


# SUPPORTING HEALTHY AND SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD: A PLAN TO PREVENT AND REDUCE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



A photograph of two young women laughing together. The woman in the foreground is wearing a black hoodie with a bright pink hood and is laughing heartily. The woman behind her is wearing a grey baseball cap and a black hoodie, also laughing. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

**“It is hard to get your feet  
firmly planted when  
all you can think about is  
where will I sleep tonight.”**

Homeless Youth, Calgary

Channel



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# MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



## Message from Honourable Heather Klimchuk Minister of Human Services

By bringing community organizations and all levels of government together, the 10-Year Plan has positioned Alberta as a recognized leader in providing vital supports to the homeless community. However, in order to make sure that all homeless individuals are provided with supportive housing, populations such as homeless youth need specialized attention and services.

*Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness* (Youth Plan) identifies innovative approaches to help Alberta's vulnerable young people become contributing members in their communities. When we support our youth, we support an Alberta where all families and communities can thrive. The Youth Plan focuses on how we can facilitate healthy transitions to adulthood and, where possible, reunify homeless youth with their families. In addition, the Youth Plan also outlines strategies that address prevention and raise awareness on this issue.

The 2013 Office of the Child and Youth Advocate report, *"Where do we go from here?" Youth Aging out of Care*, emphasized that specialized targeted responses are required in order for youth facing multiple barriers to be successful. And that requires the collaboration and support of community-based organizations, service providers and all levels of government, and the attention of all Albertans. When we work together to have a solid understanding of how youth become homeless, we can use this information to push for continuous improvement and supports for vulnerable children and families.

As we continue this transformational work, I would like to extend my gratitude to the community partners, formerly homeless youth and government staff who have dedicated their time and expertise in developing the Youth Plan. We have been able to listen and value the opinions of everybody involved in developing this plan. We all bring important ideas and experiences to the table. I truly believe the best way to reach our common goal is through an ongoing collaboration. We will continue to invest in our youth to help them achieve their greatest potential as they transition into adulthood. I look forward to the continued community support as we move into our next phase of addressing this complex issue and involving more individuals and organizations in the work.

Together, we can reach our goal and make sure that every child and youth in Alberta has a safe place to live.

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Heather Klimchuk, Minister





# BUILDING STRONG INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

## Executive Summary

Alberta has experienced success in addressing homelessness through the 10-Year Plan. Since its inception in 2009, more than 9,865 homeless Albertans have received housing and supports and approximately 73% remain successfully housed, but we can do more. The 10-Year Plan states that Albertans from specialized groups, including homeless youth, are dealing with particularly challenging issues, and require targeted responses to be rehoused. *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness* (Youth Plan) aligns and is integral to work being led through the 10-Year Plan. The Youth Plan represents the next step in the 10-Year Plan and is a targeted response to a specialized population.

The causes of youth homelessness are complex and multiple. Youth homelessness is the result of a number of economic and social factors that impact an individual or family at a personal level. No one chooses to be homeless and it can happen to anyone – from a teenager escaping an abusive home, to a senior citizen on a fixed income that cannot cover a rent or tax increase, to a child whose parents suddenly become unemployed. Understanding the factors that lead to youth homelessness is not easy considering the complexity of the population, and the fact that there are many pathways to homelessness.

The Youth Plan has been developed to address the unique needs of youth and places a particular emphasis on strengthening families first and ensuring youth experience healthy transitions across the system of care. The prevention of youth homelessness and reunifying families when possible is a top priority. The Youth Plan, guided by the principles of *Alberta's Social Policy Framework*, emphasizes alignment across government programs and systems.

The Youth Plan engages government, communities, parents and youth in building solutions.

## Do We Have a Problem With Youth Homelessness in Alberta?

Youth are among the fastest growing and most underserved of Canada's homeless population. The number of homeless youth in Canada is estimated to be approximately 65,000.

In 2011-2012, youth-serving organizations in Alberta served over 2,100 youth through outreach and family support/reunification services and 1,900 youth through shelter and supported living. This estimate does not include the youth who do not voluntarily go to shelters or other housing options.

Most recent point-in-time counts:

- In Calgary (August 2012), the number of youth between the ages of 13 and 24 years experiencing homelessness was 446 (13%).
- In Red Deer (September 2012), 103 (37.1%) of the homeless population were youth under the age of 25.
- In Edmonton (October 2012), 258 independent youth (13%) between ages 14 and 24 were homeless.

*Note: In October 2014, a simultaneous point-in-time count was conducted in the seven largest cities in Alberta; a full analysis of the count will be released in January 2015.*

In some cases, homeless youth in Alberta have accessed support through Housing First programs.

- Of the 9,865 homeless Albertans who have been provided housing and supports through Housing First programs to date, 13% were youth between the ages of 18 and 24.

Community service providers have consistently agreed that homelessness among youth is a distinct, identifiable problem. A number of providers and agencies reported increases in the number of youth accessing shelter and support services.

## Why a Plan for Youth?

Youth homelessness is an issue that is similar to yet distinct from homelessness in general, and our understanding of and solutions to the issue must be distinct as well.

- Youth are in the process of transitioning toward adulthood and may not have acquired personal, social and life skills that make independent living possible.
- Youth tend to seek, access and respond to services and supports differently than other homeless individuals.
- They often avoid the homeless-serving system out of fear of authorities.
- Youth have particularly challenging issues, and require targeted responses to be rehoused.
- For youth under the age of 18, the situation is complicated by the obligation of families and/or the government to care for them and provide for their basic needs.
- For youth involved with the Child Intervention System, these issues are further magnified if healthy transitions are not prioritized.

Youth living on the street become entrenched in this lifestyle very quickly, due to:

- Quickly developing new social networks with other street-involved youth.

- Substance abuse issues for themselves or within the family.
- Losing ties with the education system.

Homelessness is a dangerous, unstable lifestyle for youth, characterized by a number of high-risk, negative experiences, including:

- Violence, victimization, physical and sexual abuse.
- Involvement with police and the justice system.
- Criminal activity.
- Stress, depression, anxiety disorders and suicide.

Many homeless youth are struggling with developmental and attachment issues that make their transition to adulthood more challenging. They have never lived independently or developed critical life skills.

According to a three-year national research project (*Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions, 2009*) that tracked the 'lived experience' of 689 street-involved youth in three Canadian Cities (including Calgary):

- 63% (62%) grew up in a family that found it hard to maintain housing.
- 62% (57%) had dropped out of school, reflecting the lack of support and resources.
- 68% (28%) had previous involvement with foster care, group homes or a youth centre.
- 71% (80%) had previous criminal justice system involvement.
- 43% (16%) had previous involvement with child protection.

\* Numbers are Calgary specific.

Of the 9,865 homeless Albertans who have been provided housing and supports through Housing First programs to date, approximately **22.5%** self-identified having involvement with Foster Care.

- **33.6%** of 18 – 24 year olds self-identified having involvement with Foster Care.

## Alberta’s Solution to Youth Homelessness

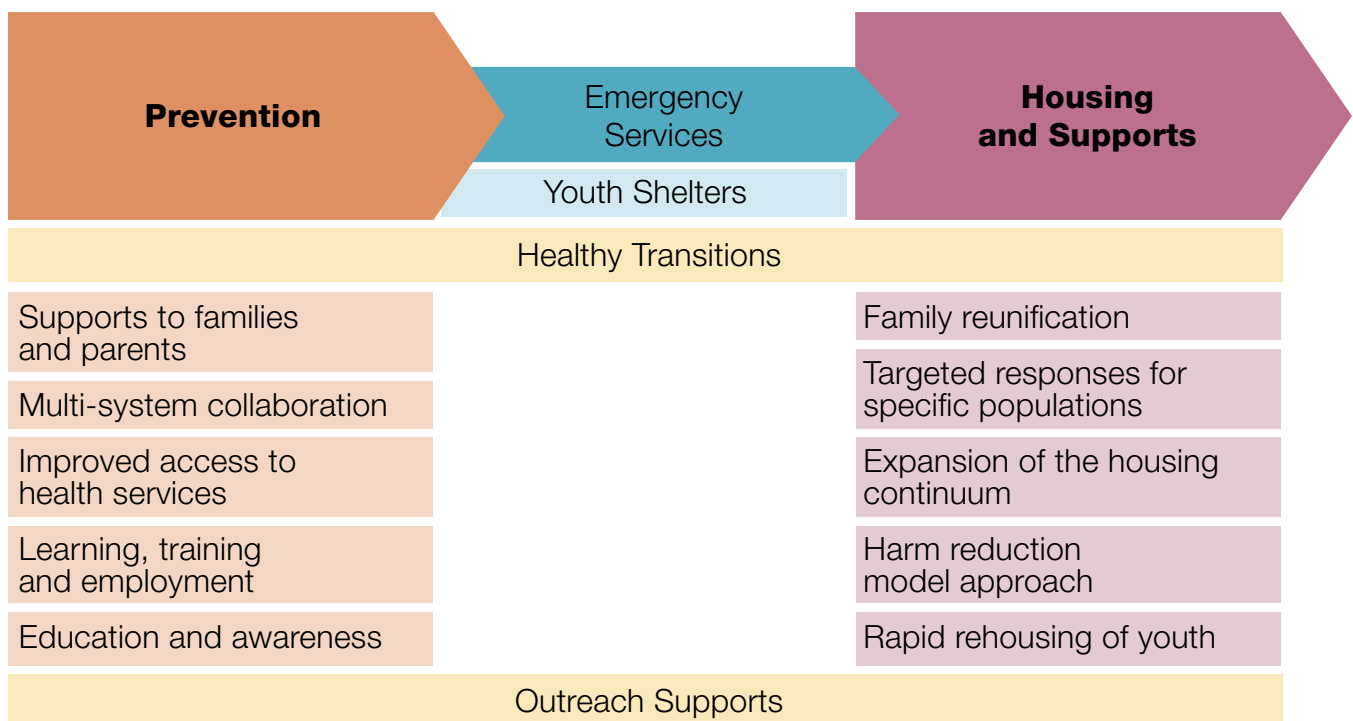
Alberta’s current response to youth homelessness places much of the emphasis on the emergency response. While emergency services are important and necessary, we cannot rely on these as the ‘system’ to deal with youth homelessness.

The strategies presented in the Youth Plan suggest a new way to address youth homelessness that builds on the three existing components: prevention/emergency services/housing and supports – but shifts the emphasis. Prevention and housing and supports become a greater priority. Emergency services are provided, with support, to facilitate this shift in Alberta’s response.

