

# Strategy to Establish a Plan to End Youth Homelessness in BC

The BC Coalition to End Youth  
Homelessness

February 5, 2018

# 1. Background

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## Introduction:

This plan outlines a process to engage youth voices, indigenous perspectives and British Columbia (BC) communities in a BC Coalition to develop a collaborative provincial plan to end youth homelessness.

Youth homelessness is defined as the “situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.”<sup>1</sup>

## Background to Community Planning to End Youth Homelessness in BC

In 2012, a national program called The Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness Program (MLC) was initiated in Toronto. The ultimate goal of this group was “to end youth homelessness by fostering collective community action and promoting systemic change to public policies in Canada”.

Kamloops was named as one of two pilot communities and that community developed a youth homelessness action plan called “*A Way Home*”. At the same time, a grassroots Kamloops collective was initiated to explore how to create housing for youth aging out of care into homelessness. This group was asked to implement the plan and became the A Way Home steering committee. The A Way Home Kamloops (AWHK) plan transformed youth services by bringing all sectors together to develop youth housing and supports. This collective grew to include over 140 members and six action teams dedicated to ending youth homelessness.

In 2015, MLC asked AWHK for permission to adopt the name A Way Home Canada for the national organization. While there is no formal association between A Way Home Kamloops and A Way Home Canada, A Way Home Kamloops works collaboratively with A Way Home Canada with the common goal of ending youth homelessness.

In 2016, Kamloops was the first community in Canada to conduct a local youth only homelessness point-in-time count. As a result of this count and community consultations, a need for policy changes and provincial supports to end youth homelessness was evident. A Way Home Kamloops met with provincial ministers to educate government on the urgency of youth homelessness and the resources required to address it. When provincial government representatives met with A Way Home Kamloops in early 2016, it was suggested that the Kamloops example represented a microcosm of what a provincial coordinated response to end youth homelessness could be. As a result of provincial and local discussions, A Way Home Kamloops set a strategic priority to develop a provincial plan to end youth homelessness.

Communities across BC do exemplary work to address youth homelessness. It is intended that the totality of BC communities’ best practices will form the foundation of a shared provincial plan. Innovative service approaches include specialized services for pregnant youth such as Aunt Leah’s, programs for youth aging out of care such as TRRUST (Transitions in Resources,

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<sup>1</sup> The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. (2016). The Canadian definition of youth homelessness.

Relationships and Understanding Support Together), the Street-Wise Designs for Youth group led by youth for youth at the Nanaimo Women's Centre and co-ordinated "one-stop" services such as the Foundry Model. Kelowna has formed an A Way Home Steering Committee to develop a youth plan. The Okanagan Boys and Girls Club initiatives include shelter diversion practices and prevention strategies to support youth and their families. BC agencies and organizations like McCreary Centre Society, Covenant House and others conduct critically important research and have worked to develop a knowledge base for provincial efforts to meet the needs of youth who are homeless or at risk. BC's provincial plan will be developed collaboratively and led in partnership to ensure that the plan is sustainable and community based, reflecting and meeting the diverse needs of youth and communities throughout BC.

## **Youth Homelessness in British Columbia**

British Columbia is diverse. The province includes urban centers, rural and northern communities, Indigenous communities, reserves, unique regions and islands. British Columbia is home to 198 First Nations, about one third of all First Nations in Canada. The First Nations of BC have rich and varied cultures, histories and traditions. Most BC First Nations did not sign treaties and 70 of BC First Nations are currently in negotiations with the Government of Canada, along with the Province of BC through the BC Treaty Process. Provincial and federal governments, municipalities and First Nations all have governance roles in programs and structures related to youth homelessness and developing a plan to end youth homelessness will require careful planning and input that reflects the uniqueness of BC and its youth population.

- Youth are served by a distinct infrastructure and designated provincial systems. Youth under the age of 19 have specific legal entitlements and restrictions.<sup>2</sup>
- Youth have higher experiences of episodic and hidden homelessness.
- Indigenous youth are over-represented in the youth homeless population
- Unique to youth homelessness are causes that can include familial conflict and abuse, as well as structural stressors including poverty or system failures such as aging out of foster care.<sup>3</sup>
- Youth homelessness is characterized by a developmental stage where youth may have never lived independently from adult caregivers.<sup>3</sup>
- Youth have increased vulnerability on the streets and experience higher levels of criminal victimization such as sexual exploitation.<sup>5</sup>
- There is a need for early intervention as prolonged youth homelessness results in increased trauma, mental health, substance use, and survival activities. We must intervene before youth become street entrenched.<sup>6</sup>

Youth homelessness is challenging to enumerate and B.C. has a research gap in identifying the magnitude of this issue. The Point-In-Time (PIT) counts underestimate youth homelessness by focusing primarily on street homelessness. For example, the Kamloops 2016 PIT count identified 7 youth; while youth-specific methodology identified 56 youth experiencing homelessness during

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<sup>2</sup> Baker, J.P. (2013). A Way Home: A plan to end youth homelessness in Kamloops.

