



REPORT TO COUNCIL

**TO:** Richmond City Council  
Councillor Malcolm Brodie, Chair  
Planning Committee

**DATE:** May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001  
**FILE:** 4057-11

**RE:** REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS PLAN FOR GREATER VANCOUVER

The Planning Committee, at its meeting held on Wednesday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2001, considered the attached report, and recommends as follows:

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

- (1) *That*
- (a) *the Regional Homelessness Plan's guiding principles be endorsed, and*
  - (b) *the Regional Homelessness Plan be endorsed as a working document to guide and co-ordinate the collective efforts of regional, City and Richmond based stakeholders to address and alleviate homelessness in the region.*
- (2) *That staff be directed to submit the application for SCPI funding to develop a homelessness strategy for Richmond, following receipt of final comments from the stakeholder group."*

Councillor Malcolm Brodie, Chair  
Planning Committee

Attach.

VARIANCE

Please note that staff recommended the following:

That

- (a) the Regional Homelessness Plan's guiding principles be endorsed, and
- (b) the Regional Homelessness Plan be endorsed as a working document to guide and co-ordinate the collective efforts of regional, City and Richmond based stakeholders to address and alleviate homelessness in the region.



**CITY OF RICHMOND**

**REPORT TO COMMITTEE**

**TO:** Planning Committee  
**FROM:** Terry Crowe  
Manager, Policy Planning  
**RE:** **Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver**


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*To Planning - May 23, 2001*  
**DATE:** April 20, 2001  
**FILE:** 4057-11

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

That Council endorse:

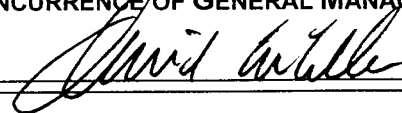
1. the Regional Homelessness Plan's guiding principles, and
2. the Regional Homelessness Plan as a working document to guide and co-ordinate the collective efforts of regional, City and Richmond based stakeholders to address and alleviate homelessness in the region.

  
Terry Crowe  
Manager, Policy Planning

Att.

**FOR ORIGINATING DIVISION USE ONLY**

**CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER**



## STAFF REPORT

### ORIGIN

A Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver has been prepared and is being circulated by the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness to various regional stakeholders including municipalities for review and endorsement.

This report:

- provides Council with a summary of the Regional Plan;
- seeks Council's endorsement for:
  - the guiding principles of the Plan and
  - the Regional Plan to be considered as a working document to guide and co-ordinate the collective efforts of regional and community based stakeholders across Greater Vancouver to address and alleviate homelessness in the region;
- updates Council on the local consultative process with community stakeholders to develop a proposal to seek funding for a local homelessness planning strategy for Richmond.

### FINDINGS OF FACT

The Regional Homelessness Plan:

- identifies key issues and priorities including the wide range of services, support and housing needed to address homelessness, from addiction to mental health services, emergency shelters and long term housing; and,
- provides a co-ordinated framework which identifies policies and actions which can be implemented over the next five to ten years by all levels of government, community agencies and homeless people to address and alleviate homelessness.

**Attachment 1** to this report is an executive summary of the plan. Copies of the entire Regional Plan are available from the Clerk's Office upon request.

### Regional Plan Preparation

The Plan has been prepared over the past year, by the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness which consists of representatives from emergency shelters, service and housing providers, tenant rights groups, health regions, health service providers, urban aboriginal organizations, labour, federal, provincial and local government and the GVRD. The City of Richmond has been represented on this steering committee by Policy Planning staff members Marg Picard and Rob Innes. City staff provided Council with an update of the Regional Plan process at its regular meeting of December 11, 2000.

Funding for the regional plan has come from the Federal Government's *Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI)* program which is available to local organizations and

is aimed at developing and implementing community based solutions to address urgent local homelessness issues.

### Regional Plan Definition of Homelessness and “At Risk” of Homelessness

The regional plan defines homelessness as “living with no physical shelter; on the street, in doorways, in parkades, in parks and on beaches as well as people living temporarily in emergency shelters or transition houses for women fleeing violence”

“At risk” of homelessness includes people living in spaces or situations that do not meet basic health and safety standards, do not provide for security of tenure or personal safety and are not affordable. This also includes people considered as the invisible homeless, such as individuals who are “couch surfing” or staying temporarily with family and friends.