### CURRENT RESPONSE:



### FUTURE RESPONSE:





## Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness

Over 400 Albertans, including almost 200 youth, have contributed to the development of the Youth Plan. The concepts and priorities were established through community conversations, research, reviews of best practices, and work with Stephen Gaetz, a nationally recognized and well-respected research authority on youth homelessness in Canada. Alberta is considered a leader in developing this response, as the Youth Plan is the first of its kind in Canada.

The Youth Plan represents an opportunity to refine specific responses and align ongoing work being led through the 10-Year Plan. Ensuring healthy transitions across the system needs to be emphasized as we change our approach to how we respond to youth who are at risk of homelessness or are currently experiencing homelessness will help us achieve our goal of preventing and reducing homelessness. It builds on effective existing community-based services and introduces new evidence-based actions required to address the complex issue of youth homelessness. The Youth Plan is the first provincial response to homelessness for specialized populations in Alberta.

### Vision

An Alberta where all youth have a safe, supportive and nurturing home.

### Mission

To reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness in Alberta and prevent further youth from becoming homeless by ensuring that youth and their families have the services and supports they need.

The overarching goals of the Youth Plan are two-fold:

- Prevent youth from becoming homeless through family supports and education.
- Rapid rehousing of homeless youth through family reunification or supportive living by utilizing a client-centred approach.

The Youth Plan defines homeless youth as those Albertans who are **between the ages of 13 and 24** and:

- Are without a permanent place of residence.
- Live on the street, in shelters or in places that are not intended or suitable for permanent residence.
- Are “couch-surfing”, or temporarily living with others for short periods of time.

The Youth Plan is a unified, integrated, provincial response to youth homelessness that engages government, communities, parents and youth in building solutions. The priorities of the Youth Plan are:

- **Prevention and Awareness** – Prevent youth from becoming homeless.
- **Early Intervention** – Youth receive supports before they become entrenched in homelessness.
- **Client-Centred Supports** – Youth have access to client-centered supports.
- **Research and Evaluation** – Youth homelessness in Alberta is understood, measured and evaluated.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** – Community partners and youth mobilize solutions to address youth homelessness.

### Outcomes for the Youth Plan Based on Alberta’s Social Policy Framework

Alberta’s Social Policy Framework (Framework) is a vision for social policy that defines who we are as people and communities, one that reflects our aspirations for a province that offers all Albertans the opportunity to reach their potential and to benefit from the highest possible quality of life. The outcomes of the Youth Plan are guided by the outcomes of the Framework. The strategies, priorities and actions of the Youth Plan support the building of a better Alberta. The Youth Plan will ensure that youth are safe, resilient and engaged, by achieving the following outcomes:

SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES	YOUTH PLAN OUTCOMES
<b>Safe</b> – Live free from fear of abuse and violence.	Increased housing stability for youth through rehousing or family reunification.
<b>Healthy</b> – Achieve the highest attainable standards of health and well-being.	
<b>Secure and Resilient</b> – Support themselves and their households through safe work and career opportunities, with access to effective income supports when in financial need.	Increased resiliency in homeless youth and youth at risk of becoming homeless.
<b>Lifelong Learners</b> – Develop the knowledge, skills, and commitment to learning necessary to realize their potential and participate in society.	Prevention of youth homelessness through education and enhanced family and natural supports.
<b>Included</b> – Feel welcomed in the communities where they live, learn and work.	
<b>Active and Engaged</b> – Explore opportunities to participate in recreational activities and cultural experiences, and to engage in Albertan society.	Healthy transitions to adulthood.

## Every Albertan has the Potential to Play a Role in Shifting our Response to Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue that requires many people working together to build and sustain healthy relationships and capacity in families and communities to reduce and prevent the issue.

### Role of the Government of Alberta

- Establish a shared vision, provincial priorities and policy directions amongst all ministries.
- Facilitate collaboration among individuals, families and communities to prevent youth homelessness through education and awareness.
- Support the provision of coordinated and integrated supports and services at the community level.
- Provide the legislative and policy framework and funding support to address youth homelessness.
- Support opportunities to share knowledge between policy-makers, academics and service providers.
- Support existing best and promising practices and innovative research and programming.
- Ensure healthy transitions across the system of care for youth.

(For a summary of the roles of partnering Government of Alberta Ministries, please refer to Appendix 3.)

### Role of Service Providers/Non-Government Organizations and Communities

- Deliver front-line services and supports.
- Collaborate to share best practices and research, and help to identify emerging trends.
- Work with government to identify needs, issues and strategic directions.

- Inform and influence government priorities.
- Identify promising practices and research opportunities.
- Inform and influence community change.

### Role of the Private Sector

- Provide leadership and modeling.
- Provide skills training and employment opportunities.
- Engage and support employees in building healthy relationships.
- Provide charitable and philanthropic giving.
- Support employees to be engaged on the issue.

### Role of Individuals – Youth, Families, Friends and Neighbours

- Take personal responsibility for individual wellness and healthy relationships.
- Become engaged citizens to prevent and reduce youth homelessness in Alberta.
- Learn how to identify youth at risk of homelessness and what can be done about it.

## Albertans Taking Action

Responding to youth homelessness will take hard work and commitment on the part of governments, communities, homeless-serving agencies and the private sector. It will also require continuous monitoring and improvement to refine best practices, information and investments. Albertans take pride in their innovation, their courage and their collective community spirit. Albertans also believe in the resiliency of youth and believe that each of them should have the opportunity to realize and maximize their potential.



# BACKGROUND

Youth are among the fastest growing and most underserved of Canada's homeless population. The number of homeless youth in Canada is estimated to be approximately 65,000.

In 2011-2012, youth-serving organizations in Alberta served over 2,100 youth through outreach and family support/reunification services and 1,900 youth through shelter and supported living. This estimate does not include the youth who do not voluntarily go to shelters or other housing options.

Research shows that youth homelessness is often caused by family dysfunction and breakdown, resulting from conflict, abuse and disruption. Rarely is youth homelessness the result of a single factor or incident.

According to a three-year national research project (*Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions, 2009*) that tracked the 'lived experience' of 689 street-involved youth in three Canadian Cities (including Calgary):

- 63% (62%) grew up in a family that found it hard to maintain housing.
- 62% (57%) had dropped out of school, reflecting the lack of support and resources.
- 68% (28%) had previous involvement with foster care, group homes or a youth centre.
- 71% (80%) had previous criminal justice system involvement.
- 43% (16%) had previous involvement with child protection.

\* Numbers are Calgary specific.

Of the 9,865 homeless Albertans who have been provided housing and supports through Housing First programs to date, approximately **22.5%** self-identified having involvement with Foster Care.

- **33.6%** of 18 – 24 year olds self-identified having involvement with Foster Care.

## The Path into Homelessness

Throughout the development of the Youth Plan, research and community conversations have led to significant insights about the path into and out of homelessness for youth. These community conversations included meaningful discussions with homeless youth. The path into homelessness is relatively predictable and generally includes some of the following factors:

- Experience with the Child Intervention system, particularly those placed in care.
- A history of family conflict or instability.
- One or more mental health conditions (present in the youth or family member).
- Alcohol and/or substance abuse issues (present in the youth or family member).
- Low-income or poverty-stricken family backgrounds.
- Exposure to abuse or other victimization.
- Previous episodes of temporary homelessness.

“Youth follow fairly predictable paths in and out of homelessness.”

– Agency Stakeholder, Calgary

With these factors as a precursor, youth experience a crisis or incident that leaves them without a permanent residence. Sometimes parents or guardians may decide that they are unable to care for a youth anymore, or are unable to afford their basic needs. Youth may make the choice to leave, as well, which often occurs in the case of abusive or otherwise untenable situations. It is important to note, however, that even when homelessness begins in this way as a “choice,” this choice vanishes once youth become entrenched in homelessness.

“We travel in groups for safety and other reasons... this is my chosen family.”

– Homeless Youth, Edmonton

Homelessness delays social and developmental progress while making it more difficult to develop life skills and independence. Further, without the ability to create stability or independence in their lives, youth may be “stuck” in homelessness, uncertain of what help they need to change their situation, or how to get it.

Aside from shelters, youth may not be aware of or able to access many services, supports or jobs that are available, especially because they lack a fixed address, personal voicemail and identification.

Homeless youth also report facing a powerful stigma that labels them as listless, worthless, criminal or dangerous. Youth and community stakeholders suggest that the stigma of homelessness interacts with negative perceptions of youth in general to create a climate of disrespect and disregard for these youth, even in some service environments.

## Scope of the Problem

The Canadian government places the number of homeless individuals in Canada around 150,000 (inclusive of 65,000 homeless youth). This is a conservative number and some agencies estimate the homeless population to be between 200,000 and 300,000.

The scope and prevalence of youth homelessness in Alberta is unclear. Six municipal centres in Alberta conduct homeless counts. These homeless counts represent a snapshot in time in a given municipality, and based on the various methodologies and definitions used, they may not represent accurate data for the youth population. Moreover, the data collected across the province is not consistent, and so comparisons across communities are difficult. In many cases prior to 2012, homeless youth were not specifically counted, except where they were identified as part of a family experiencing homelessness. According to the most recent point-in-time counts:

- In Calgary (August 2012), the number of youth between the ages of 13 and 24 years experiencing homelessness was 446 (13%).
- In Red Deer (September 2012) found that 103 (37.1%) of the homeless population were youth under the age of 25.
- In Edmonton (October 2012) found that 258 independent youth (13%) between ages 14 and 24 were homeless.

The table on the following page is a summary of available information collected through municipal homeless counts, which seem to suggest an upward trend in some locations. It is not clear from this data, however, how the magnitude of the issue may be changing.



## Estimated Prevalence of Homeless Youth in Alberta

MUNICIPALITY	HOMELESSNESS CATEGORY	2004	2006	2008	2012
Edmonton	All homeless	2,192	2,618	3,079	2,174
	Homeless children and youth (with families)	306	194	259	Unavailable
	Homeless independent youth	30	43	52	258
Calgary	All homeless	2,597	3,436	4,060	3,576
	Homeless children and youth (with families)	218	304	384	198
	Homeless independent youth	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	446
Lethbridge	All homeless	143	118	163	99
	Homeless children and youth (with or without families)	20	26	24	18
Fort McMurray	All homeless	355	441	549	326
	Homeless children and youth (with families)	68	5	10	Unavailable
	Homeless independent youth	Unavailable	Unavailable	65	85*
Grande Prairie	All homeless	147	179	Unavailable	200
	Homeless children and youth (with families)	25	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable
Red Deer	All homeless	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	279
	Number of homeless youth (under the age of 25).	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	103

\* Between ages 17-30.