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. (2016). The Canadian definition of youth homelessness.

<sup>5</sup> Calgary Homeless Foundation. (2011). Plan to end youth homelessness in Calgary.

<sup>6</sup> Gaetz & Redman. (2016). Federal investment in youth homelessness.

that same time period. However, PIT counts do provide a starting point of understanding the minimum number of youth experiencing homelessness in B.C. When reviewing B.C.'s most recent PIT Counts, there were 24 communities who participated in 2014 or 2016. Out of these:

-15 communities identified youth ages 19-24 and in sum there were 465 youth experiencing street homelessness in B.C.

-7 communities identified youth under 19 and in sum there were 106 youth experiencing street homelessness in B.C.

## **2. Toward a Plan to End Youth Homelessness in British Columbia**

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### **Mission**

To develop a provincial plan to end youth homelessness that ensures every youth has access to safe housing and the supports needed to sustain it.

### **Core Strategy Values:**

- ❖ *Youth First Voices are First Priority:* Youth First Voices bring lived experience expertise. Youth Voices are powerful and engage diverse stakeholders in a shared vision. Treating youth voices as paramount will promote policy changes that are grounded in lived experience and will empower those who have been oppressed through homelessness. This project strategy was created by a Youth First Voices young adult.
- ❖ *Community-Led Movement:* Communities in B.C. are engaged in co-creating a provincial plan to end youth homelessness. Diverse communities, organizations and governments engage and work in collaboration to end youth homelessness by fostering collective community action and promoting systemic change to public policies in B.C. through a bottom-up approach.
- ❖ *Integration of Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action:* It is widely reported and recognized that Indigenous youth are over-represented in the homeless population.<sup>7</sup> Diverse Indigenous communities and leaders have a lead role in the BC movement to develop a provincial plan to end youth homelessness. Fourteen of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action pertain specifically to children and youth. These priorities will inform all areas of BC's provincial strategy to end youth homelessness.

### **Project Goals:**

1. Ensure Youth First Voices and Indigenous Voices have a lead role in the development of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness in British Columbia.
2. Engage community partners in the plan to end youth homelessness.
3. Engage and work collaboratively with other programs and initiatives involved in addressing youth homelessness in Canada and BC.

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<sup>7</sup> Gaetz, S. & et al. (2016). Without a home: The national youth homelessness survey.

4. Research the state of youth homelessness in British Columbia and promising practices to prevent and reduce its occurrence.
5. Ensure government is an active and informed participant in the development of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness.
6. Develop a provincial plan to end youth homelessness that includes community actions to drive change.

### **Project Outcomes:**

#### ***Short-term Outcomes*** (next 12 months):

- ❖ Establish a BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness and a community of practice (CoP) on youth homelessness
- ❖ Conduct research and complete environmental scans of current services and promising practices
- ❖ Identify, implement and sustain effective services and promising practices related to the prevention and ending of youth homelessness:
  - Prevention and early intervention
  - Housing
  - Supports and services
- ❖ Establish a BC Provincial Plan to End Youth Homelessness that is developed and endorsed by Youth First Voices, Indigenous Voices, community stakeholders and governments.

#### ***Long-term Outcomes:***

- ❖ Provincial policy and resources to prevent and end youth homelessness.
- ❖ Inter-ministry coordination and community collaboration to prevent and end youth homelessness.
- ❖ End youth homelessness and ensure immediate responses to youth at risk of homelessness.

### **What would a provincial plan in B.C. do?**

The solution to youth homelessness is a provincial plan that provides resources, policy changes, inter-ministerial coordination and a collective shared responsibility for mobilizing change. This plan must be developed and led by Youth First Voices, Indigenous Voices and local B.C. communities to ensure solutions are responsive to our distinct and diverse provincial needs. A provincial plan endorsed by government would be a show of leadership and ensure communities move forward in a coordinated manner towards ending youth homelessness. Other benefits of a provincial plan include:

- Support for communities to complete action plans, coordinate services, and develop resources that meet the needs of youth in their unique context.
- Validate and support for local efforts to innovate solutions and coordinated responses such as community plans. The provincial plan's priorities should promote flexibility.

