

# ATTACHMENT C

## ***Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness 2018-2023***



**United Way**  
Central and Northern  
Vancouver Island

**Canada**

Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition



## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Executive Summary.....	5
Section One: Background.....	8
Profile of Nanaimo .....	8
Homelessness in Nanaimo .....	9
The need for a new action plan .....	10
Process for a new plan .....	10
Relationship to Nanaimo's affordable housing strategy .....	11
Section 2: Context for the 2018-2023 Action Plan .....	12
The demographic and economic context .....	12
Increased acuity in addictions and mental health .....	14
Service Context: Gap analysis .....	15
Section 3: Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023.....	18
Strategies to address homelessness .....	18
Overview .....	18
Discussion of recommended strategies .....	20
Strategy 9: An Indigenous-specific approach.....	30
Indigenous holism and the self .....	31
Housing as reconciliation .....	32
Conclusion.....	33
APPENDIX A: INVESTMENT IN NANAIMO FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES.....	34
APPENDIX B: NANAIMO HOMELESSNESS COALITION MEMBERS.....	35
References .....	36
Endnotes .....	37



## Introduction

On behalf of the **Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition**, I am pleased to present ***Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023***.

This plan has been developed with funding from Service Canada, the government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and the support of many agencies and individuals in Nanaimo and Oceanside who have shared their wisdom and experience in serving community members experiencing homelessness. On behalf of United Way, I want to thank each and every one of you for your contribution to this work.

*Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023* is the result of the collective research and voices of the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition. The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition is made up of non-profit societies, representatives from the three levels of government, faith groups and community members who have an interest in developing and carrying out solutions to homelessness. Building on the significant work invested in previous homelessness plans, the Coalition hired Springbok Consulting to conduct interviews and collaborate with the Coalition to develop this Action Plan.

**The Action Plan lays out a pathway to help us achieve a city where everyone has safe and stable housing.** We know ending homelessness is a journey of a thousand steps, and so with each step we aim to make life a little bit better for community members seeking long-term housing. In doing this work, in ending homelessness, we are also guided by a second vision: to ensure that people experiencing homelessness also find a secure place in the community, to feel that they belong in Nanaimo. We aim to make people feel that they have a home, in all the senses of that word.

Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023 reflects current circumstances, but it also reflects decades of experience in developing and implementing solutions that tackle the multiple causes of homelessness, including the high cost of housing, addictions, the long historical effects of colonization, trauma, and enduring poverty.

**But while our community has made significant progress, there remains much work to be done. We therefore invite your participation in this work and welcome your feedback.**

As you read through this document please keep in mind that this Action Plan focuses on services and programs. It adopts the language of non-profit organizations, of funders, and of other stakeholders who work together to help solve social issues. The Plan has been developed for the people that the services and programs are intended to help. It is also for our wider community that desires a clear and effective way to help the homeless and thus the health of our overall community.

A critical dimension of homelessness, then, is to understand the homeless as community members, as citizens; as more than the recipients of services. So, while this Plan speaks to



services, it does so only to speak to the human experience of those who are homeless and also for those in the wider community wanting to engage in helping our community become healthier.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Signy'.

Signy Madden  
Executive Director—United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island  
Community Entity, Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Service Canada



## Executive Summary

This report aims to help Nanaimo end homelessness, or where homelessness persists, to diminish the harms it produces. It does so by guiding and organizing the delivery of services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

To meet this goal of helping Nanaimo to end homelessness, the report sets out a five-year plan for homelessness services. Building on previous plans and on the experience and knowledge of community agencies, *Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018 – 2023* (the “Action Plan”) aims to both coordinate programs for the homeless over the next five years and give them a strategic direction.

This Action Plan builds on the framework for homelessness services created between 2008 and 2017, which provides Nanaimo with a strong foundation to help community members who face housing challenges.

This Plan addresses homelessness, which is one dimension of the housing crisis facing Nanaimo. But this Plan also works in conjunction with the City of Nanaimo's soon-to-be-developed affordable housing strategy. Together, the two strategies aim to address a broad range of housing issues in the community.

The Action Plan is aimed primarily at those who live in Nanaimo. But it also speaks to the fact that Nanaimo is a regional hub, serving individuals and families from places such as Oceanside, or Ladysmith.

To date, Nanaimo has done well in its response to homelessness. But times change, and as this Action Plan sets out, the service system in Nanaimo faces real challenges in current era that present substantial risk to community members if left unaddressed. Those challenges—for instance, changes in the rental market and in the nature of homelessness—can't be met only with the existing services and will thus demand a different approach. A strategic shift is required.

*“Put bluntly, Nanaimo faces pressures that threaten the integrity and sustainability of the current service system if not addressed.”*

**Put bluntly, Nanaimo faces pressures that threaten the integrity and sustainability of the current service system if not addressed.** This report has found that a gap has opened up between community expectations, the needs of the homeless, and the strategies used by agencies to respond to these two pressures. This gap is real, and must be addressed if the service system is to retain community support and maintain its capacity to serve its clients.

Two issues in particular require attention.

**First, the service system in Nanaimo needs to account for the challenges posed by changes in the housing and labour markets;** in particular, sharp rises in housing costs, low vacancy rates, and precarious income. This change in the economic context is amplified by a social change; specifically, the need to recognize and respond to the increasing acuity and complexity of addictions and mental health issues in Nanaimo.



**Second, the current system of services needs to be modified to address gaps in services that were identified by service providers,** which range from lack of support to escape street involvement to the need for more graduations in supportive housing.

**It must be stressed that this Action Plan is intended as a mid-level strategic document, rather than a detailed operational plan.** This is to give it flexibility to respond to changes at the level of services and funding, and to ensure a consistent approach over a five-year or longer period. It guides operations, rather than mandating their contents.

In terms of strategic shifts in the system of homelessness services, the Action Plan recommends the following ten strategies.