Medicine Hat does not conduct point-in-time counts.

Community stakeholders have consistently agreed that homelessness among youth is a distinct, identifiable problem. A number of these stakeholders representing community service agencies reported increases in the number of youth accessing shelter and support services.

The richest available data can be found at the agency level. Appendix 2 outlines the breadth of supports offered across Alberta and the related numbers of youth and families that accessed those services. Youth-serving organizations that

participated in the development of the Youth Plan report that in 2011-12 they served over 2,100 unique youth through outreach and family support/reunification services and 1,900 through shelter and supported living services. While this is a significant number, communities agree that it is an underrepresentation of the actual number of youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This is due to the “invisible” populations of homeless youth who are not readily identifiable because they are not accessing shelter or support services.

Unfortunately, youth living on the street become entrenched in this lifestyle very quickly and are often powerless to escape homelessness without help. The broader implications of this issue include costly impacts to systems and society as a whole. Intervening and supporting youth to exit homelessness before they become entrenched in street life can mean the difference between short term and lifelong support.

The **risk factors** that contribute to adult homelessness also play a role in the occurrence and duration of homelessness for youth. These factors include:

- Poverty
- Lack of affordable housing
- Low education levels
- Unemployment
- Mental health
- Substance abuse issues
- Family violence



Beyond those factors, the phenomenon of youth homelessness is largely a reflection of family dysfunction and breakdown, specifically familial conflict, abuse and disruption.

The **protective factors** associated with homelessness avoidance or successful transitions out of homelessness for youth are similar to adults as well, such as:

- Positive attitudes values or beliefs
- Conflict resolution skills
- Good mental, physical, spiritual and emotional health
- Positive self-esteem
- Success at school
- Strong social supports
- Community engagement
- Problem-solving skills
- Positive adult role models, coaches or mentors
- Healthy prenatal and early childhood development
- Participation in traditional healing and cultural activities
- Positive peer influences
- Steady employment
- Stable housing

Youth usually enter a state of homelessness as a result of:

- Physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- Involvement with the Child Intervention System
- Discrimination
- Homophobia
- Poverty

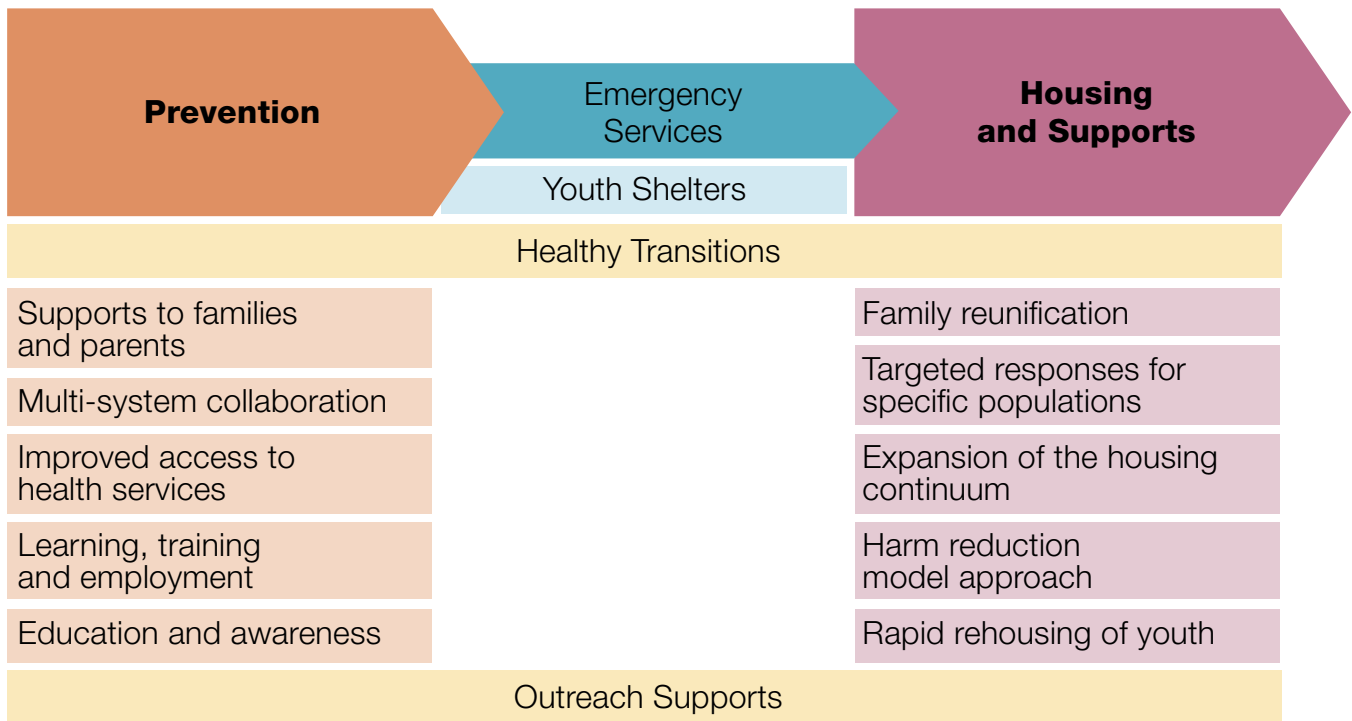


# STRENGTHENING OUR RESPONSE

## CURRENT RESPONSE:



## FUTURE RESPONSE:



Alberta’s current response to youth homelessness places much of the emphasis on the emergency response. While emergency services are important and necessary, we cannot rely on these as the ‘system’ to deal with youth homelessness.

The strategies presented in the Youth Plan suggest a new way to address youth homelessness that builds on three existing components – prevention/emergency services/housing and supports – but shifts the emphasis. Prevention and housing and supports become a greater priority. Emergency services are provided, with support, to facilitate this shift in Alberta’s response. Clearly there are a number of factors and opportunities that need to align to help young people find their way out of homelessness.

We need to shift our approach to how we respond to youth who are at risk of homelessness or are currently experiencing homelessness. Refining our approach to this specific population further addresses the strategies identified in the 10-Year Plan.

The Youth Plan builds on effective existing community-based services and introduces new evidence-based actions required to address the complexities of youth homelessness.

There are two overarching goals of the Youth Plan:

- Prevent youth from becoming homeless through family supports and education.
- Rapid rehousing of homeless youth through family reunification or supportive living by utilizing a client-centred approach.

The outcomes for the Youth Plan are unique and responsive to this population, and recognize that wherever possible, we must put families first and reunify, or connect youth to a stable and nurturing adult.

In addition, the outcomes of the Youth Plan are guided by the outcomes of the *Alberta Social Policy Framework*.

SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES	YOUTH PLAN OUTCOMES
<b>Safe</b> – Live free from fear of abuse and violence.	Increased housing stability for youth through rehousing or family reunification.
<b>Healthy</b> – Achieve the highest attainable standards of health and well-being.	
<b>Secure and Resilient</b> – Support themselves and their households through safe work and career opportunities, with access to effective income supports when in financial need.	Increased resiliency in homeless youth and youth at risk of becoming homeless.
<b>Lifelong Learners</b> – Develop the knowledge, skills and commitment to learning necessary to realize their potential and participate in society.	Prevention of youth homelessness through education and enhanced family and natural supports.
<b>Included</b> – Feel welcomed in the communities where they live, learn and work.	
<b>Active and Engaged</b> – Explore opportunities to participate in recreational activities and cultural experiences, and to engage in Albertan society.	Healthy transitions to adulthood.

The Youth Plan is a unified and integrated provincial response to youth homelessness. It is the result of ongoing engagement with government, communities, parents and youth, coming together to identify solutions. Through research and conversations with the community, including youth who have experienced homelessness, we have identified the following priorities to effectively address youth homelessness:

- **Prevention and Awareness** – prevent youth from becoming homeless.
- **Early Intervention** – youth receive supports before they become entrenched in homelessness.
- **Client-Centred Supports** – youth have access to client-centered supports.
- **Research and Evaluation** – youth homelessness in Alberta is understood, measured and evaluated.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** – community partners and youth mobilize solutions to address youth homelessness.

Homeless youth are defined as those Albertans who are **between the ages of 13 and 24** and:

- Are without a permanent place of residence.
- Live on the street, in shelters or in places that are not intended or suitable for permanent residence.
- Are “couch-surfing” or temporarily living with others for short periods of time.







# ALBERTA'S PLAN TO PREVENT AND REDUCE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

## Vision

An Alberta where all youth have a safe, supportive and nurturing home.

## Mission

To reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness in Alberta and prevent further youth from becoming homeless by ensuring youth and their families have the services and supports they need.

## Guiding Principles

The following principles will guide coordinated provincial and community efforts to address youth homelessness.

- **Engaging Youth.** The unique perspective and voice of the youth that we are trying to help must be heard in order to craft the solutions that they want and need.
- **Family Support.** The best place for youth is with their family and families can come in many forms (birth family, alternate care-givers, foster family, “chosen” family). Youth and their families must be supported and connected to ensure that whenever possible youth are able to stay with their families or with a caring, safe and nurturing adult.
- **Building on Successful Existing Initiatives.** We must leverage the wealth of knowledge, expertise, partnerships and resources available through ongoing initiatives in Alberta that are directly relevant to the issue. In addition to forging strong linkages and alignment with the ongoing work in Alberta communities, the Youth

Plan is linked to Government of Alberta initiatives, such as the work of the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness, the 10-Year Plan, the *Social Policy Framework*, *Child Intervention Practice Framework* and *Creating Connections: Alberta's Addictions and Mental Health Strategy*.

- **Collaboration.** The complexity of youth homelessness in Alberta communities calls for collaborative action and solutions. Communities, community organizations and every level of government are directly impacted by youth homelessness and share responsibility for addressing youth homelessness in Alberta.
- **A Proactive Approach.** Intervening proactively to address youth homelessness is a more successful and cost-effective approach than reacting to the problem as it exists. Effective planning and healthy transitions for youth will allow for proper supports and services to be in place. Preventing youth from becoming homeless in the first place should be the goal, and a key component of this is adopting the philosophy that a youth without a home is unacceptable in Alberta. Intervening quickly and decisively when a young person in Alberta is without residence will have long-term and cost-effective benefits for youth, families and the community.

## Development of the Youth Plan

Youth are one of the populations considered the “hidden” homeless; many avoid the homeless-serving system often out of fear of authorities. It has been identified that this population requires specialized attention, services and a shift in our response.

Extensive work and community conversations led to the development of the Youth Plan, as outlined below.

