Canadian Mental Health Assoc., New Westminster
Kay	Johnson	Canadian Mental Health Assoc., New Westminster
Val	Hammerberg	Canadian Mental Health Assoc., Goodman House
Rhonda	McGillis	Canadian Mental Health Assoc., New Westminster
Scott	Small	Catholic Charities
Phil	Fassbender	Christian Life Assembly
Sharon	Folkles	City of Burnaby
Joan	D'Angolo	City of Richmond
Sarah	Robin	City of Vancouver
Krista	Thompson	Covenant House
Sharon	Belli	Downtown Community Court, Community Advisory Committee
Naomi	Moyer	Downtown Eastside Womens Center
Dustin	Budden	Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Gail	Franklin	Fraser Valley Housing and Homeless Task Force
Jo-Ann	Stevens	Gathering Place
Cherlyn	McKay	Information Services Vancouver

Dave	Speers	Iron Horse Youth Safe House
James	Grunau	Journey Home Community Services
Jackie	Novik	Kettle Freindship Society
Leslie	Stern	Lower Mainland Network for Affordable Housing /Womens Housing
Adele	Wilson	Marguerite Dixon Society
Hazel	Burns	Metis Skills & Employment Center
Trent	Brown	Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance Fraser Region
Sadia	Ramirez	MOSAIC
Alex	Dander	no agency
Gabriella	Pickard	no agency
Donna	Stewart	North Shore Housing Task Force
Tricia	Andrew	North Shore Neighbourhood House
Erin	Barber	Options – Hyland House
Andrea	Dodd	Options Services to Communities Society
Hanna	Krieger	Options Services to Communities Society
Marissa	Johnson	Options Services to Communities Society
Pablo	Rodriguez	Options Services to Communities Society
Peter	Fedos	Options Services to Communities Society
Ray	Barkhouse	Options Services to Communities Society
Shalini	Prasad	Options Services to Communities Society
Carolyn	Canty	Provincial Ministry of Housing and Social Development
Dave	Jagpal	Provincial Ministry of Housing and Social Development
Judy	McGuire	Ray-Cam Center
Lorelai	Hawkins	Ray-Cam Center
Hazel	Cardinal	Reclaiming Our Spirit
Mary	MacDougall	Regional Exteme Weather Response Coordinator
David	MacPherson	Salvation Army - New Westminster
Anthony	Owusu	Salvation Army, New Westminster
Lindsay	Milburn	Seniors Services Society
Tricia	Millman	Service Canada

Trudi	Shymka	St James Community Service Society
Arlene	Schemmelfenigh	St James Community Services front line staff
Nola	Kwiatkowski	St James Community Services, Outreach
Deborah	Campbell-Little John	St. James Community Services
Jonathan	Oldman	St. James Community Services
Mary Jane	Ross	St. James Community Services
Juanita	Maginley	Street Nurses
Jae	Kim	StreetoHome Foundation
Lynn	Siemens	StreetoHome Foundation
Susana	Cogan	Tikva Housing Society
Martha	Lewis	TRAC Tenant Resource and Advisory Society
Sandy	Burpee	Tri-Cities Homelessness Task Force
Catharine	Hume	Vancouver Foundation
Lawrence	Hoepfner	Vancouver Recovery Club
Irina	Goga	Vi Fineday
Barb	Robinson	
kristi	Fairholm-Mader	

## APPENDIX 3: Additional Resources

### Creating Housing Choice Forum

### Reference Materials and Further Information

Updated December 2008

#### Homelessness Plans and Services

##### Canada

*3 Ways to Home* - Regional Homelessness Plan, prepared by the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness. [www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness](http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness)

*2008-2010 Service Plan* - prepared by the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy. [www.gvss.ca](http://www.gvss.ca)

*Homeless Action Plan* - City of Vancouver

[www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/housing/pdf/hap05jun.pdf](http://www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/housing/pdf/hap05jun.pdf) & *Supportive Housing Strategy*

[www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/housing/supportivehousingstrategy/index.htm](http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/housing/supportivehousingstrategy/index.htm)

##### USA and Britain

National Alliance to End Homelessness [www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org)

City of Portland, USA [www.portlandonline.com/bhcd/index.cfm?c=30140](http://www.portlandonline.com/bhcd/index.cfm?c=30140)