#### **Strategy 1: Better engagement with people at the perimeter of the shelter system**

- Incremental additions to shelter beds to meet population increases or to account for reductions in other housing options.
- More robust outreach for shelter-only or service-avoidant individuals.
- An intervention strategy designed to interrupt the pathways leading to street involvement.

#### **Strategy 2: Create a day space/Drop-in facility**

- Allow the users of the drop-in space to control some portion of the facility.

#### **Strategy 3: Remap social networks**

- Align social integration activities with the goal of shifting people into identified, pre-existing community networks or circles.

#### **Strategy 4: Managing market pressures and income insecurity**

- Provide incremental increases in rent supplements.
- Coordinate with federal and provincial ministries responsible for labour force development.

#### **Strategy 5: Supportive housing**

- Add to the number of dry housing units available; develop scattered site housing.
- Develop more incremental steps within the housing continuum for more efficient matching of services with clients.
- Find a mechanism to engage and recruit more 'informal' rental resources.

#### **Strategy 6: Support for personal and program transitions**

- Dedicate resources to managing transitions in the lives of community members, and within service streams.
- Modify a Rapid Rehousing program to focus it on supporting transition points.

#### **Strategy 7: Manage increasing acuity**

- Redirect resources to managing acute addictions and mental health issues.
- Integrate an 'acute lens' with transition management.



#### Strategy 8: Increased sector capacity

- **Implement a half-time position to coordinate homelessness services; the position should be managed by a lead agency, provisionally identified here as the United Way.**

#### Strategy 9: Considerations in serving Indigenous people

- **Integrate an 'Indigenous lens' into the services that flow from this Action Plan.**

#### Strategy 10: Prevention through agency coordination

- **Homelessness service providers should coordinate on an annual basis with other agencies in Nanaimo that provide prevention or support services.**

Each of the ten strategic directions are discussed in detail in Section 3.





## Section 1: Background

### Profile of Nanaimo

The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy famously wrote; “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” In writing these words, in telling us that families differ most—and most tellingly—in the circumstances of their sorrows, Tolstoy is asking us to pay attention to the specifics of suffering and trauma. He is inviting us to attend, in other words, to the way in which the expression of suffering or loss exposes, not just the experience of the individual, but also the local and the particular circumstances of that experience; to the way in which trauma or loss or even just indifference can make us confront the uncomfortable relationship between daily communal life and the experience of dislocation and abandonment. We sometimes think of being a member of a community as being like a warm embrace that brings us together. Tolstoy reminds us that being a member of a community can also mean deprivation and exposure.

So too with homelessness, which occurs in every city but is shaped, in the end, by the local situation and the specific dynamics in the community: the particularities of place and time, and the embodied texture of one’s local relationships.

Taking Tolstoy’s lead, this Report aims to make clear the circumstances that will, over the next five years, drive the experience of homelessness in Nanaimo, giving homelessness its local form and also conditioning the community’s response to this issue.

This five-year homelessness plan thus aims to guide service providers in understanding emerging challenges in homelessness in Nanaimo, and to suggest strategies that may be effective in diminishing the harms produced by precarious housing.

### **The Current Local Context in Nanaimo**

If this is so, what shapes homelessness in Nanaimo and the community response? What is the local context?

The first context is Nanaimo’s energy: the city hosts dynamism and change, displacement and settlement. The city is an active, diverse community located on the coast of Vancouver Island with a growing population; today, more than 91,000 people live within city limits.<sup>1</sup> As a hub for central and northern Vancouver Island, Nanaimo is a channel for the movement of people and goods for the region, attracting people from across Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. We should be careful to note that while a hub for the Island now, it has always been a hub for First Nations, who have long hosted Indigenous people from other parts of North America and elsewhere. Even the Coast Salish name for the area, *Snuneymuxw*, means ‘meeting place’.

In contemporary times, population movement into Nanaimo came from those seeking a better life through international migration to Canada; from Indigenous people seeking education or employment opportunities; and from people from the Lower Mainland looking for a more affordable place to live.

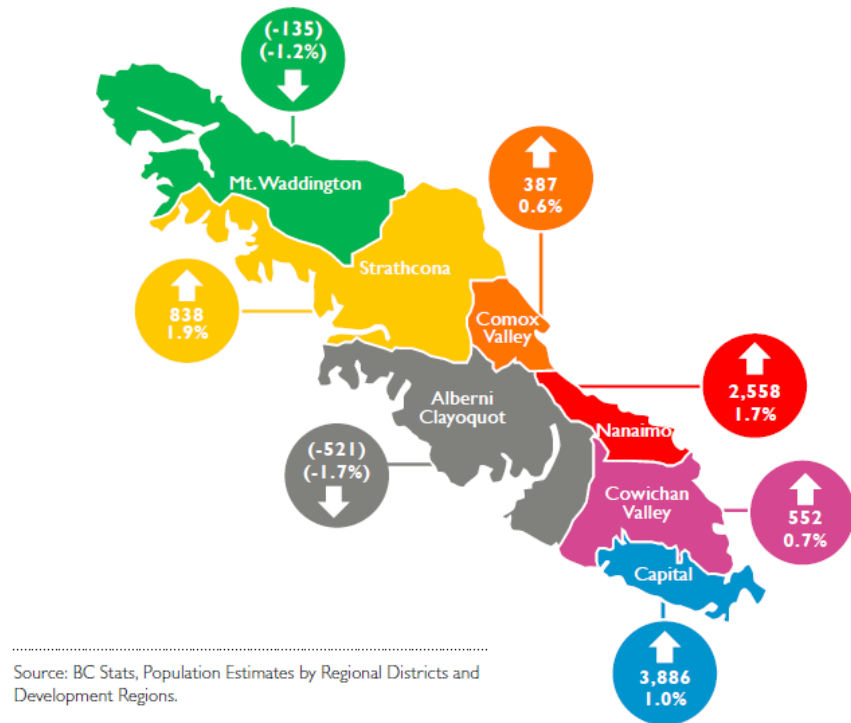
As evidence of this dynamism, the City’s growth rate is well above the provincial average. Between 2011 and 2016, Nanaimo’s grew by 8%; in comparison, the rest of B.C. averaged just 5.5%. On the Island,





Nanaimo outpaces Victoria as a place to move to or raise a family.<sup>2</sup> If Nanaimo is growing, it is not just in absolute numbers, but also in its external connections and internal complexity. Through its role as both an economic centre and a destination for people from outside the City, Nanaimo is increasing its integration into a wide range of economic, social and familial relationships.