### **The 10-Year Plan**

- Implemented in 2009, the 10-Year Plan states that everyone should have access to safe, affordable housing and that specialized groups, including homeless youth, require targeted responses.
- The 10-Year Plan is the provincial framework that sets the strategic direction for addressing homelessness in Alberta, and informed the development of the Youth Plan.

### **Internal Review of Youth Homelessness**

- A 2009 MLA-led internal review identified policies and improvements for consideration to address youth homelessness, including obtaining better information, exploring housing options and supporting rapid and coordinated community-driven responses.
- These policy options have informed the development of the Youth Plan.
- Youth were consulted, as part of this review, and their feedback was integrated into the Youth Plan.

### **Government Collaboration and Leadership through a Cross-Ministry Committee**

- A Cross-Ministry committee was established to bring together all partnering Government of Alberta Ministries that play an important role in advancing the priority areas from the Internal Review.
- The Cross-Ministry committee played a leadership role in the development of the Youth Plan.

### **Research**

- Extensive research was undertaken to review programs and services across Canada and globally to identify promising and best practices for addressing and reducing youth homelessness.

### **Community Conversations**

- Over 400 Albertans, including approximately 200 youth, have contributed to the development of the Youth Plan.
- In June 2012, Human Services hosted conversations with community partners in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. There were 180 participants, representing Human Services program delivery, Alberta Health Services, Justice and Solicitor General, Community-Based Organizations, Family and Community Support Services, community service delivery partners and youth.
- In March 2013, the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness created a committee to address specialized populations, including youth, who require targeted responses. The Interagency Council on Homelessness will continue to provide information and guidance on the Youth Plan's implementation as part of its commitment to addressing matters related to specialized populations.

### **Youth Engagement**

Youth were engaged throughout the entire development of the Youth Plan through:

- The Youth Secretariat's Youth Advisory Panel.
- Youth with lived experience.
- Online feedback on the Speak Out [www.speakout.alberta.ca](http://www.speakout.alberta.ca) Student Blog.

Participants provided valuable input on the concepts, priorities and strategies within the Youth Plan.

# WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

<b>PRIORITIES</b>			
<b>Prevention and Awareness</b>	<b>Early Intervention</b>	<b>Client-Centred Supports</b>	<b>Research and Evaluation</b>
<b>GOALS</b>			
<b>Prevent youth from becoming homeless</b>	<b>Youth receive supports before they become entrenched in homelessness</b>	<b>Youth have access to client-centered supports</b>	<b>Youth homelessness in Alberta is understood, measured and evaluated</b>
<b>STRATEGIES</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports to family and parents</li> <li>• Needs/risk assessment tool development</li> <li>• Public education and awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outreach</li> <li>• Encourage multi-system collaboration</li> <li>• Accessibility to mental health and addictions services</li> <li>• Rapid rehousing of youth in crisis</li> <li>• Improve access to learning, training and employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted responses for specific populations</li> <li>• Single point of entry into the system</li> <li>• Harm reduction model</li> <li>• Expansion of the youth housing continuum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent data collection and data sharing</li> <li>• Scoping and monitoring the Youth Plan's success</li> <li>• Evidence-based best practices</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>			
<b>Community partners and youth mobilize solutions to address youth homelessness</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community capacity-building</li> <li>• Youth leadership and engagement</li> </ul>			



# PRIORITY 1.0 PREVENTION AND AWARENESS

## GOAL: PREVENT YOUTH FROM BECOMING HOMELESS

### STRATEGIES

#### 1.1 Supports to Families and Parents

Young people enter into homelessness largely as a result of challenges they experience with their parents or their families. We know that conflicts within family – whether related to abuse, mental health or addictions issues of either young people themselves or other family members – often lead young people to the streets. Many street youth are fleeing abusive and otherwise problematic family situations.

Although family conflict also plays a part in adult homelessness, the connection is more critical for youth since they are, by virtue of their developmental stage in life, still largely financially, emotionally and, depending on their age, legally dependent upon their families.

**Strengthening families through reunification, counselling or mediation** may be the service and support that a young person needs to prevent them from experiencing homelessness. Working with young people and their families prior to the experience of homelessness, or intervening to mediate family conflicts once a young person leaves home offers young people the opportunity to improve the relationship or resolve family conflicts. This may enable them to return home or move into independent living in a safe, supported and planned way.

Parents/caregivers may not know where to go or how to **access parenting resources or supports**. It will be important to enhance and increase accessibility to resources such as family mediation, conflict resolution, counselling and assessment services.

When family reunification is not a viable option for young people who are experiencing homelessness, strengthening informal support networks (friends, mentors, co-workers, educators, neighbours) can be critical for their success.

“Some families just don’t know what to do.”

– Community Agency Stakeholder, Red Deer

#### Actions:

- **Enhance the capacity of communities and service providers to support family reunification initiatives. This will include providing training and development opportunities, sharing resources and promising practices, and increasing opportunities for information sharing, as well as developing a common understanding of family preservation and reunification.**
- **Develop comprehensive tools and resources for parents who are trying to resolve family conflict to keep their family unit together.**
- **Increase awareness of these resources through government and community service providers, websites and resource centres.**

## 1.2 Develop Needs/Risk Assessment Tool

**Services should be planned and delivered in a way that suits an individual's needs.** A needs/risk assessment tool identifies an individual's need and matches those needs to the appropriate services. To coordinate these important services, a common assessment tool with **standardized questions and data** is required. Common assessments will also allow community partners to develop an understanding of needs throughout the system and better coordinate those services to avoid duplication.

The assessment needs to be timely and should consider a wide range of aspects of the young person's life, not only their housing needs. This holistic assessment can be used by various community partners and will coordinate access to services.

### Actions:

- **Develop a provincial needs/risk assessment tool with community organizations that builds from existing needs/risk assessment tools being used across Canada for programming related to youth homelessness.**
- **Develop a common understanding and use of this tool through training and information sharing, and support the implementation of the need/risk assessment tool across Alberta.**
- **Develop a monitoring system to ensure modification of the tool, where appropriate.**

## 1.3 Public Education and Awareness

**Public education** is an important foundation of prevention strategies. Effective public education programs will help to dispel myths and stereotypes about street-involved youth. They will also serve to help Albertans understand the issue of youth homelessness within the broader context of family distress, abuse, neglect, violence and other barriers faced by youth.

In addition to broad public education, efforts should be **targeted to youth specifically**. It is important that young people are aware of the risks of homelessness and know where to turn for support. Collaboration with the education system and the use of social media campaigns may be effective ways to share information and raise awareness among youth.

### Actions:

- **Develop and distribute public education tool kits and resources for schools, service providers and businesses to assist in supporting youth who are at risk of or who are experiencing homelessness.**
- **Develop processes within the current youth-serving systems to:**
  - **Ensure that youth leaving systems of care, such as: Child Intervention; Family Supports for Children with Disabilities; Justice; and Mental Health have been engaged in planning processes that address housing, programming and education supports required to ensure a healthy transition to adulthood.**
  - **Through social media, engage and inform youth about services and housing options available to them.**





# PRIORITY 2.0 EARLY INTERVENTION

## GOAL: YOUTH RECEIVE SUPPORTS BEFORE THEY BECOME ENTRENCHED IN HOMELESSNESS

Early intervention should encompass the following five areas:

- Strategies which assist an individual at the point of homelessness including family reunification/mediation.
- Strategies which focus on the development of life skills in people to avoid homelessness or a return to homelessness.
- Community development opportunities which can build resiliency in young people.
- Advocacy at a broader policy level to overcome structural barriers to secure housing.
- Building capacity within existing systems to serve youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless more effectively.

### STRATEGIES

#### 2.1 Outreach

**Outreach** plays an important role in reaching street-involved youth who are unfamiliar with available services or who feel they would be stigmatized by accessing them. Agencies that reach out to young people to provide support and services, rather than waiting for youth to seek out the appropriate services, have shown promising results. Outreach workers provide non-judgmental information and support, assist with basic needs and make referrals to other services for youth. They may also provide basic system navigation if the youth is ready for intervention supports.

#### Actions:

- **Support community agencies to share promising practices that will assist in enhancing outreach services delivered.**
- **Through outreach, increase diversion opportunities by intervening as quickly as possible to avoid youth from becoming entrenched in homelessness.**
- **Engage in the ongoing review of current system barriers to assess how prevention of youth homelessness can be improved.**
- **Encourage and facilitate youth access to community resources through greater information-sharing using social media.**

#### 2.2 Encourage Multi-System Collaboration

Youth homelessness is a complex issue, with implications across many sectors. As identified earlier, there are many contributing and compounding factors that may cause a young person to become homeless. For this reason, there is a need for **multi-system collaboration**.

The Education system has a role to play in contributing to promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies. Opportunities exist to create strong partnerships with schools and build awareness among school staff on the issue of youth homelessness. Building on the foundational principles of high school redesign, particularly the principles of meaningful relationships, personalization, and creating welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments will create opportunities for all students to build protective factors that support lifelong resiliency and positive mental health. Finding ways to support students not actively engaged in the school system will be important as this work moves forward.

A coordinated and collective approach is essential in tackling those multi-faceted issues that most impact community safety including homelessness, mental health, addictions and family violence.

*The Alberta Gang Reduction Strategy*

Homeless youth tend to have high levels of interactions with other systems.

Young people transitioning from systems, such as child intervention, mental health and addictions, and justice, must be linked to housing options and necessary supports and services.

The Lethbridge Youth Hub is an excellent example of how partnerships between government ministries, the City of Lethbridge, school divisions and the police can successfully wrap support and services around vulnerable youth. Outreach includes educational support, counselling, mental health services, access to employment, family reunification and/or access to safe and stable housing if required. The Youth Hub is a virtual entity that has contributing partners working with homeless youth at whatever school or agency that they appear. “Every door is the right door”, is the philosophy behind the wraparound services that are being developed to prevent youth from becoming entrenched in a homeless lifestyle.

#### **Actions:**

- **Support the development of tools and resources that contribute to building a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment for all students.**
- **Support comprehensive and collaborative practices and partnerships that ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed.**
- **Increase the capabilities of community leaders, educators and service providers to identify specific intervention strategies, including appropriate referrals and supports, primarily related to identification of youth who are on the verge of or are homeless.**

- **Support the alignment of policy initiatives that impact youth across the Government of Alberta.**
- **Bring communities, agencies and governments together to develop strategic partnerships.**
- **Support the development of youth-focused services to ensure that government and community organizations can easily connect youth to the appropriate housing and supports.**
- **Support communities that have or are developing youth homeless plans to facilitate alignment with the Youth Plan.**
- **Support healthy transitions to ensure youth can avoid homelessness altogether.**

### **2.3 Accessibility to Mental Health and Addictions Services**

Youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness require **increased access to mental health and addiction support.**

When access to mental health and addiction services are unavailable, or when individuals are unable to access treatment and assistance, people’s lives are impacted in all areas – work productivity, family stability, health and quality of life.