### The Regional Plan's Guiding Principles

The six principles listed in **Attachment 2** have guided preparation of the plan and are embodied as a central element in the plan. In summary form, these principles include:

- Solutions to homelessness require a co-ordinated and inclusive community effort;
- The plan is intended to address the needs of all people who are without shelter, who are living in shelters or safe houses, or who are at risk of homelessness (living in shelter that is not safe, not healthy, not secure (stable) or not affordable);
- Preventing and alleviating homelessness requires flexible and co-ordinated responses that recognize the diversity of homeless people and their needs;
- A “continuum of housing and support” provides the best model for framing effective responses to homelessness;
- Homeless people must have access to all components of this continuum according to community need, and distributed throughout the region;
- The plan is intended to set out actions to alleviate homelessness over the long term, but is a “living document” and will be updated as circumstances require.

### Continuum of Housing and Support Model

The plan adopts the “continuum of housing and support” model for addressing homelessness which recognizes the need to consider and develop co-ordinated action in the three elements of housing, income and support to effectively address homelessness. The continuum advocates a strong prevention approach by focussing on housing and income as solutions to homelessness, while recognizing the importance of support services.

### Plan Goals

The Regional Plan includes the following goals:

- enhancing the continuum of housing and support services
- creating and maintaining a continuum of housing
- ensuring that households have adequate income
- delivering support services; and

- supporting communities in Greater Vancouver to meet local needs.

## ANALYSIS

The regional homelessness plan for Greater Vancouver builds on the significant efforts of community stakeholders which over the years have worked to provide support and services to alleviate emerging homelessness issues throughout the region. The plan represents the region's first comprehensive and strategic effort at developing a co-ordinated, longer range planning framework and strategy to address homelessness.

### Contributing Factors

A number of contributing factors to homelessness in Greater Vancouver are documented in the Plan. These include:

- inadequate capacity of emergency shelter space;
- very little purpose built rental housing being built in the region over the past 10 years;
- existing stock of affordable housing is being lost through redevelopment/conversion;
- demand for social housing is greater than the supply;
- continuing high housing costs/relatively low vacancy rates;
- de-institutionalization policies have not been accompanied by sufficient community supports;
- inadequate social and income supports have exacerbated the effects of family breakdown;
- growing incidence of poverty in the region.

### Implications for Local Government

The plan sets out policy statements and recommended strategies to provide additional services and/or facilities and which are aimed at a variety of stakeholders including various levels of government, community agencies, and homeless persons.

A number of key issues identified in the Plan suggest a role for local government in working with other government and non profit partners in addressing homelessness:

- the existence of gaps and insufficient capacity in the continuum of housing and supports for homeless persons and households at risk of homelessness region wide and in communities around the region;
- the lack of adequate supply of emergency shelter beds in Greater Vancouver region to meet existing needs; homeless people in several communities have no access to shelter beds locally;
- the inability of the emergency shelter system to meet the wide range of needs among the diverse homeless or "at risk" population;
- growing numbers of individuals with mental illness, addictions and/or serious physical, social and behavioural concerns are using emergency shelters;
- the lack of information about people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness;

- the lack of sufficient transition beds in the region to meet the needs of women with and without children fleeing abusive relationships;
- the lack of sufficient supply of supportive housing for all client groups including youth, persons with addictions, mental illness, HIV/AIDS and persons with multiple diagnosis;
- the inadequate supply of new social housing and affordable housing for low and moderate income households in the region;
- the loss of existing stock of affordable rental housing due to redevelopment or conversion

Richmond was identified in among various sub areas of Greater Vancouver which were lacking in a number of services/facilities including:

- minimal barrier emergency shelters which can be responsive to the unique needs of all groups including youth, women (with and without children) refugees, seniors, members of different cultural groups, persons with mental illness, addictions and/or serious physical, social and behavioural issues. The only emergency shelter in Richmond serves single men;
- Second stage transition houses (transitional, time limited housing obtained after leaving an emergency shelter and before person is ready for independent housing);
- Supportive housing, especially for seniors with mental illness and people with special needs;
- Second stage housing for youth (longer than 30 days);
- Permanent affordable housing including new private market rental housing

#### Endorsation of the Regional Plan

Regional stakeholders including Richmond have been asked to:

- endorse the plan's guiding principles outlined in **Attachment 2** of this report and,
- endorse the plan as a "working document" to guide and co-ordinate the collective efforts of regional and community based stakeholders across Greater Vancouver to address and alleviate homelessness in the region.