#### Population Growth BY REGION 2014 TO 2015



Graphic reproduced from The Vancouver Island Economic Alliance 2016 Report

### Homelessness in Nanaimo

But if Nanaimo is a diverse and active city, it can also be a difficult place to live.<sup>3</sup> While some people experience Nanaimo as a dynamic community, others experience it as a challenging place to live, with episodic employment opportunities, low wages and limited affordable housing. The non-Indigenous population in Nanaimo is also growing older, with larger numbers of people in fixed income, who struggle with the steady increases in housing costs that seem inevitable.

As a result, some members of the community find themselves living in the gap between the promise of Nanaimo as a place of growth, and the reality of Nanaimo as a place where stable, safe housing is tenuous, or at worst, unavailable. But one does not simply 'live' in this gap; one struggles, one succeeds, one fails, or one survives. Or sometimes, one does not survive. If Nanaimo is at the centre of a web of economic, social and familial relationships, it remains the case that this web sometimes fails, or breaks, leaving some community members exposed, without access to safe, affordable housing.

This is not a trivial problem, affecting a handful of people. While estimates of homelessness<sup>4</sup> are uncertain and subject to wide variation, the 2016 *Point In Time (PIT) Count*, identified a minimum of 174 people who experienced absolute homelessness<sup>5</sup> in Nanaimo. Given the limitations<sup>6</sup> of the PIT Count,



the real numbers might be closer to 300, if we include those community members who are episodically homeless. And beyond these of course are many more residents who stay on couches or live in unhealthy or dangerous places, or who cannot thrive because they are consumed by housing challenges.

### ***Service Planning and Coordination***

The community has not remained idle in the face of this issue. Nanaimo is, at its heart, a closely-knit place with a long history of collective action on social and economic issues. As a result of the work of agencies and individuals, Nanaimo has developed a broad range of programs aimed at helping people at risk of homelessness.

Over time, this system of services and support has grown in complexity and size, such that coordination and planning of services has become an essential feature of the system rather than a luxury. The most recent attempt to create a coordinated plan for homelessness in Nanaimo was in 2008, which produced the *Nanaimo's Response to Homelessness Action Plan*.<sup>7</sup> This Action Plan builds on that work, adding the changes needed to account for the issues that Nanaimo will face over the next five years, and for developments in services since the 2008 report.

### **The need for a new action plan**

Significant changes have occurred in Nanaimo and in homelessness since the 2008 action plan was drafted. Rising rents, increasingly complex mental health and addictions behaviours, and precarious employment; these and other changes have shifted the landscape for homeless services. In addition, the housing initiatives delivered in the ten years since the 2008 action plan have had a significant, positive, impact on the face of homelessness. All of these motivate the need for a new plan.

It should be stressed that much is at stake over the next five years. The need for a new five-year plan stems from the realization that while the current system is still working, pressures on services are rising, and changes must be made before the demand for services can no longer be accommodated at a reasonable level.

As described below, homelessness services face two systemic risks: increased pressure for highly complex, expensive services for acute addictions or mental health issues, and large numbers of more simple cases of people who are pushed out of the housing or labour markets.

### **Process for a new plan**

In early 2017, Kaleidoscope Consulting conducted an initial set of consultations with stakeholders in Nanaimo to set out the broad strokes for a new five-year homelessness plan. Subsequently, Springbok Management Services was hired to complete the plan. To achieve this, interviews with service providers and community advocates in Nanaimo and Oceanside were conducted. This was supplemented by a brief review of the relevant literature and a review of other homelessness plans in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

*Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023* was produced under the direction of the Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, and with the administrative support of the United Way Northern and Central Vancouver Island. The City of Nanaimo provided extensive technical and advisory support. The 2018 Action Plan is also informed by the input of community members and service agencies.



### Relationship to Nanaimo's affordable housing strategy

This Action Plan focuses on services for the homeless and those who are at risk of homelessness. It does not deal directly with the issue of affordable housing, which is aimed at reducing barriers to home ownership, or encouraging certain kinds of rental housing at below-market value, for instance, for seniors on fixed incomes.

While the Action Plan and Nanaimo's affordable housing strategy aim at different groups within the community, there is some overlap. Both concern themselves with the housing insecurity that comes when there is a substantial gap between income and housing costs, making it more likely that vulnerable people will slip out of market housing and into episodic homelessness. Both attempt to respond, that is, to situations where the alternative to expensive housing is not cheaper housing, but no housing at all.

This Action Plan speaks directly to the issue of affordability, as it should, given that the high cost of housing in Nanaimo is clearly pushing some people into homelessness. But the services called for in this Action Plan require a strong, active affordable housing strategy to be effective. This Plan then, needs to be implemented in close cooperation with an affordable housing strategy.