The onset of most mental health problems and mental illness occurs during adolescence and young adulthood, therefore early identification and intervention are critical.

25% of people who have mental health problems and mental illness do not receive treatment. Ensuring that people with addiction, mental health problems and mental illness have access and feel comfortable using these services they need will go a long way to improving their quality of life and reducing pressures on other systems.

*Creating Connections: Alberta’s Addiction and Mental Health Strategy*

Youth with complex needs must be matched appropriately with the right level and intensity of care. It is important that they are aware of what services are available to them, and have support navigating the mental health system. *Creating Connections: Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Strategy* is addressing the complex needs of the most marginalized populations such as street-involved youth and the homeless population. For example, some programs that support young people work closely with Alberta Health Services – Addictions and Mental Health to provide access to addictions counselors on-site, and connect youth to the supports and services they need to ensure healthy transitions to adulthood.

#### Actions:

- **Invest in youth-focused community based/mobile mental health and addictions supports.**
- **Work with community organizations to streamline access to Community Residential Treatment programs for youth.**
- **Ensure when rapidly re-housed, youth have access to the support necessary to remain housed.**
- **Increase accessible information for youth to become aware of services and supports available to them.**
- **Increase community capacity to identify and refer youth to appropriate treatment options through increased information, collaboration and resource sharing.**



## 2.4 Rapid Rehousing of Youth in Crisis

In order to prevent and reduce youth homelessness, the work of homeless-serving agencies, communities and governments must shift beyond simply managing the issue. The Housing First philosophy includes support for the **rapid rehousing** of homeless Albertans, which will help to quickly address youth in crisis.

**Rapidly rehousing a youth in crisis** involves moving the young person from the streets and shelters into appropriate permanent housing. This intervention targets young people who have entered homelessness for the first time and require rapid intervention to prevent long-term entrenchment in this lifestyle. Services are intended to ensure young people are quickly rehoused or reunited with family.

To facilitate rapid rehousing of youth in crisis, work must be done to expand the housing continuum for youth and increase the number of housing options with wrap around supports. Simply rehousing a young person is not enough – the underlying factors that contributed to homelessness must be addressed.

#### Actions:

- **Work with community organizations to develop specific strategies to move youth quickly out of homelessness and into more permanent/supportive housing.**
- **Increase service providers' knowledge of the range of housing for youth across the housing spectrum.**
- **Assess and monitor the effectiveness of housing options for youth.**

## 2.5 Improve Access to Learning, Training and Employment

Young people often enter into homelessness without life skills such as cooking, money management and job searching. Youth need to be supported in learning the skills required to live independently. Further to this, accessing educational opportunities and obtaining employment can be significant barriers for youth without stable, permanent housing.

**Improving access to education, training and employment** is critical for homeless or formerly homeless young people to successfully transition into adulthood and eventually independence. Providing critical educational and employment training helps youth to develop essential skills and launches them on a path towards independence and self-sufficiency as contributing members of society.

Improving educational opportunities and coordinating job training that is designed specifically to meet the needs of street-involved youth will remove some of the barriers that these young people encounter when trying to obtain employment or access education.



These strategies will help youth secure opportunities to exit homelessness, improve financial security and encourage healthier lifestyles. Further, they are aligned with work led by Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education.

Innovative programs, such as the *Advancing Futures* bursary program ([www.advancingfutures.gov.ab.ca](http://www.advancingfutures.gov.ab.ca)), a post-secondary bursary program for youth who have been in care, can provide information on how to successfully decrease barriers for youth wishing to achieve their educational goals and obtain meaningful employment.

### Actions:

- **Keep youth engaged in school through mentorship, dual credit, trades and other transition programs.**
- **Support comprehensive services connecting families, schools, post-secondary institutions, community partners and employers.**
- **Work with youth-serving agencies to get disengaged youth back on a positive career and education pathway.**
- **Support community-based employment and training programs that lead to sustainable employment for young people.**
- **Ensure eligible youth are aware of and have access to education and training supports through strategies such as the Advancing Futures Bursary and Strengthening Hope Bursary.**





# PRIORITY 3.0 CLIENT-CENTERED SUPPORT

## GOAL: YOUTH HAVE ACCESS TO CLIENT-CENTRED SUPPORTS

Development of client-centered responses will strengthen the ability of existing systems to intervene in a rapid, coordinated manner before youth become entrenched in a homeless lifestyle. A client-centred response is intended to provide the following specific benefits:

- Youth, including those that have been involved in the Child Intervention System, will experience healthy transitions between systems of care and adulthood.
- Youth will access multiple programs and services without having to retell their story.
- Information can be shared between programs to provide better services to youth.
- Youth will receive the required services and supports, based on their needs and circumstances, in a timely manner.
- Youth are supported and will remain engaged and receive supports to move from crisis to long-term stability.
- Fewer “system” barriers will exist for youth.
- Services are better coordinated to meet the needs of the youth.

The Internal Review of Youth Homelessness in Alberta found that 16 and 17 year olds, in particular, represent an underserved population with respect to homeless supports. Communities have identified

the need for preventive and proactive approaches for this population. These approaches include adoption of a Housing First approach with wrap-around services that provide a promising foundation to intervene and help youth escape homelessness. At present, access to and appropriateness of the available supports and services are areas in which there is room for improvement.

It is recognized that housing and support options may differ for youth at different stages of life, and that roles for government and other partners may be defined in part by the age of youth who receive services. Because youth are in a state of transition, collaborative interventions within both government and community are required.

“We need to be treating the entire person, not just the housing issue.”

– Community Agency Stakeholder, Medicine Hat

Housing First is an approach to addressing homelessness that centers on providing homeless people with housing quickly and then providing services as needed. What differentiates a Housing First approach from traditional emergency shelter or transitional housing approaches is that it is “housing-based,” with an immediate and primary focus on helping individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing. This approach is consistent with what most people experiencing homelessness want and seek help to achieve.



Housing First programs share critical elements:

- There is a focus on helping individuals and families access and sustain permanent rental housing as quickly as possible and the housing is not time-limited.
- Wraparound services are delivered primarily following a housing placement to promote housing stability and individual well-being.
- Support services are time-limited or long-term depending upon individual need.
- Housing is not contingent on compliance with services – instead, participants must comply with a standard lease agreement and are provided with the services and supports that are necessary to help them do so successfully.

The 10-Year Plan

## STRATEGIES

### 3.1 Targeted Responses for Specific Populations

Some young people have diverse, complex and unique identities that need to be recognized and responded to. Therefore, appropriately addressing youth homelessness will require targeted responses for specific subpopulations.

Specifically, there must be critical attention to meeting the needs of youth with mental health and/or addictions issues, youth with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Aboriginal youth, young people who are new to Alberta, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning youth (LGBTQ). These subpopulations are disproportionately represented among homeless and street-involved youth.

**Actions:**

- **Develop strategies and responses that reflect the unique needs of diverse youth, including Aboriginal people, immigrants and the LGBTQ community that are based on research and promising practices.**
- **Develop a common understanding of the unique causes of homelessness for these subpopulations, such as discrimination and inequality.**
- **Monitor and evaluate targeted responses for continuous improvement in serving subpopulations of youth.**

Individuals with FASD require improved access to housing – including places to live that are affordable and provide structure and support for affected individuals.

Service gaps exist, particularly for youth in transition.

Strategy: Improve access to services for individuals affected by FASD, including vulnerable populations who are not receiving the support they need, with a particular focus on youth-in-transition to adulthood.

*FASD 10-Year Strategic Plan*

“Youth don’t want to tell their story 15 times – they need one single point of entry into the system.”

– Community Agency Stakeholder, Edmonton

### 3.2 Single Point of Entry into the System

Youth experience frustration from having to tell their story countless times to different agencies as they progress through the homelessness system. Young people require a system where they can enter through ‘no wrong door.’

Having a **single point of entry into the system** becomes an effective way to help youth access the information, supports and services that they need. Through the coordination of services, a young person who accesses the system will receive the appropriate support to address their needs, without having to repeat their story multiple times.

This is consistent with the Government of Alberta’s direction to implement a citizen-centered, streamlined approach to program development and service delivery that focuses on the needs of the person rather than program structures. This will reduce gaps, simplify access and improve client outcomes.

#### Actions:

- **Ensure youth leaving systems of care, such as: Child Intervention; Family Supports for Children with Disabilities; Justice; and Mental Health have been engaged in the development of comprehensive transition/discharge plans that address housing, programming and education supports required for successful outcomes and healthy transitions.**
- **Build on existing initiatives to implement a coordinated access process for youth to ensure they receive standardized, comprehensive and accessible supports.**

### 3.3 Harm Reduction Model

In many cases, compliance-based services and zero-tolerance policies do not fit the needs of youth who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness.

We know that youth may make certain lifestyle choices that involve sexual practices, drug use and engaging in unhealthy behaviour that involve risk. The **harm reduction model** focuses on reducing the risk related to these behaviours, rather than enforcing a zero-tolerance policy.

Harm reduction is often misinterpreted to mean a lack of accountability for receiving services. In reality, harm reduction is a strategy aimed at reducing the risks or harmful effects associated with substance use and addictive or other high-risk behaviours for the individual, which benefits the individual, community and society. It promotes the delivery of non-judgmental services to young people with addictions or mental health problems. It is important to note that the harm reduction model **allows for choice**. Some young people will desire a harm reduction environment while others will want and benefit from abstinence-based services. Providing young people with a range of options is the true approach to harm reduction.

Programming that incorporates a harm reduction model will help to establish a trusting relationship with the young person that will support a healthy transition to stability and independence and reduces the likelihood of termination of services for non-compliance.

#### Actions:

- **Develop a common understanding of harm reduction and its benefits for vulnerable youth.**
- **Support community organizations to develop programs and initiatives that include a harm reduction approach.**
- **Monitor and evaluate harm reduction responses to encourage continuous improvement in serving vulnerable youth.**

### 3.4 Expansion of the Housing Continuum for Youth

Youth need access to a range of appropriate housing options that reflect their unique needs. This will require **an expansion of the continuum of housing specifically for youth**. The expansion will focus on **'Transitional Housing'** and **'Enhanced Accommodation'** options.