#### Supporting the Principles

The principles provide a helpful and effective framework to guide implementation of the regional plan and to prepare more locally based strategies. The principles recognize that the solutions to homelessness do not rest solely with one level of government or community, but rather require a co-ordinated and timely response by a number of community partners. Further, the principles recognize the complex nature and dimensions to homelessness issues and the need for policy and action response in the areas of housing, support and income to effectively address homelessness.

#### Endorsing the Regional Plan as a Working Document

The regional plan is intended to be a guide or framework to help co-ordinate efforts by a great number of people across the region to address homelessness. It should be noted that this plan has not been prepared by the GVRD, but rather the multi-stakeholder Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness consisting of emergency shelter, service and housing providers,

health regions and health service providers, urban aboriginal organizations, labour, local as well as regional and senior government representatives.

The regional plan, which has no legal signatories, sets out general directions which can be customized and implemented to fit and address local conditions or circumstances. It is recognized by the parties involved in the process as a common agreement from a wide diversity of people who have been working on the issues of homelessness, including homeless people themselves on regional priorities and general strategic direction.

One of the requirements of the federal (SCPI) funding was the need to identify a legal entity which would assume longer term governance of the regional plan. The Regional Steering Committee is currently considering a governance model option where an existing or newly constituted legal entity could assume this governance role. Existing entities being considered include the Vancouver Foundation, the United Way of the Lower Mainland, or the Greater Vancouver Housing Corporation/Greater Vancouver Regional District. No decisions on the final governance model have been reached to date.

The planning process and the regional plan itself have helped inform the local homelessness planning process in Richmond. Specifically, the regional plan has helped in defining the problem of homelessness in the region, established valuable agency and organizational contacts and provided some sense of homelessness priorities at the regional and municipal level. Municipalities such as Richmond can benefit from the collective knowledge and expertise that has gone into preparing the plan and still have the flexibility and control to develop local plans and strategies as needed.

#### Local Homelessness Strategy for Richmond (Next Steps)

While the regional plan sets out a broad regional context and strategic steps for action, it strongly recognizes the need for more locally based strategies which could more specifically identify and address the unique homelessness issues in various municipalities across the region. The City's current process to work with local community based organizations to develop a proposal to prepare a community homelessness plan for Richmond is consistent with this direction.

At its regular meeting of December 11, 2000, City Council authorized staff to undertake a consultative process with community organizations to determine the feasibility of making a submission for funding under Phase 2 of the SCPI program for the purpose of undertaking a community based, homelessness needs assessment and planning strategy for Richmond.

In response, staff met with approximately 30 representatives from local community agencies and organizations on January 29<sup>th</sup> to solicit input and perspectives on homelessness in Richmond and to explore the feasibility of developing a proposal for funding to prepare a local community homelessness plan for Richmond. It was widely recognized among the participants at the meeting that a local planning framework or strategy was needed in Richmond to address emerging homeless issues in the City. A working group of agency representatives volunteered to continue to work closely with City staff to develop a draft proposal for funding in anticipation of subsequent federal funding opportunities expected in mid May under the SCPI program to help develop local needs assessment and plans as well as build additional shelter capacity. The working group and staff have met three times since the end of January to develop and refine a draft proposal. Once the federal announcement on the availability of the funds are made, staff and the community working group will apply for the funds to do the needs

assessment and plan. Staff will report on the proposal process to Council once dates and timelines have been set by the Regional Homelessness Steering Committee and the Federal Government.

### FINANCIAL IMPACT

The Regional Plan does not identify or allocate any specific costs to proposed strategies.