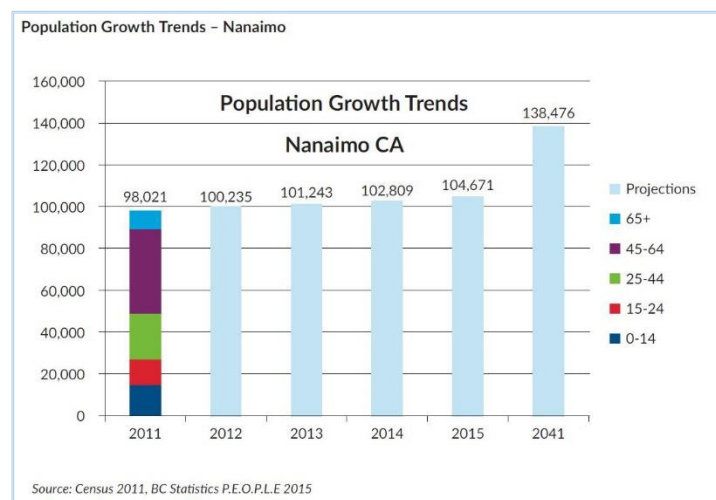
## Section 2: Context for the 2018-2023 Action Plan

To ensure that Nanaimo's strategies for ending homelessness remain effective in the face of changing circumstances, three major contexts need to be considered:

- ➡ The demographic and economic context, particularly population growth and market changes;
- ➡ The deepening opioid and mental health crises, and its impact on the ability to secure safe housing;
- ➡ The service context, both gaps in the current system and the capacity of providers.

### The demographic and economic context

Nanaimo is experiencing sustained population growth: between 2017 and 2035 the Nanaimo region is expected to grow by an additional 35,000 people.<sup>9</sup> This increase is most pronounced in the working age population, which tells us that many see Nanaimo as a place to come to when their communities experience economic distress. This and other data implies that the labour force in the community is both precarious and mobile, factors which increase the likelihood of episodic homelessness. All else being equal, an increase in population will itself create additional pressure on the service system. And the aging of the non-Indigenous population means that agencies will likely see an increasing number of older people on fixed incomes in the service stream.



While the percentage of international immigrants into Nanaimo (still largely drawn from Europe and Asia) has remained relatively stable in proportion to the total population, some agencies suggested that official statistics do not tell the whole story.

In the experience of agencies, Nanaimo is seeing more people coming from high conflict zones or escaping state-sponsored violence. The result is that housing vulnerability is accompanied, for some, by the trauma of forced dislocation, and of distrust of official systems. This is a familiar story in Indigenous communities, but it is now an issue in other populations as well. This follows a trend explored below: homelessness is becoming more complicated and more acute, and requires a different response than what was appropriate a decade ago.



### Market changes

As with other parts of southern B.C., housing prices in Nanaimo have risen sharply over the last five years, both absolutely and in relation to income. As the figure below shows, between 2015 and 2016 for instance, house prices grew by more than 14%.<sup>10</sup>

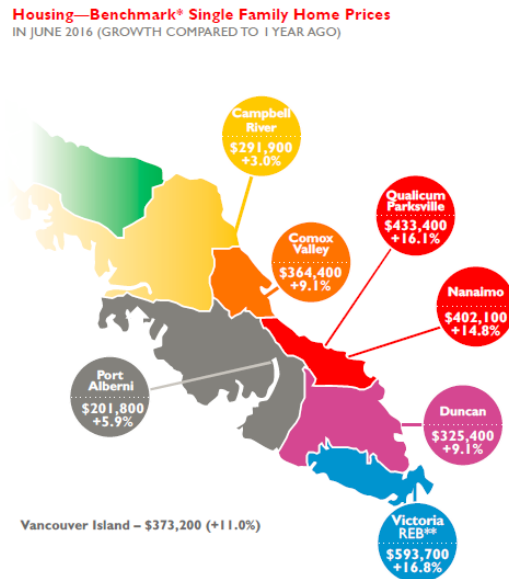


Figure 2: From the State of the Island Economic Report 2016

This increase in costs is also present in the rental market. Here, the problem of rising costs is exacerbated by low vacancy rates. Between 2014 and 2016, for instance, the average vacancy rate dropped from 2% to 1.5%.<sup>11</sup>

	Bachelor		1 Bedroom		2 Bedroom		3 Bedroom		Total	
	October 2014	October 2016	October 2014	October 2016	October 2014	October 2016	October 2014	October 2016	October 2014	October 2016
Rents – Private	\$585	\$636	\$723	\$760	\$847	\$895	\$1,030	\$1,150	\$773	\$816
Vacancy Rates – Private	4.7%	2.3%	1.4%	0.9%	2.2%	2.2%	1.9%	2.5%	2.0%	1.5%

Table 1.

This tightening in the housing market is amplified by the fact that, while wages from employment are rising in Nanaimo, they continue to lag behind B.C. as a whole.<sup>12</sup> This constellation of market forces means that even as employment grows in Nanaimo the gap between income and the cost of housing is widening.

The gap between income and housing costs not only threatens those who are vulnerably housed. It also impacts service agencies, whose staff also face a widening difference between income and housing



costs. And there is no evidence to suggest that this trend will reverse, which risks creating a class of people whose access to housing is permanently tenuous.

#### Increased acuity in addictions and mental health

A second consequential shift in the context for homelessness services is in changing patterns of drug use and in mental health issues.

In the consultations that led to this Action Plan there was consensus amongst providers that the homeless population and the vulnerably housed are experiencing much higher levels of acuity in mental health and drug use, particularly with respect to opioid use.

This experience is supported by the available evidence. According to the Coroners Service of British Columbia there were 24 deaths from suspected opioid use in Nanaimo from January 1, 2017 to July 31, 2017<sup>13</sup>. This is a fourfold increase since 2012. The same report indicates that the Central Island Health delivery area is in the top five health service areas with the highest rates of death from illicit opioid use.

Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths by Top Townships of Injury, 2007-2017* [2,4]											
Township	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Kamloops	11	7	7	10	2	5	8	7	7	42	27
Nanaimo	2	2	6	4	8	6	20	16	19	28	24
Maple Ridge	5	2	6	4	4	5	10	14	29	27	22
Langley	3	6	2	3	10	5	10	10	10	30	20

Table 3

These two environmental shifts—accelerating costs of rental housing against flat incomes, and sharp increases in the acuity of mental health and drug use issues—will present real service pressures over the next five years. These pressures will affect different parts of the system:

- ➡ Rental increases will impact the economically homeless, such as those people who are marginally attached to the workforce, but who may be otherwise ready to house;
- ➡ Increased acuity in addictions and mental health issues will create complicated cases. While the numbers in this group may be low, people experiencing mental health or opioid addictions are often difficult to house, and are more unstable when housed.

