

Homeless in Vancouver

The delights of living in Vancouver can be hard to appreciate if you don't have a home – a situation that over a thousand people have to deal with on an average night in the city. Though housing and social services are primarily provincial and federal responsibilities, the City works to promote affordable housing, contributing land, buildings, capital funds, and property tax waivers, as well as undertaking policy and regulatory initiatives.

Vancouver's Homeless Action Plan identified a need for 3,800 units of supportive housing from 2005 to 2015. Supportive housing is non-market housing linked with services to help tenants stabilize their lives, enhance independent living skills, and re-connect with the community.

Since 2005, about 900 units of new supportive housing have been added. In cooperation with the provincial government, 14 City-owned sites will be developed, of which six are under construction now to deliver 600 units by spring 2011. Other projects, such as Woodward's and Union Gospel Mission, add an additional 216 units.

Taken together, 1,700 units of new supportive housing will be occupied by Spring 2011. That's substantial progress, though another 2,100 units are still needed to address homelessness.

SHELTERS

In 2009, the Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) initiative opened five temporary homeless shelters, bringing 450 people inside every night over the winter months. Funding totalling \$1.5 million was provided from BC Housing, Streethome Foundation, the City and other donors. During those winter months, 31,000 bed-nights and over 60,000 healthy meals were provided to homeless individuals in Vancouver.

HOMELESSNESS IN VANCOUVER

- In March 2008, 1,576 people were homeless in Vancouver, of whom 765 stayed in emergency shelters and 811 had no shelter, sleeping outside or in other places not intended for human habitation. That represented an increase of 16% just from 2005 to 2008.
- Across the Metro Vancouver region, homelessness has increased by 140% since 2002
- The number of shelter beds in Metro Vancouver in winter months has increased from 550 in 2000 to 1,480 in 2008, three-quarters of them in the city of Vancouver
- Almost 40% were aboriginal, though aboriginal people make up only two per cent of the city's population



For the winter of 2010, City Council allocated \$500,000, and the provincial government \$1.2 million, to make available a total of seven Winter Response Shelters with 500 beds, in addition to the 750 spaces available in Vancouver through BC Housing's Emergency Shelter Program. The City also participates in the Extreme Weather Response, a community-based effort providing mats and shelter during periods of inclement weather. Participating City facilities include the Gathering Place and Evelyn Saller.

SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY (SRO) BUILDINGS

SROs are rooming houses and residential hotels containing small single rooms, usually about 10 m². These SRO units represent the most basic and the lowest cost housing available in the city.

Over the past several years, the provincial government has acquired a total of 23 SRO hotels and the City provided \$5 million to assist with renovations. The City has also purchased two additional hotels – the Drake Hotel and a rooming house at 514 Alexander. Together these amount to over 1,400 units of housing.

The City played an important role in securing the renovation of Dunsmuir House and the Bosman Residence (scheduled to be opened in April 2010) by providing grants of \$500,000 each. These sites will supply 268 more units of supportive housing over the next three to six years, while new supportive housing projects are being developed.

The City purchased the Rainier Hotel on Carrall Street in 2008 and renovated it to provide 21 units of housing and offer a 20-unit treatment program for women in recovery.

HOMELESSNESS IN VANCOUVER

- Over half reported addictions to drugs/and or alcohol, and one-quarter reported mental illnesses
- Long term homelessness is increasing - half of the individuals surveyed have been homeless for more than one year
- The median age is 41, up from 39 in 2005
- A significant number are 'working poor' - 100 sheltered homeless were working full-time

(based on regional survey)