City of London, Britain [www.london.gov.uk/mayor/housing/strategy/index.jsp](http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/housing/strategy/index.jsp)

Housing Corporation, Britain [www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.12118](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.12118)

#### Housing First

*What Housing First Means for People: Results of Streets to Homes Post Occupancy Research*. A report on outcomes Toronto Streets to Home program, an example of a successful Housing First approach in Canada. [www.toronto.ca/housing/about-streets-homes.htm](http://www.toronto.ca/housing/about-streets-homes.htm)

Interagency Council on Homelessness (Philip Mangano's organization) [www.ich.gov](http://www.ich.gov)

#### Cost of Homelessness

*Million Dollar Murray* [www.stophomelessness.ca](http://www.stophomelessness.ca)

Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia report (2008) [www.carmha.ca/publications/index.cfm?contentID=29](http://www.carmha.ca/publications/index.cfm?contentID=29)

The Cost of Homelessness in BC (2001) [www.housing.gov.bc.ca/housing/homeless/vol3.htm](http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/housing/homeless/vol3.htm)

### **Films on Homelessness**

*Cats of Mirikitani*

*Devil Plays Hardball*

*Something to Eat, A Place to Eat and Someone Who Gives a Damn*

*Street Smarts: Improving relationships with street youth*

### **Books on Homelessness**

*Breakfast at Sally's: One Homeless Man's Inspirational Story* (Skyhorse Publishing).

### **Other Homelessness Information**

2008 & 2005 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count results

[www.gvrd.bc.ca/homelessness/research.htm](http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/homelessness/research.htm)

City of Vancouver [www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/housing/homelessness.htm](http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/housing/homelessness.htm)

Homelessness Action Week [www.stophomelessness.ca/](http://www.stophomelessness.ca/)

Including Homeless Voices [www.gvss.ca](http://www.gvss.ca)

Joint Centre for Housing Studies, Harvard University [www.jchs.harvard.edu/index.htm](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/index.htm)

Rowntree Foundation (Britain) [www.jrf.org.uk/](http://www.jrf.org.uk/)

Vancouver Agreement [www.vancouveragreement.ca/Housing.htm](http://www.vancouveragreement.ca/Housing.htm)

Virtual library of homelessness research reports [www.ihpr.ubc.ca/EN/479/890](http://www.ihpr.ubc.ca/EN/479/890)

**APPENDIX 4**  
**BACKGROUND PAPERS ON THE FIVE THEMES**  
**Background Paper # 1**

## **Investing in Transitional, Supportive and Affordable Housing**

Prepared by the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, in Partnership with the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

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### **Why this paper?**

Participants in the May 2008 Creating Housing Choice forum came to agreement on 4 points that highlight the importance of investment in affordable rental housing:

1. We have a shared interest in ensuring access to adequate, safe, affordable housing and the related support services that some people may require to avoid homelessness.
2. All levels of government have a fiscal responsibility to ensure that housing be accessible to every citizen. Funding for housing solutions should be equitable, based on the resources of each level of government. We need a federal strategy for safe, affordable housing.
3. To create housing choice, so that people are not forced into lower levels of the housing continuum than they need, we must expand the supply of transitional, supportive and affordable housing (including both market and non-market rental housing).
4. Whereas the 'housing first' approach focuses on people who are entrenched in homelessness, we also need to address the housing needs of the working poor, people leaving abusive relationships, and people who may not have diagnoses such as mental illness and addiction. To support further dialogue and action by governments, the non-profit sector and business, this paper provides background information on this issue, and an overview of current investment in transitional, supportive and affordable housing in BC.

### **What is the issue?**

Affordable housing is the key to preventing and ending homelessness. Metro Vancouver is in the midst of a sustained economic boom, but despite the economic successes of the past decade housing affordability challenges persist. The median household income of \$55,000 per year is just 60% of the \$90,000 required to purchase even a two-bedroom condominium in the region. Renters face even greater challenges given the relatively low incomes of renter households and shortage of available rental units. Metro Vancouver's rental vacancy rate in 2007 was 0.7% and has been below 1% for several years. The last time the vacancy rate stayed below 1% for two or more consecutive years was 1988 to 1990, often referred to as the region's first rental housing crisis. A healthy vacancy rate is considered to be about 3%. At the same time, the affordable housing stock across the region has become increasingly vulnerable. In the Vancouver area Single Room Accommodation stock is at risk due to age (most are a century old), a more difficult tenant profile (increasing mental illness and addiction), and competing uses (conversion to tourist hotels and demolition for condominium development).