'Transitional Housing' refers to a supportive, temporary accommodation that bridges people from homelessness to permanent housing by offering structure, supervision, support, life skills and, in some cases, education and training. As the concept of transitional housing has evolved, new approaches that incorporate the use of rental accommodation, shared living situations or smaller housing facilities are now being adopted. In such cases, the transitional 'supports' being offered to youth can be adapted given their stability and living arrangements.

'Enhanced Accommodation', such as Housing First for youth or the Foyer model, is a housing model that offers longer term residency along with opportunities for education and training, life skills development and an intentional case management focus, provides young people with a greater

opportunity for independent living, but enables them to obtain the flexible, individualized supports they need.

That is, many of the core supports that define transitional housing are still available. The crucial distinction is that such supports are not tied to a designated facility, but are portable. As the young person grows older, matures and develops skills for independent living, the level of supports may decrease or end altogether. However, for a smaller subpopulation (young people with a serious mental illness, disability or addictions challenges), the supports may be continuous, long-term or even permanent.

#### Actions:

- **Increase awareness of promising and innovative supportive housing models that effectively serve youth between the ages of 13 and 24.**
- **Work with the Interagency Council on Homelessness to ensure that youth are addressed within the range of housing options available in Alberta.**





# PRIORITY 4.0 RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

## GOAL: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN ALBERTA IS UNDERSTOOD, MEASURED AND EVALUATED

We have a significant opportunity to resolve the information gaps that currently make it challenging to understand and address youth homelessness. Better data and information on the issue of youth homelessness in Alberta is a priority, as is evaluating outcomes and measures of progress.

### Improving the collection of information will allow us to better respond to the following questions:

- How many homeless youth are there in Alberta, or in various Alberta communities?
- What is the scope and magnitude of the needs of youth who are either at risk or experiencing homelessness?
- What information is being collected in communities across the province?

Government and individual agencies are able to relate what services they provide, however this does not lend itself to a comprehensive understanding of the scope of the issue, or the need for improved services. While agency-level data is the richest source of available information about homeless youth, agencies are collecting data differently, making it difficult to compare between agencies and communities.

Moving forward, the Government of Alberta has set clear direction and expectations for data collection in partnership with communities and organizations that will be providing the information. As a major funder of services for homeless youth, the Government of Alberta will streamline and simplify information collection in collaboration with

community agencies. This will result in consistent, comparable information across the province that can provide a more accurate picture of youth homelessness and the impact of community interventions.

Common outcomes are an important piece of measuring the progress of the Youth Plan. We heard from some stakeholders that there is an over-reliance on quantitative outcomes, which may not accurately demonstrate the positive impacts of programs and services.

Establishing qualitative measures to evaluate outcomes will enhance current quantitative data collection and ensure that the youth homeless-serving system is enhanced.

## STRATEGIES

### 4.1 Consistent Data Collection and Data Sharing

The development of a data collection system is important in collecting baseline data, determining the scope of the issue, informing evidence-based programming, and identifying community need or gaps in support. Data collected on homeless youth will ensure that programs and services are efficient in their operation and will help to measure outcomes.

To support a multi-system approach to youth homelessness, **information sharing** will need to occur between systems as data and information is generated. Alberta remains committed to having better information to identify solutions and best practices. The Homeless Management Information System being implemented within adult shelters across the province will be broadened to capture youth shelters and outreach programs as well, with the long range goal to ensure consistency of data

collection across homeless-serving systems and building an effective bridge between these systems.

**Actions:**

- **Work with youth shelter providers to implement a Homeless Management Information System.**
- **Establish information sharing agreements with youth-serving organizations to facilitate the single point of entry support system.**

#### 4.2 Scoping and Monitoring the Youth Plan's Success

While we know that youth homelessness is an issue in Alberta, the true scope of the issue, impact on resources and profile of young people experiencing homelessness has not yet been fully determined. We must identify the scope of the issue in our communities so that we can create effective, targeted responses to reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness.

Better information and clear definitions are needed to make informed decisions and to evaluate the success of these interventions. This information will continue to inform our ability to effectively respond to this issue and intervene appropriately.

**Actions:**

- **Develop a consistent methodology for point-in-time counts to capture youth specific numbers.**
- **Develop innovative tools and strategies to better collect data on youth homelessness.**
- **Create a provincial approach to gathering comparable data by establishing common and consistent data collection and data sharing methods.**

- **Link in with the provincial homelessness research agenda that has been developed through a partnership between the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research (ACCFCR) to ensure that better responses to youth homelessness are achieved.**
- **Increase research capacity through existing partnerships, such as the Alberta Research Council, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and post-secondary institutions.**
- **Support the gathering and sharing of knowledge, research, expertise and successful service delivery practices across the province to link research to practice.**
- **The Youth Plan's success will be informed by evidence-based outcome measures that will be regularly reviewed and reported to Albertans.**

#### 4.3 Evidence-Based Best Practices

Research and evidence-based practices lead to improved service delivery. As research on homelessness evolves, and youth homelessness is better understood, more evidence-based best practices will be developed.

Communities must be supported to mobilize evidence-based best practices to develop effective services and programs, as well as targeted responses for specialized populations.

**Actions:**

- **Identify best practices and support communities to implement them.**
- **Use research to recommend policy change.**
- **Educate policy-makers and community stakeholders on the information emerging out of current research.**





# PRIORITY 5.0 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

## GOAL: COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND YOUTH MOBILIZE TO ADDRESS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Stakeholder engagement is an integral part of public policy development and implementation for the Government of Alberta.

As demonstrated throughout the creation of *Alberta's Social Policy Framework*, community collaboration and ownership are core components of creating a vision for social policy that reflects our province.

### STRATEGIES

#### 5.1 Community Capacity-Building

Youth homelessness is a community issue that is most effectively addressed through community driven and designed solutions, based on community needs. This strategy supports the local capacity of communities to respond to the issue of youth homelessness. Collaboration is already occurring between partners and stakeholders to respond to the issue of youth homelessness. Communities will continue to initiate actions and define desired outcomes as the Youth Plan is implemented. The Youth Plan will support coordinated planning and responses to youth homelessness through common vision, purpose and goals both provincially and locally.

#### Actions:

- **Strengthen connections between community organizations to ensure alignment of programming, shared resources and collaboration.**
- **Support community-based organizations and municipalities to initiate community-driven responses to address youth homelessness.**
- **Establish a provincial youth homelessness learning community through existing partnerships to enable shared learning, success and promising practices and to support improved practice.**
- **Report on the Youth Plan through the province's reporting on the 10-Year Plan.**





## 5.2 Youth Leadership and Engagement

According to the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, youth engagement is meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself. The kind of activity in which the youth is engaged can be almost anything – sports, the arts, music, volunteer work, politics, social activism – and it can occur in almost any kind of setting.

Under the Youth Plan, youth will have the opportunity to influence, shape and refine its implementation. They will be key drivers of policy and program improvements, which will be paramount to the Youth Plan’s success.

Youth have an important role in directing and shaping their own priorities and interests. This role should be facilitated through the Government of Alberta’s youth engagement processes to ensure direct linkage to broader public policy initiatives on youth homelessness.

### Actions:

- **Ensure that youth engagement related to the Youth Plan is aligned and coordinated with existing Government of Alberta youth engagement processes through the leadership of the Youth Secretariat.**
- **Ensure that the Youth Plan is considered in all engagement opportunities that relate to or affect vulnerable youth.**





# WHAT'S YOUR ROLE IN ADDRESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

Every Albertan has the potential to play a role in addressing youth homelessness. It is a complex social issue that requires many people working together to build and sustain healthy relationships and capacity in families and communities to reduce and prevent youth homelessness.

## Role of the Government of Alberta

- Establish a shared vision, provincial priorities and policy directions among all ministries.
- Facilitate collaboration among individuals, families and communities to prevent youth homelessness through education and awareness.
- Support the provision of coordinated and integrated supports and services at the community level.
- Provide the legislative and policy framework and funding support to address youth homelessness.
- Support opportunities to share knowledge between policy-makers, academics and service providers.
- Support existing best and promising practices and innovative research and programming.
- Ensure healthy transitions across the system of care for youth.

(For a summary of the roles of partnering Government of Alberta Ministries, please refer to Appendix 3.)

## Role of Service Providers/Non-Government Organizations and Communities

- Deliver front-line services and supports.
- Collaborate to share best practices and research, and help to identify emerging trends.

- Work with government to identify needs, issues and strategic directions.
- Inform and influence government priorities.
- Identify promising practices and research opportunities.
- Inform and influence community change.

## Role of the Private Sector

- Provide leadership and modeling.
- Provide skills training and employment opportunities.
- Engage and support employees in building healthy relationships.
- Provide charitable and philanthropic giving.
- Support employees to be engaged on the issue.

## Role of Individuals – Youth, Families, Friends and Neighbours

- Take personal responsibility for individual wellness and healthy relationships.
- Become engaged citizens to prevent and reduce youth homelessness in Alberta.
- Learn how to identify youth at risk of homelessness and what can be done about it.



# IMPLEMENTATION

## **Completed (2013 – 2014)**

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- Scope of the issue.
- Evidence-based best practices.
- Community capacity-building.
- Common and consistent data collection.

## **Immediate/Short-Term Priorities (2014 – 2015)**

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- Encourage multi-system collaboration.
- Expand the housing continuum for youth.
- Expand outreach supports and services.
- Developed targeted responses for specific populations.
- Develop a needs/risk assessment tool.

## **Medium-Term Priorities (2015 – 2016)**

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- Increase supports to families and parents.
- Public education and awareness.
- Develop a rapid re-housing response for youth.
- Increase access to learning, training and employment.
- Support models of family reunification.
- Increase access to mental health and addictions services.
- Support the use of harm reduction models in service delivery.

## **Long-Term Priorities (2016 – 2017)**

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- Promote a single point of entry into the system philosophy.
- Continuous engagement of community, including youth.
- On-going evaluation of the Youth Plan.



# OUTCOMES

The outcomes of the *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness* (Youth Plan) are guided by the outcomes of the *Alberta's Social Policy Framework*. The strategies, priorities and actions of the Youth Plan support the building of a better Alberta.

The following outcomes are the anticipated results associated with the implementation of the Youth Plan:

- Increased housing stability for youth (through rehousing or family reunification).
- Prevention of youth homelessness (through education and enhanced family supports).
- Increased resiliency in homeless youth and youth at risk of becoming homeless.
- Healthy transitions to adulthood.