- Increase awareness and leverage momentum by bringing all the key stakeholders together to ensure every sector has a role and is supporting the shared vision.
- Inspire all key stakeholders to come together to inform the changes needed in our province to end youth homelessness. This includes: youth, Indigenous organizations, businesses, ministries, non-profits, faith communities, and concerned citizens.
- Increase private sector involvement and encourage funding organizations to prioritize community initiatives to end youth homelessness.
- Increase information sharing and support the development of a provincial community of practice.
- Inform the planning of other communities that have an initiative to end youth homelessness.

### **What commitments and strategies would a Provincial Plan include?**

This plan would be co-created by a provincial Youth Against Youth Homelessness Advisory, a BC Coalition including leadership from communities and Indigenous organizations throughout BC, and provincial government. The plan would include:

#### *1) A commitment of provincial government responsibility to end youth homelessness:*

- Collaboration with and advice to government on:
  - Policy changes and coordinated, inter-ministry provincial responses
  - Promising practices to end youth homelessness including prevention, housing, and support programs.
- Recommendations of financial resources from the provincial government to support local communities housing and support programs to end youth homelessness.
- An implementation plan and process that ensures Youth First Voices, Indigenous Voices and B.C. communities are heard.

#### *2) A strategy for youth housing:*

- To meet the needs of youth, communities should be supported to develop an array of housing options. This includes: emergency housing, stabilization housing, mentorship programs, transition housing, scattered site units, private market housing, and access to subsidized market housing.
- Articulate the support needs of youth housing programs in B.C. Housing supports should include: therapy for trauma related to physical and sexualized violence, mental health and

substance-use treatment and counseling, life-skills, outreach, health, sexuality, recreation, cultural, education, employment, and peer support.

- Provincial targets and bench-marks such as number of housing units needed.

3) *A strategy for preventing youth homelessness:*

- Assess current access statistics and ensure timely access to specialized therapy and victim services for children and youth who experience physical and sexualized violence, and other childhood experiences associated with later youth homelessness.
- Explore the concept of “duty to assist” as a rights-based approach to ending youth homelessness; investigate prevention legislation such as in Wales where there can be a duty to assist youth, likely to be homeless within 56 days, to secure accommodations.<sup>8</sup>
- Prevent youth homelessness by reducing system discharges into homelessness by coordinating ministries at the provincial level and by bridging transitions from foster-care/provincial care, justice, hospitals, treatment facilities, and mental-health systems.

4) *A strategy for supports to end youth homelessness:*

- Ensures an Indigenous lens and leadership role in developing a culturally responsive plan to support Indigenous programs and governments.
- Ensure adequate mental health, substance-use, life-skills, employment and education supports for youth.
- A strategy to incentivize coordinated supports at local levels.

5) *Collaborative research, planning and information-sharing to end youth homelessness:*

- Collaborate with leaders in youth homelessness such as A Way Home Canada to conduct research, provide training and identify strategic approaches to developing a plan to end youth homelessness
- Develop a provincial community of practice through support for coordination and information-sharing efforts
- Be the catalyst to develop a coordinated youth point-in-time count and gather the evidence we need to address the magnitude of the problem
- Environmental scan of promising practices in B.C.
- Provide a strategy and support for rural and remote communities

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<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on Allocation of Accommodations and Homelessness.

## **Process and Timelines to Develop a Provincial Plan**

### **Nov 2017 – Dec 2018**

Establish coalition of agencies committed to ending youth homelessness in BC

Action items include:

1. Drafting and development of Strategy document and Terms of Reference
2. Discussion of membership, collaboration plans and priorities
3. Sharing of knowledge and promising practices
4. Development of an informal provincial community of practice
5. Engaging allies committed to ending youth homelessness in BC

### **Jan – Mar 2018**

Formalize work of the BC Coalition and Identify priorities and work plans

1. Establish Leadership Committee
2. Leadership Group tasks:
  - a. Finalize BC Coalition plan documents and membership considerations
  - b. Develop overall work plan structure and guide overall work plan development
  - c. Draft goals and propose working groups

Priorities tentatively identified:

- Develop collaboration plans to engage and work in partnership with the provincial government and community, provincial and national organizations
- Develop and implement plans to engage Youth First Voices and Indigenous Voices
- Develop work plans for each priority goal

### **Mar – Dec 2018**

Implementation of work plans for all priority goals

### **Jan 2019**

The BC government adopts a BC Provincial Plan to End Youth Homelessness that is developed and endorsed by Youth First Voices, Indigenous Voices, community stakeholders and governments.

### **Project Resources**

The United Way TNC is supporting this initiative through the First Voice Manager of *A Way Home Kamloops*. It will begin with 30 hours per month from Nov 2017-April 2018 and 60 hours per month from May 2018-Jan 2019. Other organizations are encouraged to contribute staff time to support the development of the BC Coalition and plan. Additional resources and assistance will be sought as needed to sustain the plan.