In the rest of the region, the affordable market rental housing stock is at risk for several reasons, including age and redevelopment pressure.

The affordability challenges and increasing homelessness are stretching the capacity of the existing shelter network to respond. Most shelters in the region operate at or near full capacity and turn aways remain high. Despite these realities, there is growing evidence that increasing the number of shelter beds is not an effective way to solve homelessness.

First, addressing homelessness through emergency services, including shelters, represents an extremely inefficient use of public resources. A recent report by the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions (CARMHA) pegged the cost to the emergency services system of one homeless person at \$55,000 per year. Provision of adequate housing and supports is estimated to cost \$37,000 per person per year. This study is the most recent in a large body of work which clearly demonstrates that it is more cost effective to solve homelessness through providing housing than it is to manage it through the provision of emergency services.

Second, for many people who are homeless the provision of adequate housing and basic supports is all they need to end their homelessness. For these people, the combination of outreach services (to connect with them) and the provision of a permanent housing unit can be the most effective response. However, this 'housing first' approach will not work for everyone. Homeless shelters, through which the continuum of housing and support services can be accessed, will continue to be necessary.

### **What's already happening?**

Currently BC Housing is investing in significant numbers of new transitional and supportive housing units in Metro Vancouver. As shown in Appendix 1, 276 transitional units, 1,956 units of permanent housing with supports and 75 units of affordable housing are under development.

### **Project example: The Lux**

Located at 65 East Hastings, The Lux (RainCity Housing) will provide 92 units of supportive housing. The City of Vancouver provided the land, BC Housing is providing capital and operating funds, and Vancouver Coastal Health will fund support services to tenants (to open by early 2009).

In addition, BC Housing provides rent supplements through two primary programs: SAFER (for seniors) and the Rental Assistance Program for Families.

### ***Acknowledgements***

This document and the Creating Housing Choice forum were made possible by funding from BC Housing, City of New Westminster, City of Surrey, City of Vancouver, Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance and Service Canada. James Pratt served as the primary writer, with input and assistance from Michael Anhorn and Daniel Garrison.

## **Appendix 1: Housing Units Funded by BC Housing in Metro Vancouver <sup>1</sup> Table 1: Active Projects**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Emergency housing<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Transitional housing</b>	<b>Affordable housing w. supports</b>	<b>Affordable housing</b>	<b>Total</b>
Burnaby	6	0	1093	3,691	4,790
Coquitlam	4	8	347	847	1,206
Delta	0	0	251	491	742
Langley City	22	10	99	693	824
Langley District	0	0	172	241	413
New Westminster	53	117	183	870	1,223
North Vancouver City	45	5	63	728	841
North Vancouver District	18	0	386	635	1,039
Port Coquitlam	0	10	125	562	697
Port Moody	0	0	96	165	261
Richmond	10	0	653	1,607	2,270
Surrey	157	129	938	2,863	4,087
Vancouver	620	304	6,641	11,669	19,234
West Vancouver	0	0	98	265	363
White Rock	0	0	315	80	395
Multiple municipalities (portable)	0	0	41	0	41
<b>Metro Vancouver (total)</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>11,501</b>	<b>25,407</b>	<b>38,426</b>

**Table 2: Projects under Development by BC Housing**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Emergency housing</b>	<b>Transitional housing</b>	<b>Affordable housing w. supports</b>	<b>Affordable housing</b>	<b>Total</b>
Burnaby	0	7	64	0	71
Coquitlam	0	0	30	0	30
Delta	0	0	45	0	45
Langley City	55	0	0	0	55
Langley District	0	14	0	0	14
Maple Ridge	0	0	95	0	95
New Westminster	0	46	50	0	96
North Vancouver City	0	0	8	0	8
Richmond	0	38	0	0	38
Surrey	0	75	115	0	190
Vancouver	43	96	1,549	75	1,763
<b>Metro Vancouver (total)</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>1,956</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>2,405</b>

## Definitions

**Emergency Housing** – provides short term shelter (up to 30 days) for the homeless.

**Transitional Housing** – provides limited term housing (30 days to 3 years) with support that enables tenants to move towards independence and self sufficiency.