OUTCOMES			
Individual Level	Sector and Systems Level	Community Level	Societal Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved resiliency for youth and families</li> <li>• Youth have skills that allow for a healthy transition to adulthood</li> <li>• Improved access to learning, training and employment programs</li> <li>• Increased access to supports and resources for youth and their families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved partnership across sectors and systems</li> <li>• Collaboration between community organizations to ensure young people have improved access to resources and support</li> <li>• Young people have housing options and supports when discharged from systems</li> <li>• Coordinated outreach service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in the number of homeless youth in Alberta</li> <li>• Increased prevention and awareness leads to communities having the supports to identify at-risk youth</li> <li>• Improved targeted responses for specific subpopulations</li> <li>• Improved community connections for at-risk youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness among Albertans on the issue of youth homelessness</li> <li>• Reduction in the number of homeless youth in Alberta</li> <li>• Improved quality of life for youth and their families</li> </ul>

The Government of Alberta is committed to achieving these outcomes and monitoring the progress of the Youth Plan.



# CONCLUSION

Responding to youth homelessness will take hard work and commitment on the part of governments, communities, homeless-serving agencies and the private sector. It will also require continuous monitoring and improvement to refine best practices, information and investments. Albertans take pride in their innovation, their courage and their collective community spirit. Albertans also believe in the resiliency of youth and believe that each of them should have the opportunity to realize and maximize their potential.

The path out of youth homelessness will be built upon a foundation of strong families, housing options that meet the unique needs of youth, and training and employment. Youth caught up in the cycle of homelessness require reliable and uninterrupted provision of services to address a complex array of issues. Stability is critical if youth are to be allowed to fail, learn from their mistakes and try again.

The Youth Plan will be guided by *Alberta's Social Policy Framework* and strengthened by adopting a whole-government approach. This means working in partnership to align with other government initiatives, such as:

- Child Intervention Practice Framework
- An Alberta Approach to Early Childhood Development
- Information Sharing Strategy
- Children First Act
- Poverty Reduction Strategy
- The 10-Year Plan

- Family Violence Hurts Everyone: A Framework to End Family Violence in Alberta
- Creating Connections: Alberta's Addiction and Mental Health Strategy
- Alberta's Crime Prevention Framework
- Results-Based Budgeting
- Alberta Mentoring Partnership

The Government of Alberta will also seek future partnerships with the private sector, formal and informal community leaders and community groups to address this complex social issue. We will support leadership in all sectors and all communities to help build a stronger Alberta.

The Government of Alberta will continue to support and invest in our community partners to deliver critical services to youth and their families. We have made tremendous strides over the past four years with the 10-Year Plan and have built a solid foundation through innovative practice, service delivery and community response. Through family supports, education, and rapid rehousing, we can shift our response to youth homelessness in Alberta.



# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Alignment with the 10-Year Plan

The table below details the alignment and linkages between the priority areas for action in the 10-Year Plan and the priorities and strategies of the Youth Plan.

THE 10-YEAR PLAN PRIORITY AREAS AND STRATEGIES	ALIGNMENT WITH YOUTH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES
<b>BETTER INFORMATION</b>	
1. Develop standards for data collection about homelessness, including the use of common definitions, methods and counting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire better information on the issue through common and consistent data collection and data sharing methods; establish data collection standards.</li> <li>• Determine the scope of the issue of youth homelessness in Alberta.</li> </ul>
2. Establish a provincial electronic information management system and provide funding for its deployment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) that is currently used to collect information on the adult homelessness system to capture and manage data related to youth shelters and outreach programs.</li> </ul>
3. Establish a research arm to inform policy development and share best practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase research capacity regarding youth homelessness; develop partnerships with research organizations (e.g., Alberta Research Council and post-secondary institutions).</li> <li>• Support the accumulation and implementation of knowledge, research, expertise and successful practices into service delivery across the province.</li> </ul>
4. Measure outcomes and track progress on a regular, ongoing basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire better information on the issue through common and consistent data collection and data sharing methods.</li> <li>• Measure outcomes and track progress using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).</li> </ul>

THE 10-YEAR PLAN PRIORITY AREAS AND STRATEGIES	ALIGNMENT WITH YOUTH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES
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AGGRESSIVE ASSISTANCE	
5. Continue employing emergency assistance programs in order to prevent homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on rapidly rehousing youth in emergency situations.</li> <li>• Provide homeless youth with client-centered supports to ensure they do not become entrenched in the lifestyle.</li> </ul>
6. Reformulate Alberta government assistance programs to ensure they achieve the coordinated objective of providing Albertans with housing stability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align with the Service Delivery Transformation Initiative to move programs towards a citizen-centered, aligned and integrated approach to program development and delivery; reduce gaps, simplify access and improve client outcomes.</li> </ul>

COORDINATED SYSTEMS	
7. Make it easier for clients to connect with Alberta government programs and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance outreach services in the province to ensure young people have access to programs and supports.</li> <li>• Encourage multi-system collaboration to streamline healthy transitions between different government systems.</li> </ul>
8. Review and revise funding and administrative arrangements with homeless-serving agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify roles, definitions, mandates and reporting requirements for community organizations that deliver services to youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.</li> </ul>
9. Develop approaches to prevent provincial systems from discharging clients into homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage multi-system collaboration between Government of Alberta Ministries and systems.</li> <li>• Improve planning and coordination of discharge.</li> <li>• Connect young people to housing options and necessary supports and services.</li> </ul>
10. Support community plans to end homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support community based organizations and municipalities to initiate community-driven responses to address youth homelessness.</li> <li>• Build linkages with existing community plans and interventions.</li> <li>• Build community capacity to respond to youth homelessness.</li> </ul>

THE 10-YEAR PLAN PRIORITY AREAS AND STRATEGIES	ALIGNMENT WITH YOUTH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES
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MORE HOUSING OPTIONS	
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11. Increase the availability of permanent housing with supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support community organizations to expand the housing continuum for youth to include a range of appropriate housing supports; focus on Transitional Housing and Enhanced Accommodations.</li> </ul>
12. Work with other levels of government to create additional housing options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring communities, agencies and governments together to develop strategic partnerships.</li> <li>• Work with partners to implement housing options and other solutions to address youth homelessness.</li> </ul>

MORE EFFECTIVE POLICIES	
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13. Shift expectations and develop outcome measures for emergency shelters in Alberta.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with youth emergency shelters in Alberta to collect better information and measure outcomes.</li> <li>• Focus on rapidly rehousing youth in crisis.</li> </ul>
14. Develop approaches for homeless-serving agencies to share client information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices.</li> <li>• Create a provincial approach to gathering comparable data by establishing common and consistent data collection and data sharing methods.</li> </ul>
15. Simplify personal identification requirements for accessing programs and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage youth throughout the development of solutions, address access issues and the importance of personal identification.</li> <li>• Improve transitions between government systems.</li> </ul>
16. Examine ways of reducing poverty to help prevent homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support a proactive approach and implement youth homelessness prevention strategies.</li> <li>• Support community-based employment and training programs that may lead to sustainable employment for young people.</li> </ul>
17. Identify legislative and regulatory changes to advance the objectives and elements of the 10-Year Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with cross-ministry partners to improve government's response to youth homelessness.</li> <li>• Continue to align with the 10-Year Plan.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2

### Youth Homelessness System Use

Numbers provided by youth serving organizations outline the breadth of supports offered across the province and the related numbers of youth and families that accessed those services.

ORGANIZATION	PROGRAMS	2011-2012 #'s
Youth Empowerment Support Services (Edmonton)	<b>Youth Emergency Shelter</b> – Can accommodate 18 homeless youth. Designed for 15-18 year olds.	317 unique youth * 5,221 intakes
	<b>The Armoury Youth Centre</b> – The Armoury is a safe space for youth to escape the lure and temptations of the streets. The Armoury functions on five key pillars; Health and Wellness, Safety, Recreation, Self-reliance and Education.	732 unique youth * 9,040 intakes
	<b>Skills for Youth (SKY)</b> – SKY is a residential program for 15-18 year olds and can accommodate 12 youth (6 boys and 6 girls). SKY residents are transitioned from the YESS Shelter Program.	46 unique youth
Edmonton John Howard Society	<b>The Loft (Life Opportunities for Transition)</b> – Provides youth with the opportunity to gain the skills, experience and confidence to live and work independently in the community.	15 unique youth
	<b>REE*START (Resources, Education, Employment, Support, Teaching, Advocacy, Respect, Transition)</b> – Support and empowers youth to make healthy choices in life. This is accomplished by promoting the youths' independence and helping them to develop positive support systems.	274 unique youth
49th Street Youth Shelter (Red Deer)	<b>Residential Program</b> – Can accommodate 8 homeless youth.	265 unique youth
	<b>Outreach Supports</b> – The outreach worker works to address the recidivism rates of youth who access the residential program by providing individual support to youth and families.	45 youth and 71 families
	<b>Crisis Line</b> – The 24 hour crisis line is used by teens and families seeking support.	3,029 contacts

ORGANIZATION	PROGRAMS	2011-2012 #'s
Boys and Girls Club of Calgary	<b>Avenue 15 Youth Shelter</b> – Can accommodate 25 homeless youth aged 12 to 18. Shelter supports include a comprehensive support system to help youth permanently end their cycle of homelessness.	262 unique youth * Average age was 15 * 51% were 16+
	<b>Safe House</b> – 9-bed shelter facility that provides transitional shelter and support for multi-risk youth aged 15 to 19 who are on the continuum of homelessness and who have status with Child Intervention.	57 unique youth * Average age 17 * 93% were 16+
	<b>The Infinity Project</b> – Housing First project that supports youth to obtain and keep permanent homes in the community through methods such as convertible leases while youth develop the financial assets and living skills that promote future stability.	40 unique youth
	<b>RADAR</b> – a community collaborative that supports homeless youth who are between the ages of 13 and 15 to reconnect with their families, schools and communities.	18 unique youth
Woods Homes (Calgary, Lethbridge and Fort McMurray)	<b>EXIT Youth Shelter (Calgary)</b> – Can accommodate 15 homeless youth between the ages of 12 to 17. EXIT also provides supportive counselling and family mediation to youth and their families.	614 unique youth * 52% were 16+
	<b>Exit Community Outreach (Calgary)</b> – Operating a downtown storefront and mobile outreach service, they assist young people using a “harm reduction” model. Supports youth aged 12 to 24.	616 unique youth * 13,872 contacts
	<b>Emergency Youth Shelter (Lethbridge)</b> – Can accommodate 8 homeless youth between the ages of 12 to 17.	130 unique youth
	<b>Stepping Stones Youth Shelter (Fort McMurray)</b> – Can accommodate 8 homeless youth between the ages of 12 to 18.	119 unique youth * 66% were 16+
	<b>Stepping Stones Mobile Outreach Service</b> – The service liaises with other youth programs in Fort McMurray, provides outreach to youth ages 12 to 24, and supplies information, basic needs and resources.	435 unique youth * 59% were 16+



ORGANIZATION	PROGRAMS	2011-2012 #'s
McMan Youth Family and Community Services (Medicine Hat)	<b>Inn Between Youth Shelter</b> – Can accommodate 6 homeless youth between the ages of 12 to 17.	49 unique youth
	<b>Shelter Outreach</b> – The service provides “Common Ground” Parent/Teen Mediation, one-to-one support and success coaching for youth and families in order to prevent youth homelessness.	40 unique youth
Grande Prairie Youth Emergency Shelter Society	<b>Sunrise House</b> – Can accommodate 14 homeless youth between the ages of 12 to 17.	72 unique youth
	<b>Family Support</b> – The family support worker assists youth and their families by providing guidance, mediation, problem-solving, emotional support, relationship building and feedback.	15 families

## Appendix 3

### Roles for Government of Alberta Ministries to Address Youth Homelessness

The following ministries represent the core partnering ministries and were involved in the Youth Plan's development.