Pursuant to Council direction, city staff are currently facilitating a process with community stakeholders to seek federal funds under the SCPI to support the preparation of a local, community homelessness plan for Richmond.

Financial implications would largely consist of staff time to actively participate and manage this process once approval for funding to undertake the local needs assessment and plan has been received.

### CONCLUSION

1. Staff have reviewed the regional plan.
2. The regional plan supports the City's corporate vision of creating an appealing, livable and well-managed City.
3. Staff recommends that Council endorse:
  - a) the regional plan's guiding principles and;
  - b) the regional plan as a "working document" to guide and co-ordinate the efforts of government, non government and community based health and social service providers to address homelessness in Greater Vancouver over the next five to ten years.
4. The City's consultative process with local community based organizations to develop a proposal for federal funding to undertake a community plan for homelessness in Richmond is consistent with the regional plan's general direction to encourage the preparation of more locally based strategies to understand and develop local strategies to reduce homelessness. Staff will report to Council once clear deadlines for proposal submissions are set by the Greater Vancouver Regional Homelessness Steering Committee and Human Resources Development Canada.



Rob Innes  
Planner

RI:cas



April, 2001

## REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS PLAN FOR GREATER VANCOUVER EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### Homelessness a "National Disaster"

In 1998, community groups from across the country and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities declared homelessness to be a "national disaster" in Canada. Over the past decade particularly, Greater Vancouver, like other major urban centres across the country, has experienced a marked increase in the number of homeless people, and an equally significant shift in the composition of that population. The number of homeless and at-risk people in the region is unknown, and is the subject of current research. But from shelter operators and service providers in the region, the diversity of this population is known: homeless people today include children and youth, men and women, seniors, families, members of the urban Aboriginal community, immigrants and refugees, people in a range of cultural groups and with a range of sexual orientations, and people with special needs.

For well over a decade, local groups across Greater Vancouver have been developing an array of services and facilities to support people who are homeless or to prevent absolute homelessness for persons at risk. These include full service shelters, drop-in centres, foodbanks and food programs, new affordable and social housing, and community outreach services. These efforts have been made most often without the benefit of sustained funding resources, or of regional coordination, and yet have been critical in establishing services to homeless people. There are, however, serious outstanding issues in alleviating homelessness in Greater Vancouver, and in gaps in the inventory of services and facilities across the region.

#### Regional and Complex Nature of Homelessness

Homelessness has emerged as a regional issue - there are homeless people and people at risk of homelessness throughout the Burrard Peninsula (Vancouver, Burnaby, New Westminster), on the North Shore, in Richmond and within municipalities south of the Fraser River.

Root causes for homelessness are many, and complex in their interconnectedness. In Greater Vancouver, contributing factors include:

- the inadequate capacity of emergency shelter space;
- the absence of new private purpose-built rental housing in the region for at least a decade;
- the dwindling stock of existing affordable housing because of redevelopment and conversion, and the loss of aging affordable rental stock to disinvestment;
- the demand for social housing consistently outstripping supply;

- the high cost of housing;
- the low vacancy rates for rental housing;
- the lack of funding for community supports that were to have accompanied deinstitutionalization policies;
- the lack of discharge planning for people leaving hospitals, prisons and transition houses;
- the inadequate capacity of residential detox and addiction treatment beds;
- the inadequacy of social and income supports in preventing family breakdown;
- changes in the labour market corresponding to changes in levels of personal and household income; and
- a growing incidence of poverty in the region.

## **2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL PLAN ON HOMELESSNESS**

### *The Regional Steering Committee*

The Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness was formed in March 2000 to oversee the development of a regional plan to address homelessness. This planning process was funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and was facilitated by the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). Its founding members represented people long involved in providing shelter and services to homeless people, many of whom in turn represented established networks in the region such as ShelterNet BC, the Housing and Homeless Network of BC (HHNBC), and the regional Cold/Wet Weather Strategy. Since its inception, the Steering Committee's membership has continued to evolve to provide for broad representation, so that currently Regional Steering Committee members represent emergency shelter providers, housing providers, health authorities, urban Aboriginal organizations, community service organizations, service providers, the immigrant services community, women's transition homes, substance counselling agencies, advocacy groups, business/labour, the regional district and all three levels of government. (See Appendix A to the plan).