**Affordable housing with supports** – Provides permanent affordable housing and supports to enable tenants to live independently.

**Affordable housing** – provides housing for families and seniors who do not have sufficient income to afford market rent housing.

<sup>1</sup> Source: BC Housing.

<sup>2</sup> Emergency housing figures include some transition house spaces for women leaving abusive relationships

DRAFT

**APPENDIX 4**  
**Background Paper on the Five Themes**  
**Background Paper # 2**

## **Building Capabilities on the Front Line**

Prepared by the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, in Partnership with the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

### **Why this paper?**

Participants in the May 2008 Creating Housing Choice forum came to agreement that “it is important to continue to strengthen the capacity of the shelter sector to assist people in the process of stabilizing their housing.” Within this point, the group agreed on the following 2 action items that are specific to building the capabilities of staff in shelter, outreach, and related services:

1. Train outreach and shelter staff so they can be trusted by diverse organizations to make credible assessments and referrals.
2. Develop ‘communities of practice’ to support learning among staff serving similar populations in the community/sub-region/region.

To support further dialogue and action by governments, the non-profit sector and business, this paper provides background information on this issue, what initiatives are already underway to build front line capabilities in BC, and examples of proven and promising initiatives.

### **What is the issue?**

Providers of emergency shelter, street outreach and related services for people who are homeless have operated with very limited resources for staff training and professional development. With the move toward having these services play a stronger role in linking people with permanent housing and needed supports, it is crucial to professionalize the field.

A related issue is the need to increase wages among front line workers and in the non-profit human services sector generally. Along with building capabilities and professionalism, paying living wages to front line workers is a vital aspect of service quality.

### **What’s happening outside BC?**

A scan of regions outside BC suggests that many are wrestling with the training issue. In the UK, which is further along than most, providers of housing and outreach services have access to courses designed with intended learning outcomes. The UK also has Homeless Link, a centralized website that allows people to access extensive training and related information.

[www.homeless.org.uk/developyourservice/training](http://www.homeless.org.uk/developyourservice/training)

Homeless Link delivers training in three main ways:

- Skills for the Job training programme

- In-house training delivered direct to the staff team of an agency
- Consortium training delivered to a
- Local region, in partnership with agencies.

City regions in Ontario are exploring the opportunity to use peer-based learning and development of service provider networks to build knowledge and skills. For example, the Toronto homelessness plan sets out to “support peer learning and smart networks strategies to encourage effective coordination efforts across agencies and sectors to improve efforts re prevention, follow-up, diversion etc.”

In Philadelphia, the Log-IN project involves using online ‘communities of practice’ targeted toward ending homelessness. Knowledge management technology, a strategy that supports communities of practice, will be applied through a website.

### **What’s happening in BC?**

In recent years Shelter Net BC Society (SNBC) has provided a wide variety of workshops intended to build skills of service providers in this sector.

Current examples of training and capacity building include the following:

- Outreach meetings - BC Housing facilitates sessions to bring together outreach service providers to talk about what is working for them and the challenges they face.
- Case management meetings – service providers got together with BC Housing and talked about how programs do case management. This set up an environment to share knowledge and practical ways of case management.
- Creating Housing Choice – this Forum brought a wide range of service providers together to talk about strengthening the range of housing and related services. Participants learned about service practices and operating models through the discussions.

### **Ideas from May 2008 Creating Housing Choice Forum**

- Offer a course, on all the resources out there on how to deal with trauma and crisis in a residential setting - learning how to respond to a traumatized person in a helpful way. Need capacity within the shelter sector to facilitate learning.
- Partner with adult education programs in the region to develop a strategy for self-organized learning.
- Have a quarterly meeting to raise awareness of housing providers and related services.
- Organize a front-line worker symposium, a venue to bring staff together so they can share their knowledge and best practices.
- Effective communication and listening is the key skill – we need it and to be able to model it.
- Develop strategies to help clients and tenants translate what they have learned into changed behaviour.
- Educate people in communication skills, change thinking to more positive

thoughts, away from being shame-based.

- Raise awareness about practices that have worked.