The social, economic, and demographic changes discussed here mean that gaps have appeared between the needs of homeless people and the current service system, a system which was designed for Nanaimo a decade ago. This position was confirmed in the consultations with service providers who also pointed to the unevenness in services to homelessness.

It is not only negative changes—such as the opioid crisis—that create the need to re-think the current system. It is also the positive impact of the services and housing provided over the last decade. The hard work of agencies and government has solved some problems and made others easier to address, and this Plan also tries to account for the changes introduced by a decade of interventions.



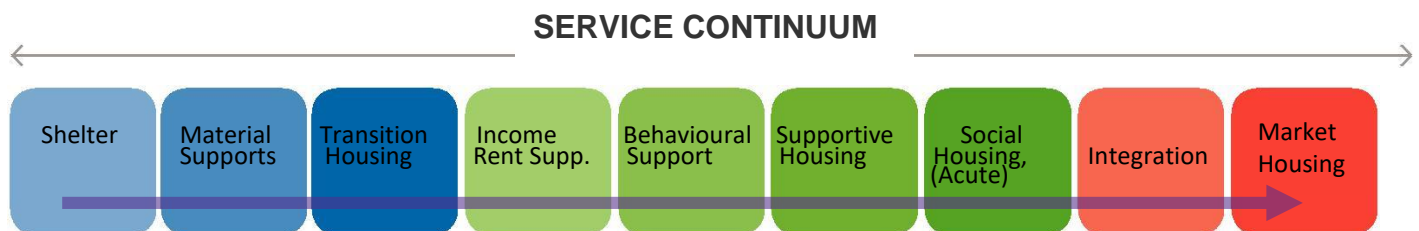
As discussed below, these changes and the positive impact of the work accomplished since 2008 mean that some shifts are required in the current system of services to ensure they remain effective.

### Service Context: Gap analysis

In developing this Plan, community agencies were invited to describe what needs to be changed in order to meet the needs of the homeless over the next five years. Their responses are as follows:

#### *The Housing Continuum*

A number of agencies talked about the need for a full “service continuum.” This refers to the need for a wide, but integrated range of housing and support options across a number of dimensions. Those services and options can be seen as moving from less intensive or intrusive (e.g., shelter beds) to more intensive housing and social supports, and finally to market housing as the preferred outcome to service interventions.



#### *Services as a flow or a network, not a box or silo*

It should be stressed that the continuum of services is just this: a continuum, not a set of self-contained activities. In a place like Nanaimo, service activities flow across and between social networks, overlapping and interacting with other services, people and places. While this Plan is organized around filling gaps in a service continuum, this ‘continuum’ is in truth an integrated flow of activities that all touch upon each other and that have multiple linkages backwards and forwards.

This is one of the strengths of Nanaimo as a mid-sized city: it is large enough to produce a comprehensive range of services and small enough to avoid producing isolated silos. It has not yet lost the ability to think about services, the people served, and the large community as a relational whole, and to see homelessness as structured by a range of cross cutting ties.

***“A strength of Nanaimo: large enough for a comprehensive range of services and small enough to avoid producing isolated silos”***

This description of services as woven into the fabric of the community has resonances with the way culture is understood in Indigenous communities. Culture is not an ‘activity’ or a service: it is rather an orientation and a resource that influences everything it touches. Accordingly, if this Action Plan speaks to ‘gaps’ in the system, these gaps should be understood as breakdowns or interstices in a web of relations or a network of overlapping service activities, rather than as an empty space between agency silos.





In the consultations, no consensus emerged as to a single point of change that should be at the core of the next five-year plan. The problem is diffused, nuanced, and systemic, not the result of a single major fault line. This is not surprising given the diversity of the community and its agencies.

Instead there was a variety of views about gaps in the current system, which, for respondents, occurred at a range of places along the continuum. The exception here is that there was broad agreement on the increasing acuity of addictions and mental health issues.

Gaps identified in the system of services include:

For shelters:

- lack of tools or capacity to reach those who access shelters only in cold weather or are otherwise service avoidant
- insufficient shelter beds due to continued pressure from population growth
- gaps in services to prevent street involvement
- lack of physical locations for homeless people to gather during the day



Material supports/rental supplements

- insufficient supports to those who are vulnerable from increasing rental costs

Supportive housing/behavioural supports

- inadequate supply of dry shelter or supportive housing suitable for those who need a drug-free or alcohol-free environment
- need for options outside of congregate housing, i.e., scattered site housing
- lack of transition support for acute mental health and addictions
- lack of interventions in early addictions pathways (13-16 year olds)
- lack of support for community and social integration
- gaps in the housing continuum between supportive housing and market rentals
- need for more cultural specific services, i.e., for Indigenous people

Rapid rehousing, and personal and service transitions

- lack of support for people making transitions out of care, or from institutions into more market-orientated housing

Market housing

- better landlord support, such as more ACT or HOST teams and other supports
- rent supplements for low-income people with moderate acuity





Sector capacity/coordination

- lack of dedicated staff person to provide coordination and support to providers
- wage lift for workers in the sector, who also face pressure from high housing costs
- need for a stronger data collection function across agencies to measure service pressures
- need for better access to or collation of outcomes measures
- lack of a service management function to help smooth service transitions for clients
- coordinated response to Supreme Court decisions, e.g., *Abbotsford (City) v Shantz*<sup>14</sup>





## Section 3: Nanaimo's Action Plan to End Homelessness, 2018-2023

### Strategies to address homelessness

#### Overview

The Action Plan set out below moves Nanaimo towards a service system that addresses all relevant aspects of the service continuum. It is thus informed by the gaps in the continuum but also by changes in intensity produced by shifts in the social and economic context. Some issues are more pressing and others less so than they were in 2008.

