

Social Housing in Nanaimo Explained

AFFORDABLE HOUSING VS SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

What is the difference between affordable housing and supportive housing?

Affordable housing is based on economic need. The government (Provincial and/or municipal) provides a subsidy to a housing development to bring the rents down; typically the goal is to have the tenant pay 30% of their income in rent (called Rent Geared to Income or RGI). Generally speaking, affordable housing does not come with tenancy support staff although meal programs are sometimes provided. Residents of affordable housing projects are expected to be self-managing and independent in terms of their daily living activities.

Some examples of affordable housing projects in Nanaimo include: Mount Benson Seniors Housing Society (55+ singles and couples) on Prideaux Street and Comox Road, Nanaimo Affordable Housing Society (single adults) on Wallace Street and Pacifica Housing (families) on Sixth Street.

Supportive housing is affordable housing that comes with tenancy support staff who are typically on-site 24 hours a day. Residents of supportive housing projects will usually have significant barriers to maintain a successful tenancy such as mental illness, substance use disorders, history of trauma, diminished capacity of some kind, etc. Staff in supportive housing projects are primarily tenant support workers but also function to control access to the building and to manage the internal dynamics.

Some examples of supportive housing projects in Nanaimo include: 437 Wesley Street (36 units), 6025 Uplands Drive (31 units) and 1598 Boundary Crescent (41 units).

OTHER HOUSING OPTIONS IN NANAIMO

- Emergency shelters – Salvation Army New Hope Centre for Men (24 beds), Samaritan House Shelter for Women (21 beds), Unitarian Winter Shelter for all genders (30 beds), Tillicum Lelum Youth Safe House (12 beds)
- Transitional housing – typically aimed at people leaving substance use disorder treatment programs or correctional facilities who are making significant changes in their lives. IN Nanaimo there are a number of transitional housing units run by Island Crisis Care Society, John Howard Society and Vancouver Island Mental Health Society. Funding for this housing typically comes from the Provincial Government.
- Shelters for women and children fleeing violence – Nanaimo has two of these shelters. Women from all walks of life access this type of emergency shelter. They typically stay for a short period of time (less than 2 years) until they can transition into affordable or market housing. These shelters have staff on-site 24-hours a day.
- Congregate Care Facilities – Seniors-oriented buildings that provide three meals per day, light housekeeping and a very basic level of psycho-social support. Residents typically move in after the age of 55 and stay there for the remainder of their natural life or until they need a higher level of care in which case they will transition to an extended care facility.
- Group homes – Typically contained in a standard single-family home, these are oriented to particular special needs populations such as adults or youth with developmental disabilities. Typically a group home will have three to five residents living in it.

- Rental subsidies – This is a direct cash subsidy to an individual who uses it to subsidize the cost of renting a private market unit. The average subsidy is around \$250/month. Subsidies are aimed at seniors (Shelter Assistance for Elderly Renters, SAFER), homeless individuals and families. Nanaimo has approximately 1,100 active subsidies.

Other Services in Place for Homeless Individuals

HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

Harm reduction refers to policies, programs and practices that aim to reduce the harms associated with the use of psychoactive drugs in people unable or unwilling to stop. The defining features are the focus on the prevention of harm, rather than on the prevention of drug use itself, and the focus on people who continue to use drugs. (<https://www.hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction>)

Some examples of harm reduction include the provision of clean needles to intravenous drug users, supervised consumption services, provision of condoms, and sterile drug use paraphernalia. An example of harm reduction for everyday life is seatbelts in cars.

Harm reduction services currently in place in Nanaimo include an overdose prevention service, a needle exchange, and sobering and assessment centre.

OUTREACH SUPPORTS

There are a number of outreach workers in Nanaimo who focus specifically on homeless individuals. Services provided by these workers include provision of harm reduction supplies and Naloxone kits, support for housing placement, wound treatment, and referrals to treatment options and other community based services.

Some organizations in Nanaimo that provide outreach support include, Unitarian Winter Shelter, Island Health, Canadian Mental Health Association, John Howard Society, and Island Crisis Care Society.

FOOD SUPPORTS

Food supports come in two forms: a prepared hot meal or a bag of groceries. The 7-10 Breakfast Club provides a hot breakfast and a bagged lunch five days a week and some weekends to any member of the community. The Salvation Army provides a hot lunch and dinner to any community member for a nominal charge. The Loaves and Fishes Food Bank provides a bag of groceries to those affected by food insecurity from a variety of locations across the community.

Causes of Homelessness

Homelessness is not a simple phenomenon. There are many reasons why a person might become homeless including:

- A history of trauma
- Abuse at home
- Developmental disability
- Acquired brain injury
- Problematic substance use
- Mental illness
- Inability to access housing that is safe and affordable
- Personality disorder, impaired cognitive or emotional functioning
- Physical disabilities
- Poverty
- Other health issues and impairments
- End of a relationship
- Bad luck