### **Acknowledgements**

*This document and the Creating Housing Choice forum were made possible by funding from BC Housing, City of New Westminster, City of Surrey, City of Vancouver, Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance and Service Canada. James Pratt served as the primary writer, with input and assistance from Peter Fedos.*

*Draft*

**APPENDIX 4**

**Background Paper on the Five Themes**  
**Background Paper # 3**

**Connecting the Continuum**

Prepared by the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, in Partnership with the Greater Vancouver  
Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

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**Why this paper?**

Participants in the May 2008 Creating Housing Choice forum came to agreement that “it is important to continue to strengthen the capacity of the shelter sector to assist people in the process of stabilizing their housing.” Within this point, the group agreed on two action items that are specific to strengthening connections across the continuum of housing (from emergency shelter to permanent non-market housing) and related services (e.g., health, employment/training):

1. Continue to develop relationships among providers of shelter, housing and related health and social services.
2. Where possible, provide transitional housing co-located with emergency shelter.

The purpose of this backgrounder on ‘connecting the continuum’ is to provide information to support further dialogue and action by government, the nonprofit sector and business about how we can effectively build these links.

**What is the issue?**

There is a chronic problem of people using the emergency shelter system over extended periods of time when transitional or permanent housing would be more suitable to end chronic homelessness in Metro Vancouver and beyond, we need strong linkages among different levels of the housing continuum, along with coordination with related services. As stated in documents such as the *20082010 Service Plan* (see [www.gvss.ca](http://www.gvss.ca)), there is a chronic problem of people using the emergency shelter system over extended periods of time when transitional or permanent housing would be more suitable. Creating closer working relationships between providers of emergency shelter and various types of housing will help alleviate this problem.

Particularly at the lower end of the housing continuum (shelter and transitional housing), it is also critical to have strong relationships with providers of health and social services that are necessary resources to help people stabilize their lives and become capable of functioning in permanent housing. Shelter and housing providers need to stay connected to get services for clients and tenants, and to have confidence that the places they’re referring to are good and appropriate.

**What’s already happening?**

Existing and recent BC Housing-lead initiatives to connect the continuum of housing and related services include:

- Housing Continuum Agreements – pilot agreements between BC
- Housing ([www.bchousing.org](http://www.bchousing.org)) and 5 agencies with shelters and

- Transitional housing to move people from transitional housing to independent social housing owned and operated by BC Housing.
- New application process – In March 2008, BC Housing launched a new application process for people applying to social housing. The process will better match people to housing based on their housing need and need for support services.
- Coordinated Tenant Selection – BC Housing is working with the nonprofit operators of the Single Room Occupancy hotels and the successful proponents for the 14 city sites in Vancouver to develop a Coordinated Tenant Selection system. This system will provide a single point of access to housing for individuals with complex needs who want housing in these sites, and will facilitate the matching of applicants to the most appropriate housing.
- Increased support services - The Single Room Occupancy Hotels recently purchased by BC Housing and many of the projects being built under the Provincial Housing Initiatives will contain on-site support staff to assist tenants to maintain their housing and their connection to other required services (e.g. medical, mental health).
- Shelters linked to housing connections – Starting in the fall of 2008, shelters are being offered training so that they can help their clients apply to social housing and keep the applications up-to-date.

Other initiatives to connect the continuum of housing and related services include:

- The BC Non-Profit Housing Association ([www.bcnpha.ca](http://www.bcnpha.ca)) recently established a Housing continuum Task Force. The purpose of the task force is to work towards identifying and defining the role of the non-profit housing sector along the housing continuum and providing leadership to the sector in engaging at multiple levels.
- The BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses ([www.bcysth.ca](http://www.bcysth.ca)) and the BCNPHA have an ongoing research partnership to identify and take action on barriers experienced by women leaving violent relationships who are seeking housing.

### **What's working?**

In recent years Metro Vancouver has seen a trend toward co-locating multiple levels of the housing continuum, such as emergency shelter and transitional housing. Examples include Belkin House, Hyland House and the North Shore Housing Centre. Participants in the May forum commented on how this approach creates an easy transition up the housing continuum and allows for people to be housed with a level of support suited to their situation and capability.