An important finding should be emphasised: the review of the current system determined that the system in place is largely the right one: the strategies set out here are thus intended as revisions or additions to the current system, not as a replacement. The strategies aim to direct new resources and shape discretionary decision making.

*"Samaritan House is experiencing numbers like we have never seen ... in August our occupancy rates were 128% with women turned away 111 times."*

But the review also identified that new social stressors, including market changes and increasing addictions issues, have stretched the current system to the point where it risks losing the ability to manage the issues of homelessness. At a minimum, agencies risk losing the limited, but still real broad public support that exists for their work.

In light of the gaps identified in the consultations, the research on homelessness, and the socio-demographic trends facing Nanaimo, this Action Plan has identified eight strategic directions that should form the basis for the delivery of services over the next five years.

These are:

#### **Strategy 1: Better engagement with people at the edge of the shelter system**

- Incremental additions to shelter beds to meet population increases or to account for reductions in other housing options;
- More robust outreach for shelter-only or service avoidant individuals
- An intervention strategy to interrupt the pathways leading to street

#### **Strategy 2: Create a day space/Drop in facility**

- Allow the users of the drop in space to control some aspects of the space.

#### **Strategy 3: Remap social networks to broaden clients' social worlds**

- Shift social integration activities to ensure the homeless are connected to wider social networks, especially networks not derived from the social services sector; for instance, to sports leagues, or professional networks.



#### **Strategy 4: Managing market pressures and income insecurity**

- Provide incremental increases in rent supplements
- Coordinate with federal and provincial ministries responsible for labour force development
- Develop affordable housing in the city and the region

#### **Strategy 5: Supportive Housing**

- Add to the number of dry housing units available, develop scattered site housing.
- Develop more incremental steps within the housing continuum for more efficient matching of services with clients.
- Find a mechanism to engage and recruit more 'informal' rental resources.

#### **Strategy 6: Support for personal and program transitions**

- Dedicate resources to managing transitions in the lives of community members, and within service streams.
- Modify a Rapid Rehousing program to focus it on supporting transition points
- Ensure that some of the support for transitions is aimed at the early stage, i.e., has a prevention focus

#### **Strategy 7: Manage increasing acuity**

- Redirect resources to managing acute addictions and mental health issues
- Integrate an 'acute lens' with transition management.

#### **Strategy 8: Increased sector capacity**

- Implement a half-time coordinator position, to be managed by a lead agency, provisionally identified here as the United Way.

#### **Strategy 9: Considerations in Serving Indigenous people**

- Integrating an 'Indigenous lens' in services that flow from this Action Plan.
- Appreciating the unique historical and cultural contexts of Indigenous communities.
- Seeing support for Indigenous people and agencies as a form of reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

#### **Strategy 10: Prevention through agency coordination**

- Homelessness service providers should coordinate on an annual basis with other agencies in Nanaimo that provide prevention services.





## Discussion of recommended strategies

### Strategy 1: Better engagement with people at the edge of the shelter system

The current strategy for chronic or street-entrenched homelessness puts shelters at its centre. This is for good reason, since shelter beds are essential harm reduction tools, help connect people to other services, and are heavily utilized. But a review of gaps at the shelter end of the service continuum suggests that a shift is required, along three lines:

- Incremental additions to shelter beds to meet population increases or to account for reductions in other housing options;
- More robust outreach for shelter-only or service-avoidant individuals;
- An intervention strategy to interrupt the pathways leading to street involvement.

In public discussions of homelessness, shelters are highly visible symbols of the service system, acting as a proxy for the overall gap between the needs of the homeless and the limited supply of services or support. They thus enjoy a broad measure of public support as a visible manifestation of the community's commitment to ending homelessness.

***"A review of gaps for the shelter end of the service continuum suggests that a shift is required."***

And shelters are well-utilized; indeed, the supply of shelter beds in Nanaimo falls short of the demand. More than 3700 people used the Unitarian Church Shelter over the 2016-17 winter months, well above capacity. Other shelters such as Oceanside report 100% usage in January and February 2017.<sup>15</sup> Shelter services will need to form a core part of the service system into the foreseeable future. The Island Crisis Care Society (ICCS), for instance, comes to this same conclusion in their 2014 report, the *Summary of Need for Emergency Shelter and Related Housing Services for Women in Nanaimo*.

The *Summary* comments, in a discussion of recent expansions to supportive housing in the City:

*While these new additions to the continuum have succeeded in housing people, many of whom were formerly homeless, the need for emergency shelter and related services remains high. We therefore assume that emergency shelter will continue to be a need in the community for the foreseeable future....<sup>16</sup>*

In line with the ICCS's report, this Action Plan predicts continued high utilization of shelter beds. All things being equal, the pressure on the shelter system has a direct relationship to the continued creation of new supportive housing options. If new units are made available over the term of this Action Plan, then shelter utilization may remain flat or increase at the level of population increases. If the creation of new supportive housing remains flat or declines, there is likely to be increased pressure on available shelter beds.

Given this, the Action Plan recommends continued increases in the number of shelter beds to keep pace, at a minimum, with Nanaimo's growing population.



➤ **Strategy 1.1: Continued incremental increase in the capacity of the shelter system; at a minimum, to keep pace with increases in Nanaimo's population.**

While the creation of new shelter beds to keep pace with Nanaimo's increasing population is important, a focus on shelter capacity obscures two other, less noticeable gaps: lack of strong support for those who avoid shelters or are otherwise service averse; and lack of effective tactics for interrupting the pathways leading to street involvement.