### *The Planning Process*

The Steering Committee has developed this regional plan through a community-based planning process, over a year in duration, which has included two extensive stakeholder planning workshops, wide distribution of information bulletins at critical phases in the plan's development, and small-group sessions with homeless individuals in shelters and drop-in centres. Committee members continue outreach and consultation efforts with a number of organizations serving homeless people, including urban Aboriginal organizations and youth and youth serving organizations. The planning process has also shown that some communities in the region require an opportunity for further planning to identify local strategies and specific priorities.

The planning process has also involved collaboration among all levels of government. The Government of Canada announced in December 1999 that it would invest \$753 million in an approach to help alleviate and prevent homelessness across the country.

The cornerstone of this approach is the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), under which this planning process was funded. In BC, this federal initiative builds upon the previous partnerships under the Vancouver Agreement, and upon previous Provincial and local government partnerships for the regional Cold/Wet Weather Strategy, and the Homes BC program. Intergovernmental collaboration on homelessness continues, with the absence of a national affordable housing strategy being a dominant theme in these discussions.

#### Why a Regional Plan Now

Development of a regional plan for Greater Vancouver provides an opportunity to address homelessness in a coordinated regional way in order to assist government, community agencies and homeless people to coordinate efforts, set priorities, and more effectively target scarce resources. The regional plan that has been developed is a comprehensive and strategic document intended to guide the future actions of major stakeholders in the region over the next five to ten years. It documents and confirms emerging regional consensus on policy directions, many of which had been developed through previous work by community networks and government initiatives, and also establishes a context within which federal and other funding initiatives can occur.

### **3. THE REGIONAL PLAN ON HOMELESSNESS**

#### Purpose and Scope of the Plan

The purpose of the regional plan is to document contributing factors to homelessness in Greater Vancouver, and correspondingly to identify policies and actions that can be implemented by all levels of government, communities and the private and non-profit sectors to prevent and alleviate homelessness in this region.

The geographic scope of the plan is Greater Vancouver, as defined by the boundaries of the GVRD, and therefore includes twenty-one municipalities in the region. The policy scope of the plan is also broad, in acknowledgement of the complexity of issues that create and sustain homelessness: therefore, the plan provides a framework for community based programs and services region-wide that address homelessness and its root causes. It looks at capacity and how existing delivery systems can be improved. Its policies were based, in part, upon an analysis of gaps identified in the regional inventory of services and facilities (See Appendix B in the plan), and therefore the plan identifies priorities and sub-areas of the region where these gaps need to be addressed.

#### Definition of "Homelessness"

The regional plan addresses the needs of homeless people who are living with no physical shelter (on the street, in parkades, on beaches, etc.) as well as people living temporarily in emergency shelters or transition houses, or in unstable or inappropriate housing such as motels. At any one time, there are homeless people living rough and staying in emergency shelters.

The plan also addresses the needs of individuals “at risk of homelessness”. This includes people living in spaces or situations that do not meet basic health and safety standards, do not provide for security of tenure, or personal safety, and are not affordable. This also includes people considered “the invisible homeless”, such as individuals who are “couch surfing” or staying intermittently with family and friends.

### Guiding Principles of the Plan

The guiding principles of the plan are that:

1. Solutions to homelessness require a coordinated and inclusive community effort.
2. The plan is intended to address the needs of all people who are without shelter, who are living in shelters or safe houses, or who are at risk of homelessness (living in shelter that is not safe, not healthy, not secure (stable) or not affordable).
3. Preventing and alleviating homelessness requires flexible and coordinated responses that recognize the diversity of homeless people and their needs.
4. A “continuum of housing and support” provides the best model for framing effective responses to homelessness.
5. Homeless people must have access to all components of this continuum according to community need, and distributed throughout the region.
6. The plan is intended to set out actions to alleviate homelessness over the long term, but is a “living document” and will be updated as circumstances require.