Pathways to Housing in New York City is a famous example of the housing first approach, in which homeless people are provided with independent housing along with supports to address mental health, addictions and other issues.

[www.pathwaystohousing.org](http://www.pathwaystohousing.org)

### **Acknowledgements**

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**APPENDIX 4**  
**Background Paper on the Five Themes**  
**Background Paper # 4**

## **Preventing Evictions**

Prepared by the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, in Partnership with the Greater Vancouver  
Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

### **Why this paper?**

Participants in the May 2008 Creating Housing Choice forum came to agreement on the need to “work proactively with both landlords and tenants, using an individualized ‘case management’ approach to prevent evictions.” This paper provides background information on this issue, what strategies and programs are currently in place to prevent evictions, and examples of proven or promising initiatives.

### **What is the issue?**

Recent consultation with people who have experienced homelessness in Metro Vancouver suggests that relationship break-ups and other changes in household size are a common factor in becoming homeless, along with communication problems with landlords (see *Including Homeless Voices, Part 2* -[www.gvss.ca](http://www.gvss.ca)). Studies elsewhere have shown rent arrears to be a major eviction cause. Rent arrears are mainly attributed to low income and/or intermittent work, and in some cases failures and delays in housing and social benefit systems. Only about 2% of evictions occur as a result of tenant antisocial behaviour (*Evictions in Practice* [www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk)).

The May 2008 forum identified several specific concerns about evictions in Metro Vancouver, including:

- Many formerly homeless and at risk tenants are not aware of their rights (e.g. rent increases).
- Need for more capacity to work proactively with tenants and landlords, including translation and interpretation services to overcome language barriers.

With historically low vacancy rates in Vancouver and an aging stock of apartment buildings, an alarming number of tenants are currently facing evictions due to renovations. Eviction notices are issued, renovations are undertaken, and the units are then re-rented at substantially higher rents. Tenants may avoid this happening if they challenge these eviction notices.

### **What’s already happening?**

A 2005 CMHC sponsored review of 32 Canadian eviction prevention initiatives reported that the top success factors in preventing evictions included direct outreach, early intervention, and offering multiple and complementary services. The study also showed that landlords preferred programs which rely on payments made directly to landlords from agencies delivering eviction prevention programs.

**British Columbia** There are many organizations at the forefront of eviction prevention in BC. One such organization is TRAC, Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre. TRAC provides legal information to tenants, including the operation of a Tenant InfoLine (604-255-0546). TRAC publishes the *Tenant Survival Guide*, a plain language guide to the *Residential Tenancy Act*, in English, Chinese and Spanish, and the *Landlord Guide* in English, Chinese and Punjabi. TRAC assists tenants to organize themselves so that they can deal with problems with their housing, and provides training workshops on tenants' rights to tenants and community advocates.

The Seniors Services Society has facilitated workshops for senior's housing providers since 1997, providing information and resources to building managers on the housing needs of seniors so that they will have more ability to resolve problems with tenants rather than evict them.

In 2007, BC Housing instituted an Extreme Cleaning pilot program in its directly managed portfolio in the Fraser region to help tenants who are habitual hoarders to maintain their homes and avoid eviction. The program has succeeded in transforming the lives of several people. As a result, the program has now been made permanent, introduced in the Vancouver Coastal administrative region, and received additional staff support.

**Alberta** In May 2007, the province of Alberta introduced the Homeless and Eviction Prevention (HEP) fund to help Albertans who might lose their home due to rent increases or arrears; or need help to establish a new place to live. Under the program, any benefit that a person needs to avoid losing their rental home or to get a place to live is available, including payment of rental arrears, utility arrears, moving costs, damage deposit and first month's rent. There is no dollar limit to the amount issued or the number of times benefits are issued. The HEP fund will receive \$44 million this fiscal year. From its inception in May 2007 to September 15, 2008, the program helped 23,165 households avoid eviction.

**USA** The New York Department of Social Services has an eviction prevention program that helps tenants and homeowners threatened by homelessness. Under the program, clients can apply for a "one-shot deal" or ongoing public assistance to pay rent arrears, and receive referrals to appropriate legal services or protective services for adults.