On the first issue, there is a gap in the capacity to help those who, for various reasons, rarely access shelters<sup>17</sup> or don't actively seek other services (outside of e.g., food banks<sup>18</sup>). Given the make-up of the street-involved population, this means more outreach and support to older men, many of whom are Indigenous (24% in 2016).<sup>19</sup> Some may be suitable for a Housing First approach, but the intent of the strategy is to reach people who are not interested or able to move up the continuum. The 'service' here might be limited to social integration, material supports, and medical care.

➤ **Strategy 1.2: Increase outreach to the homeless who have little or no contact with the system of supports.**

There is a second gap for both those who avoid shelters and for those who do not progress to other services even when they access shelters and material supports: Nanaimo lacks an adequate process for intervening in the early stages of street involvement, before service avoidance or 'shelter only' patterns of homelessness become habitual.

This intervention would largely be aimed at young adults or older youth, but in any event its purpose is to interrupt the activities, social networks and pathways of street involvement. This service should not be confined to 'residents' of Nanaimo, since it may apply to people who are transient and are vulnerable because they have few or no other networks.

➤ **Strategy 1.3: Develop an intervention to disrupt street involvement.**

This strategy integrates with Strategy 5, below, which calls for better management of transitions (life transitions, and service changes) experienced by homeless people. Shelters represent one such transition point, and Strategy 1.3 seeks to divert people at the critical stage when they enter or exit a shelter system.

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## Strategy 2: Create a day space/drop-in facility

From the perspective of homeless community members, the current system presents an obvious gap: a place to stay the night, but no place to go during the day. This absence is also noticeable from the perspective of harm reduction, given that the persistent wearing out of the body is one of the defining condition of homelessness. In the absence of a dedicated drop-in centre, homeless citizens end up in public or semi-public settings that are not conducive to their needs.

Notably, in the 2016 *Point in Time Count*, the majority of shelter residents listed ‘the library’ as the service they used the most, second only to the food bank. Adopting a strategy which responds to this lack of day spaces goes towards treating the homeless as whole people, not just people without homes, who deserve public settings and communal spaces that account for their unique needs and social relations.

*“...the persistent wearing out of the body is one of the defining condition of homelessness.”*

Drop-in centres are a well-known service, with visible benefits: mitigating the harms of outdoor living; strengthening social relations; allowing referrals and engagement, amongst others (Our Place in Victoria, for instance, provides a mail and messaging service for those without addresses). While there is some capacity for this in Nanaimo, what is available is not adequate to meet the need.

It should be noted that a drop-in centre has an ambivalent relationship to a Housing First framework: it may enable other services but it not a direct pathway to housing. This may make a dedicated day space harder to finance, but it also implies that it does not need to adhere to the principle of ‘low-barrier’.

Further, it needs to be pointed out that some service providers found day spaces present challenges in maintaining safety and order, especially given the increase in acute drug use and the behaviours associated with acute addictions or opioid use.

### ➤ Strategy 2.1: Develop day spaces/drop-in centre facilities for the homeless and street involved

One innovation to this model is to give over some control of the space to some of its users. A central and defining feature of homelessness is that the homeless lack any effective control over the services they receive or the rules that govern their use of communal spaces. Allowing users to control some aspects of the space can produce a qualitatively different experience for clients, affirming their agency and capacity rather than controlling it.

### ➤ Strategy 2.2: Allow the users of the drop-in space to control some aspects of the space.



## Strategy 3: Remapping social networks



In the consultations, multiple agencies mentioned that they saw the benefit of more attention to the social needs of the homeless, for instance, in bolstering the often fragile support networks of the homeless, and in reducing social isolation.

But there is a gap in this process of socialization support. Much of the current work is still focused on shoring up existing relationships the homeless have, such as family. But just as frequently, the work aims to link them to networks or social worlds connected to agencies.

We often assume that being homeless entails having little or no social network or a cramped communal life, but this is not true. To the contrary, many homeless people are embedded into local circuits and patterns of interaction; to others in their situation, to the police, to service providers, to the public. The vulnerability of the homeless means that they are defined by their relationships more than most citizens. Isolation is a strategy of the well-off.

The difficulty is that those relationships are not always productive; some are limiting, or even hostile; others may be supportive but don't offer a path into the world of stable employment and housing. This is one limitation to the social networks generated by congregate housing. They limit social isolation but don't always increase social productivity.

In contrast, this Strategy recommends that the homeless be better connected to organic social networks that are not mediated by agencies or populated by other vulnerable people.

Here, as is often the case, we can learn from Indigenous people. The case of Salish Lelum provides an illustration of integrating the homeless into broader community relationships. At Tillicum Lelum the residents are encouraged to create relationships with Elders and others to create positive social networks that span the generations and that emphasise cultural knowledge and community ties.

Another example, one that has been used successfully in Vancouver, might be in encouraging clients to become involved in sports teams, which are often linked into community networks that could be of benefit to homeless individuals. The goal is to support people in experiencing social worlds that are an alternative to the street, and to gain some entry to those worlds.

Accordingly, the Action Plan recommends increased attention to ensuring community members are integrated into social networks and local relations outside of the ones with their homeless peers or others in the service system. The Plan suggests a pilot project which emphasizes not expanding social integration but shifting it so that it connects better with networks outside of the social services system.

This strategy, and the case of Salish Lelum, supports an interesting finding in the ICCS *Summary Report*, which, citing research from the Vancouver Island Health Authority, argued spiritual support is a gap in the current shelter service system, which if remedied could provide psychosocial benefits:

***“A pilot project to explore the effectiveness in such links (to ... the community) in overall stability is warranted and overdue.”***

*“Currently there is no funding for linkages to spiritual communities and organizations in the community. A pilot project to explore the effectiveness in such links in overall stability is warranted and overdue”. (ICCS Summary of Need for Emergency Shelter Services in Nanaimo; p.18).*



- **Strategy 3.1: align social integration activities with the goal of shifting people into specific community networks or circles.**



#### **Strategy 4: Managing market pressures and income insecurity**

As noted, the system of services faces serious pressures from shifts in the housing and labour markets, in particular, rising housing costs in the South Island, low vacancy rates and the precariousness of the labour market.