From these principles, the goals set out in the plan include:

- ◆ enhancing the continuum of housing and support services;
- ◆ creating and maintaining a continuum of housing;
- ◆ ensuring households have adequate income;
- ◆ delivering support services; and,
- ◆ supporting communities in Greater Vancouver to meet local needs.

### Continuum of Housing and Supports

The plan adopts a model for addressing homelessness based on the continuum of housing and support. The continuum consists of three major elements - housing, income and support, each of which has several sub-elements. The continuum espouses a strong prevention approach by focusing on housing and income as solutions to homelessness, while recognizing the importance of support. The continuum serves as a framework for organizing the plan and all its elements, including the inventory of services and facilities.

The following types of accommodation and housing form the housing continuum: emergency shelters, transition houses, supportive and second stage housing, and independent housing (itself comprising a range of housing from SRO's, and boarding/rooming houses through to market rental housing). Employment, employment insurance, and income assistance represent the income component of the continuum. Support services emphasizes programs and services and includes: outreach, drop-in centres, health services, mental health services, prevention services, and substance misuse/addiction services.

### Priorities

The regional plan sets priorities that were identified through an analysis of the inventory of facilities and services, knowledge of Steering Committee members, input from two stakeholder planning workshops, and interviews with key stakeholders. They are:

#### Under Housing

##### 1. Minimal Barrier Emergency Shelters

Some specific priorities include increasing emergency shelters which can be responsive to the unique needs of all groups including youth, women (with and without children), refugees, seniors, members of different cultural groups and Aboriginal people. Some locations in the region identified as requiring those shelters included North Vancouver, City of Langley, Richmond, Surrey and New Westminster. Due to inadequate capacity more beds/facilities are also needed in Vancouver. Additional capacity and services are also needed to provide shelter for people with mental illness, addictions and/or serious physical, social and behavioural issues.

##### 2. Transition House Beds

Currently transition houses are able to meet less than one third of the demand from women with and without children fleeing abusive circumstances.

##### 3. Supportive Housing Units

There is a need to increase the number of units across the region, particularly for seniors with mental illness, Aboriginal people, low income urban singles and people with special needs. The planning process also identified the need for more second stage housing for youth (longer than 30 days), and people with special needs. Areas of the region specified as requiring those units were the North Shore, Inner Municipalities, and those South of Fraser.

##### 4. Permanent Affordable Housing

This includes new private market rental and social housing, as well as initiatives to increase and preserve the existing supply of affordable private market units. This is a priority in particular areas of the region, namely Core Area Municipalities, the Northeast Sector, Ridge/Meadows, North Shore and Vancouver. There is also a need for more Low Income Urban Single units in the City of Vancouver outside its Downtown Eastside community.

#### Under Support Services

##### 1. Outreach

There are not enough outreach services for adults in this region. This is particularly true for adults not connected to a mental health team.

The need was identified for more facilities that provide free food, shelter, and services targeted specifically for women. The need was also identified for more services targeted specifically for youth, including shelters, detox facilities, long term treatment centres, specialized foster homes for youth with fetal alcohol syndrome and youth who have experienced sexual abuse, crisis beds, transition housing, safe house beds, and lifeskills training.

Drop-in centres can play an important role in the daily life of a person who is homeless. The regional inventory identified 24 drop-in centres throughout Greater Vancouver. However, only three facilities offer 24 hours of service daily. Urgent priority needs identified through the planning process include more drop-in centres particularly those that offer 24 hour service daily, and those that meet the needs of a wide range of clients including refugees, individuals with substance misuse issues and criminal justice involvement, and intravenous drug users. Areas of the region identified as requiring these centres included Surrey, the Langleys and the North Shore.

## 2. Mental Health Services

There is general agreement among service providers that between one third and one half of individuals who are homeless suffer from a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Clients who are transient, or have unstable housing, present a unique set of challenges for the delivery of mental health services. The regional inventory confirms that there is not adequate capacity throughout the system to meet the mental health needs of those with a serious and persistent illness. There are currently shortages of emergency shelter, short stay crisis and respite beds.