The State of Connecticut has established the Housing Mediation and Rent Bank Program to assist residents who are at risk of homelessness due to inability to pay their back rent or past due mortgage. The program attempts to prevent litigation, eviction, or foreclosure through assessment, mediation, conflict resolution, and the use of a rent bank. Clients may receive assistance from the rent bank once in an 18-month period, and the maximum amount they receive is \$1,000. The program is run by the Connecticut Department of Social Services in partnership with 14 non-profit agencies.

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**APPENDIX 4**  
**Background Paper on the Five Themes**  
**Background Paper # 5**

## Keeping the Conversation Going

Prepared by the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy, in Partnership with the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness

### **Why this backgrounder?**

Participants in the May 2008 Creating Housing Choice forum came to agreement that “we need an ongoing channel for cross-sector conversations, including people concerned with the different components of the housing continuum and related services.” This backgrounder is intended to support further dialogue and action by participants in the October component of the forum. Ultimately, the purpose is to design ways to meet the need for ongoing cross-sector conversations

### **What is the issue?**

Different sectors working to end homelessness could be more effective if they coordinated their efforts and worked in partnership. Governments, business organizations and non-profits need to hear from each other and explore opportunities for collaboration and co-operation. Similarly, creating channels for communication across the various service categories (e.g. housing, shelter, social services, mental health and addictions) creates opportunity for learning and improvement of services. With multiple agencies serving the same homeless and at-risk ‘clients’, it makes sense to share lessons learned and try to work together.

If these different ‘stakeholder groups’ and ‘sectors’ can come to agreement about solutions, that could be very powerful. For example, proposals to government that are based on a broad consensus would be more effective than if they are coming from just one organization or umbrella group.

Furthermore, there is much to be gained by hearing the voices of people who have experienced being homeless, who have been clients of these services and/or tenants in various types of housing. People with such first hand experience, front line workers, program managers, planners and decision makers can all learn from each other.

### **What’s already happening?**

There are existing housing organizations at various geographic levels, such as the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada and the BC Non-Profit Housing Association.

- BC Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), which provides leadership, advocacy, education, and research on behalf of non-profit housing agencies, creates opportunities for dialogue through an annual conference as well as networking and information sharing sessions. [www.bcnpha.ca](http://www.bcnpha.ca)
- Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), whose goals include making housing

a priority with Canadians and convincing government that housing is a sound investment, keeps members and supporters connected through an annual congress, policy symposia, and national 'teleforums', as well as publication of *Canadian Housing* magazine and a monthly e-newsletter. [www.chra-achru.ca](http://www.chra-achru.ca)

- Provincial housing associations and interested groups, facilitated by CHRA, have come together as the Housing Futures Collaborative to advocate for non-market housing. This dialogue led to joint endorsement of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities call for a national housing strategy. [www.fcm.ca/english/View.asp?mp=467&x=712](http://www.fcm.ca/english/View.asp?mp=467&x=712)
- The BC Government/Non-Profit Sector Initiative, while not specific to housing, is an example of what is possible in cross-sector dialogue and an illustration of what it takes to build capacity for working together more effectively. <http://cnpm.ca>

At the regional level, there several multi-stakeholder organizations concerned with homelessness, including the following:

- Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee for Greater Vancouver (AHSC) [www.lnhs.ca/homeless\\_initiative](http://www.lnhs.ca/homeless_initiative)
- Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH) [www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness](http://www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness)
- Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (GVSS). [www.gvss.ca](http://www.gvss.ca)

In addition, there are local multi-stakeholder homelessness tables in many communities in the region, including Burnaby, New Westminster, the North Shore, Surrey and the Tri-Cities (see, for example: [www.tricityhomeless.org](http://www.tricityhomeless.org)).

### **What's working?**

While it may seem that there is duplication among the various homelessness tables in the region, each has a distinct role or area of responsibility. There are several strategies in place to support coordination and co-operation:

1. Working together on events such as Homelessness Action Week and the Creating Housing Choice Forum;
2. Having people designated as liaisons to report back and forth among the tables;
3. Having quarterly meetings of a Regional Homelessness Coordinating Committee (with reps from the various regional tables).

The first national conference on homelessness was held in 2005 and a second is coming up in February 2009. [www.nhc2009.ca](http://www.nhc2009.ca) It may be too early to comment on what else is working to 'keep the conversation going' at the national and provincial levels. Further experience, as well as reflecting on what has been learned, is needed.

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