## **Partners**

1. Kamloops A Way Home Committee to End Youth Homelessness: United Way TNC
2. Pacific Community Resources Society
3. Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness
4. Cowichan Housing Association
5. Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society
6. Boys and Girls Clubs of Kamloops
7. Boys and Girls Club of the Okanagan
8. Boys and Girls Club of Williams Lake
9. Central Okanagan Foundation
10. BC 10 Community Entities
11. First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
12. BC Non-Profit Housing Association
13. Covenant House
14. Aunt Leah's Place
15. McCreary Centre Society
16. TRRUST Collective
17. Prince George YMCA
18. Prince George Friendship Center
19. Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association
20. BC Poverty Reduction Coalition
21. more TBA

## **Roles of Ministries, Crown Corporations and Political Party Representatives**

Many provincial government Ministries and Crown Corporations play a key role in providing supports and services that are critical to preventing and responding to the needs of youth, and ultimately, to preventing and ending youth homelessness in B.C. Likewise, political parties and other organizations are allies in the goal of ending youth homelessness. At strategic points, the BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness will engage with provincial government agencies and related organizations in a non-partisan way to share information and work collaboratively to achieve the goals of establishing and achieving the provincial plan.

The table on the following page presents “Key BC Ministry Roles and Issues Related to Youth Homelessness” and includes “sample priorities” based on identified service issues and gaps. The contents of this table should be considered “draft” or “preliminary”, as it is intended that roles and priorities will be identified and clarified through planning and collaboration as part of the development of the provincial plan to end youth homelessness.

## Key BC Ministry Roles and Issues Related to Youth Homelessness

BC Ministry	Role	Youth Homelessness Issues	Sample Priorities
Municipal Affairs and Housing	Safe, affordable housing; support for local governments, non-profits, healthy communities	Access to housing and supports in BC communities	Adopt Youth Housing First, Treatment First models
Children and Family Development	Child Protection; Family support; Children with Special Needs, Youth Services; Transition Plans	Trauma; protection/supports to children, youth, young adults, families; housing and supports alternatives; youth agreements; access to therapy for sexual abuse	Youth Voices/Indigenous Youth Voices; access to therapy, youth/young adult services, youth agreements; transition planning
Social Development and Poverty Reduction	Financial assistance; Supports to people with disabilities; Transition Planning	Adequate income; income assistance; transition planning	Transition planning; inclusive, community-based supports
Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation	Promote positive relations, reconciliation, Indigenous youth leadership; Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women (MACIW)	Over-representation of Indigenous youth; need for cultural safety, respect and humility	Indigenous Youth Voices; Indigenous initiatives; cultural safety, respect and humility
Education	Enable children, youth to develop their potential, acquire knowledge, skills, abilities to contribute to a healthy society, sustainable economy	Inclusion and accommodation; retention/graduation rates	Ensure individualized education plans, adequate, low barrier supports/services
Public Safety and Solicitor General and Emergency	Corrections, victim services, address human trafficking, public safety, criminal record checks	Over-representation of youth who have been victimized	Ensure youth friendly response to victimization; Child/Youth Advocacy Centre model
Mental Health and Addictions	Improve access to and quality of mental health and addictions services; immediate response to the opioid public health emergency	Timely access to effective treatment; homeless youth at increased risk in opioid crisis	Ensure timely access to community-based supports; harm reduction
Health	Ensure access to quality, appropriate, cost effective and timely health services	Safe housing; access to youth-friendly health services	Ensure youth friendly, low barrier health services
Advanced Education, Skills and Training	Post-secondary education and skills training	Access to training and supports	Individualized plans, adequate support
Labour	Promote fair wages, healthy, safe working conditions and employment relationships	Fair wages, worker safety, protection from exploitation	Ensure fair wages and workplace safety for youth
Overall BC Government Commitment  (included in all Ministry mandates)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make life more affordable</li> <li>2. Deliver the services that people count on (e.g., ensure children get access to quality education; families get timely health care</li> <li>3. Build a strong, sustainable, innovative economy that works for everyone (tackle poverty and inequality, create good-paying jobs, ensure people <u>from every background</u></li> </ol>	Need for Inter-Ministry focus and coordination on youth homelessness and related issues; inadequacy of transition planning and supports for youth and young adults, especially those exiting provincial government care	Ensure BC Gov't commitment to end youth homelessness; inter-ministry coordination; legislation, funding and services to meet the needs of youth; time-frame, strategy and accountability to end youth homelessness

	have the opportunity to reach their full potential		
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