## 3. Prevention Services

Prevention services may take the form of direct assistance (to prevent evictions, support stable tenancies, find affordable housing), social programs designed to support the family unit, and indirect assistance (advocacy work aimed at addressing housing and poverty issues). While there appears to be a broad range of prevention services in Greater Vancouver, accessibility is an issue. The need for a 24 hour housing registry/information service has been identified as a priority.

## 4. Addiction Treatment

This was identified as a fundamental component of the continuum of housing and support and is an urgent priority for addressing homelessness in the region. Urban areas in Greater Vancouver are struggling with the issue of death and disease related to injection drug use. While the epidemic is centred in the Downtown Eastside of the City of Vancouver, it reaches beyond Vancouver as well. Urgent priorities identified through the consultation process to date are for residential detox and treatment for youth, women and Aboriginal people. Specific needs for a sobering centre, dual

diagnosis treatment and methadone treatment were also identified. These were seen as particularly urgent priorities in the South of Fraser and Vancouver sub-regions.

### Under Income Supports

The need for households to have sufficient incomes to afford adequate housing is one of the key elements of the continuum of housing and support. This income can be from employment, transfer payments (such as income assistance, employment insurance and pensions), or a combination of these.

1. Mainstream employment and training programs are not effective in connecting homeless individuals with jobs. New approaches that are specifically targeted to homeless and homeless at risk individuals are required.
2. Many homeless people are not employed, and a significant share of unemployed individuals are ineligible for benefits under Canada's employment insurance system. Those who are eligible face a lengthy waiting period before they receive benefits, which places them at risk of homelessness. A review of eligibility requirements and of waiting periods for benefits is required.
3. Some people in need of income assistance are ineligible for benefits and cannot access housing or emergency shelter. In addition, eligibility criteria may result in people losing their benefits, which may place them at risk of homelessness. A review of eligibility criteria is required.
4. The shelter component of income assistance is insufficient.

## **INVESTMENT**

It is not possible at this time to anticipate the range of initiatives expected to flow from the priorities identified by the plan's policies. Some of these initiatives will be funded under SCPI, but because the horizon of the regional plan extends to ten years, funding initiatives beyond SCPI will be required as stakeholders within the region move forward with full implementation of the plan.

When the first "urgent needs" components of the plan were completed in the fall of 2000, the Greater Vancouver Regional District, on behalf of the Regional Steering Committee, sent out a Call for Expressions of Interest for Urgent Need Projects to over 200 stakeholders. As a result, twenty-two urgent need proposals were recommended for SCPI funding in its first fiscal year, ending March 31, 2001. At time of writing, of these, twenty-one projects have been approved and contracted, representing an investment of \$8.1 million. The majority of projects represent new facilities and services or enhancements to existing facilities and services for the absolutely homeless.

The Province has provided the full “community contribution” required under the SCPI program, for example through its Homes BC and regional Cold/Wet Weather Strategy funding. In April, 2001 the Province also announced an additional 800 units to address homelessness across the province, as part of its Homes BC unit allocation for 2001/02.

Beyond SCPI, investment decisions will lie with the governance body (and whatever administrative or advisory bodies it includes in governance) yet to be identified for this regional plan on homelessness. The Regional Steering Committee will continue to participate in governance of the plan in some capacity, working to ensure that funding and investment decisions remain consistent with the plan’s policies.

## **OUTCOMES**

The lifetime of the regional plan is approximately a decade. The expected outcomes of the Regional Plan implementation include the following:

- increased awareness and commitment throughout the region to addressing issues faced by persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- concrete projects and services which meet priority needs of those with homelessness issues;
- geographic distribution of facilities and services throughout the communities of the Greater Vancouver region;
- various models of partnership evident in homelessness responses; and,
- enhanced collaboration among planners, advocates, government and non-government agencies and organizations in order to better coordinate responses to a broad range of concerns comprising the homelessness issue.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### *Endorsation of the Plan*

The Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver is now substantially complete and has been forwarded to Minister Claudette Bradshaw, Minister of Labour and Federal Co-ordinator on Homelessness, for approval. At the same time, the plan is being circulated widely among local constituencies for endorsation, and further outreach with a number of sectors in the homeless population continues.