ROLES ACROSS GOVERNMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure that youth leaving systems of care have been engaged in planning processes that address housing, programming and education supports required to ensure a healthy transition to adulthood.</li><li>• Develop resources for parents who require support including comprehensive tools and resources for parents who are trying to resolve family conflict to keep their family unit intact.</li><li>• Services must be client-centred, with government departments and agencies working collaboratively to easily connect clients with appropriate assistance.</li><li>• Establish the infrastructure required to ensure youth at risk of homelessness or youth who find themselves homeless can access an effective range of services and supports.</li><li>• Identify best practices and support communities to implement them.</li><li>• Develop a provincial needs/risk assessment tool for community organizations.</li><li>• Encourage and/or strengthen connections between community organizations to ensure alignment of programming, shared resources and collaboration.</li><li>• Use a variety of mediums, engage youth as contributing members to the success of the Youth Plan.</li><li>• Provide data to measure the Youth Plan outcomes.</li></ul>
ABORIGINAL RELATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with community organizations and other partnering ministries to develop specific strategies to move youth quickly out of homelessness and into permanent/supportive housing.</li><li>• Work with partnering ministries to develop strategies and responses for urban Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal youth transitioning from reserve or settlement that reflect their unique needs.</li></ul>
CULTURE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborate with community organizations and other partnering ministries to build engaged and inclusive communities.</li><li>• Increase accessibility to services and resources to better meet the changing needs of youth.</li></ul>

## EDUCATION

- Support the development of tools and resources that contribute to building a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment for all students.
- Support comprehensive and collaborative practices and partnerships that ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed.
- Support the development and distribution of public education tool kits for schools, service providers, businesses, etc.
- Increase the capabilities of community leaders, educators and service providers to identify specific intervention strategies, including appropriate referrals and supports, primarily related to identification of youth who are on the verge of or are homeless.

## INNOVATION AND ADVANCED EDUCATION

- Keep youth engaged in school through mentorship, dual credit, trades and other transition programs.
- Support comprehensive services connecting families, schools, post-secondary institutions, community partners and employers.
- Work with youth-serving agencies to get disengaged youth back on a positive career and education pathway.

## HEALTH AND ALBERTA HEALTH SERVICES

- Enhance outreach services delivered by community organizations to ensure young people can be targeted early.
- Invest in youth-focused community-based/mobile mental health and addictions supports.
- Work with community organizations to streamline access to Community Residential Treatment programs for youth.

## HUMAN SERVICES

- Government of Alberta coordination lead for the implementation of the Youth Plan, in alignment with the *10-Year Plan to End Homelessness*.
- Coordinate with the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness to address youth as a specialized population.
- Enhance legislation, tools, processes and policies to improve the security, education, health, safety and well-being of children and youth in Alberta in accordance with the *Children First Act*.
- Enhance the capacity to support family reunification initiatives.
- Create public education tool kits for schools, service providers, businesses, etc.
- Enhance outreach services delivered by community organizations to ensure young people can be targeted early.
- Integrate youth homelessness into broader homeless initiatives.
- Work with community organizations and other partnering ministries to develop specific strategies to move youth quickly out of homelessness and into permanent/supportive housing.
- Keep youth engaged in school through mentorship programs and the provision of comprehensive services connecting families, schools, community partners and employers.
- Develop strategies and responses that reflect the unique needs of diverse groups of youth, including Aboriginal people, immigrant and LGBTQ youth.
- Support community organizations to develop programs and initiatives that include a harm reduction approach.
- Support community organizations to expand the range of housing supports provided to youth between the ages of 13 and 24.
- Work with youth shelter providers to implement a Homeless Management Information System.
- Disseminate data collected through existing point-in-time counts to extract youth specific numbers.
- Develop specific tools and strategies for youth specific point-in-time counts.
- Establish information sharing agreements with youth serving organizations to facilitate the single point of entry support system.

## JUSTICE AND SOLICITOR GENERAL

- Enhance outreach services delivered by community organizations to ensure young people can be targeted early.

## SENIORS

- Support capital investments in housing for youth.

## Appendix 4

### Definitions

#### **7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness** –

The 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness is a collaborative forum comprised of representation from each of the 7 major urban cities in Alberta. The Government of Alberta recognizes the seven Community Based Organizations (CBOs) as the lead local implementing bodies for community plans to end homelessness under the Plan for Alberta. On behalf of Human Services, the CBOs administer funding that targets interventions and supports to move people from homelessness into permanent housing. The 7 Cities are: Calgary Homeless Foundation, City of Lethbridge, City of Grande Prairie, City of Red Deer, Homeward Trust Edmonton, Medicine Hat Community Housing Society, and Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

**Addiction** – A primary, chronic, neurobiological disease, with genetic, psychosocial and environmental factors, characterized by behaviours that include impaired control over drug use, compulsive use, continued use despite harm, and cravings (Savage et al., 2003).

**At-Risk** – A term denoting a group or area that is particularly subject to risk factors and therefore more likely to experience youth homelessness than the general population.

**Capacity** – The collective resources of individuals and systems (families, groups, communities and organizations) to maximize their potential and cope successfully with daily challenges.

**Choice** – Youth were able to select, from a range of options, the suitable location for housing. Constrained only by local availability and affordability, youth felt empowered.

**Enhanced Accommodation** – A housing option that provides young people with a greater opportunity for independent living, but enables them to obtain the flexible, individualized supports

they need. Many of the core supports that define transitional housing are still available, but in this case, the supports are portable rather than being tied to a designated facility. As the young person grows older, matures and develops skills for independent living, the level of supports may decrease or end altogether. However, for a smaller sub-population (young people with a serious mental illness, disability or addictions challenge), the supports may be continuous, long term or even permanent.

**Entrenchment** – To be established so firmly in the homelessness lifestyle that change is very difficult.

**Harm Reduction** – Any program or policy designed to reduce harm without requiring the cessation of the harmful practice. Interventions may be targeted at the individual, the family, community or society. As a promising practice, harm reduction promotes the delivery of non-judgmental services to young people with addictions or other health and social problems with an emphasis on reducing harm.

**Homeless Management Information System** – An electronic database that collects and securely stores information about the homeless population.

**Housing First** – Adopting a Housing First approach means that permanent housing is provided along with comprehensive, client-directed support services based on each individual's particular needs, to promote housing stability and individual well-being. Support services may include intensive medical, psychiatric and case management services including life skills training, landlord liaison assistance and addictions counselling. The essential elements of the Housing First approach are:

- Rapid rehousing of homeless people without pre-conditions or limitations to length of stay.



- A commitment to working with clients for as long as they need.
- An emphasis on consumer choice and self-determination (within given structural constraints).
- An orientation on recovery and harm reduction.
- Social and community integration.

**Individualized Support** – Youth identified that supports were not pressured or forced. The supports they received felt “natural.”

**Mental Health** – A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

**Protective Factors** – Any factors that prevent or reduce a young person’s vulnerability for becoming homeless.

**Resiliency** – The capability of individuals, families, groups and communities to overcome significant adversity or stress in ways that promote health and wellness, and result in an increased ability to constructively respond to future adversity.

**Risk Factors** – Interconnected social and economic factors that can make an individual or group of individuals more susceptible to youth homelessness.

**Scattered-Site Housing** – An approach to social housing that sees benefits in having smaller housing units (apartments or houses) seamlessly integrated into neighbourhoods and communities, rather than larger institutional housing projects. There is some evidence that residents prefer this kind of housing because it is less stigmatizing, and does not ghettoize people to have significant social, income or health problems.

**Supportive Housing** – Housing and support are linked. This means that staff members usually work in the residences to provide support. The amount of hours that staff spends on-site depends on the level of assistance needed by the residents. Supportive housing can be group home settings, low-support self-contained apartments, or high-intensity congregate housing. Residents in supportive housing have limited choices in their housing setting and do not usually have a choice over who lives in the house with them or their neighbors.

- **Short-term Supportive Housing/Transitional Housing** – Temporary housing with support to assist client movement into permanent housing. (Homeless Support Program Delivery’s Conditional Grant Funding Agreement definition.)

- **Permanent Supportive Housing** (long-term) – An intensive model of congregate housing and 24/7 in-house services designed to serve individuals experiencing homelessness for longer periods of time, who may be chronically homeless, and who have many complex and likely co-occurring issues such as a mental health condition, physical health condition, or addiction, and who may benefit from tightly linked supportive services in order to utilize the clinical services they need in order to stabilize their lives and maintain stable housing. The support services are linked to the housing itself. The delivery model incorporates support services in the operations of the housing and staff members usually work in the facility to provide support to residents.

**Tolerance** – Recognition and acceptance that substance use and addictive behaviours are a reality, and that youth require focused, individual support; promotes an environment where youth are not “kicked out” because they stumbled or did not follow through with what was outlined in their success plan.

**Wraparound Supports/Services** – A process by which service providers take an individualized and interdisciplinary approach to meet the full range of client needs. Housing First programs offer services with varying levels of intensity following a housing placement to ensure successful tenancy and promote the economic and social well-being of individuals and families. These services are typically offered for only as long as they are needed. In many instances, services are transitional to help stabilize the individual or family in housing. A focus of the transitional supports is to help the individual or family develop a support network that includes other local or community mainstream resources and/or social service agencies that can be responsive and attentive to the individual's or family's long-term goals and any subsequent crisis. In other cases, on-going, intensive supports will be needed to ensure that the individual or family will be able to remain stably housed. The capacity of programs to provide supportive services following a housing placement is largely determined by, and determines, who is targeted for Housing First services.

Alberta 