All constituents whose support for implementation of the plan will be required over the long term will have an opportunity to review and endorse the plan over the coming months. It is anticipated that this endorsation process may take six to ten months, and will likely require sustained efforts by the Regional Steering Committee in presenting and advocating for the plan with stakeholders around the Greater Vancouver region. The regional plan will be distributed to all member municipalities of the Greater Vancouver Regional District, to all pertinent Provincial ministries and Federal departments, and to a wide range of community groups and networks. With respect to



community organizations, it is anticipated that approximately 200 groups will receive the regional plan with a covering letter requesting endorsement. The Steering Committee will be looking for endorsement of the guiding principles of the plan and approval/adoption of the regional plan as a working document. This is a commitment to the spirit of the plan.

#### Years Two and Three of SCPI Funding

It is anticipated that the next Request for Proposals for SCPI funding will be issued in May, 2001 and that it will again be fully regional in geographic scope, but wider in eligibility criteria than the first solicitation, to reflect the continuum of housing and supports identified in the regional plan. A working group of the Steering Committee will develop the timelines, process and tools. Proponents will be given five to six weeks to prepare submissions, during which time the Regional Steering Committee will host proposal development workshops. The Steering Committee will be responsible for reviewing, evaluating and recommending projects to HRDC.

#### Future Governance

A second and larger issue in sustainability of the regional plan is the issue of governance, models for which continue to be discussed by the Steering Committee. This issue is two-fold, in that "governance" here refers not only to administration of the SCPI program (which is to terminate at the end of March, 2003), but also to the longer term responsibilities for implementation and monitoring of the regional plan over its lifetime. With respect to delivering SCPI, until a governance entity is identified, the current "shared delivery model" will continue: this has entailed the Regional Steering Committee taking responsibility for developing the Request for Proposals (RFP), assessing proposals submitted and making recommendations for funding to HRDC, with the GVRD facilitating this RFP process, and HRDC carrying out "due diligence" on each funded proposal. Given that the regional plan is a policy framework with a lifespan of up to ten years, responsibilities for the longer term implementation and monitoring of the plan will likely be moved to a community entity. The Regional Steering Committee will continue to play a strong advisory role under whatever governance model is determined for Greater Vancouver's plan on homelessness.

## 2 Principles of the plan

The plan identifies policies and actions that can be implemented by all levels of government and the private and non-profit sectors to prevent and alleviate homelessness in Greater Vancouver.

The following principles are embodied in the plan.

- 1) Solutions to homelessness require a coordinated and inclusive community response. The plan will be implemented through collective efforts by homeless people, housing groups, advocacy groups, service providers, community organizations, labour, the private sector, local governments within the GVRD, and provincial and federal governments.
- 2) The plan addresses the needs of people who are living with no physical shelter - on the street, in doorways, parkades, in parks, on beaches - or people living in emergency shelters or safe houses. It also addresses the needs of individuals 'at risk of homelessness' living in spaces or situations that do not meet basic health and safety standards, provide security of tenure or personal safety, and are not affordable.
- 3) Preventing and alleviating homelessness requires flexible and coordinated responses that recognize the diversity of homeless people and their needs. The plan is inclusive and is intended to be sensitive to the diverse social, economic, cultural, religious, and language needs of all people including different target populations such as women and men, families, children, youth, seniors, Aboriginal people, new immigrants, refugees and refugee claimants, gay, lesbian and transgendered individuals as well as people with special needs including those with mental illness, disabilities, substance misuse, multiple diagnosis, fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effect, brain injuries, HIV/AIDS, criminal justice system involvement and victims of abuse etc.
- 4) A "continuum of housing and support" that consists of the following components best serves the needs of people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.

### Housing continuum

- emergency shelters
- transition houses
- supportive and second stage housing
- independent housing

### Adequate income

- employment
- employment insurance
- income assistance

### Support services

- outreach
- drop-in centres
- health services
- mental health services
- substance misuse services
- prevention services
- Aboriginal/holistic services

- 5) Homeless people must have access to all components of the "continuum of housing and support" according to community need and distributed throughout Greater Vancouver.
- 6) The plan identifies actions (including education and communication) that can be initiated or implemented to address homelessness over the long term, beginning in year 2001 and will be updated as necessary.