These developments increase the number of people who are vulnerably housed because of low income, and also increase the costs of supportive housing. As well, high housing costs make it more difficult for agencies to recruit and retain staff.

This problem of affordability clearly overlaps with the focus of Nanaimo's *Affordable Housing Strategy*. Some of the response to this issue should come through that strategy.

##### **Rental Supplements**

But some of the issue falls directly under the homelessness umbrella. Accordingly, this Action Plan anticipates that, at a minimum, rental supplements will need to keep pace with these market pressures. In the short term, rental supplements are a cost effective prevention measure: they can sometimes block the downward spiral where financial vulnerability results in episodic or long term homelessness. But over the long term, rent supplements are hard to sustain as a strategy, since they are always at risk of being reduced or capped as a budget item. They should act, as the term implies, as a supplement to the steady creation of affordable or supportive housing, and/or to labour market attachment.

*"... over the long term, rent supplements are hard to sustain as a strategy, since they are always at risk of being reduced or capped as a budget item."*

Since the issue, at least for some, is connected to the labour market, members of the Coalition should seek a more active working relationship with the employment side of Service Canada or the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training to try to manage the pressures on this budget. This can, in part, be achieved by developing the employability of recipients. In sum; create a labour market solution to a housing market problem.

- **Strategy 4.1: Provide incremental increases in rent supplements and**
- **Strategy 4.2 Coordinate with federal and provincial ministries responsible for labour force development.**







### Strategy 5: Supportive Housing

Over the last decade, Nanaimo has built considerable capacity in supportive housing, and managed to achieve some shelter and emergency bed expansion.

Nonetheless, some gaps in the provision of supportive housing remain. First, the emphasis on low- or no-barrier housing that comes with a Housing First approach means that there are fewer options for community members who need or want an alcohol- and drug-free environment.

Second, the current supportive housing stock in Nanaimo favours congregate housing over, e.g., scattered sites, largely because congregate is more cost effective and easier to support with services. There are exceptions to this: rent supplements, for instance, are largely scattered across the private market. But this preference for facilities means that the homeless or vulnerably housed are not dispersed across the community, which means that it is harder for them to become part of the community or to be seen as community members.

Finally, there is a serious gap in the continuum of housing options. The gap is this: there is no intermediate step between supportive housing and market housing that does not depend on the goodwill of benevolent landlords. While the ACT Team and other providers offer support to landlords, this service is limited and largely confined to mental health, addictions, or behavioural disorders.

#### Solutions

There is no simple solution to the gaps identified here. Some steps in the direction of closing these gaps might include adding to the number of dry beds available in the community; developing some scattered site options, perhaps through alignment with the affordable housing strategy, which has more incentives for this model; and trying to identify a 'close-to-market' housing option that sits between government-subsidized congregate housing and the open market.

*"... this preference for facilities means that the homeless or vulnerably housed are not dispersed across the community, with the result that it is harder for them to become part of the community."*

#### ➤ Strategy 5.1: Add to the number of dry housing units available, develop scattered site housing.

Also, some respondents argued that a flaw of supportive housing is that it was not 'fine grained' enough. That is, there were relatively large steps between, for instance, shelters and a 24-hour supported facility. Or, to take another example, between a staffed housing resource and the private market. The result is that clients sometimes end up in resources that are more (or less) intensive than they require, with the result that they are under- or over-served, and sometimes stay in a place that is a 'wrong fit' just because the next step is just out of reach.

Accordingly, the Action Plan suggests that more incremental steps be developed within resources to allow for better movement of people to their optimum placement.



**Strategy 5.2: Develop more incremental steps within the housing continuum for more efficient matching of services with clients.**

Finally, agencies argued that we are not fully utilizing the resources of the private rental market.

For instance, consider a house which has a vacant suite or a room that could be rented, in which the owners are 'casual landlords', who are not driven by the strict imperatives of the market. Such owners might be persuaded to offer their places up at below full market price for the greater good.

In Vancouver, the pressures of house prices mean these owners are rapidly going extinct. But in Nanaimo, with its more relaxed approach and longer history of collective action, this is a real possibility. But currently, there is no method to mobilize those people to contribute or consider how they might help in some way with their unused housing asset.

➤ **Strategy 5.3: Find a mechanism to engage and recruit more 'informal' rental resources.**



**Strategy 6: Support for personal and program transitions**

One of the interesting features of homelessness services is the importance placed on transitions. The hoped for move from subsidized to market housing is one example, but there are many more, such as the personal transition from 'shelter user' to 'tenant', or the personal and service transition between institutional and non-institutional settings.

Given their centrality, it is surprising that a focus on transitions is not more prominent in homelessness plans. In contrast to the majority of homelessness service plans, this report recommends funding transition management as a broad strategic priority. 'Transition management' here means services and activities that support clients at key transition points, such as:

- Moving from institutional care to supported housing
- Aging out of MCFD care
- Moving from drug experimentation to enduring opioid addictions
- Moving from episodic homelessness to street involvement
- Age-related movement into increased willingness to accept services and make lifestyle changes.

➤ **Strategy 6.1: Dedicate resources to managing transitions in the lives of community members, and within service streams.**



The Action Plan recommends that increased resources be dedicated to managing transitions in the lives of homeless people. One possible option is to adopt a modified version of Rapid Rehousing. Currently, Rapid Rehousing is:

“... a similar intervention to Housing First, but is less intense, and is intended for individuals and households with moderate acuity. Supports are delivered through Intensive Case Management for a time-limited period. There is the general expectation that at some point in the future, the household will be stably housed and be able to live without supports.”<sup>20</sup>

The modification would be to shift the program to attend more closely to transition points in community members who engage with service providers. This implies some coordination across programs, and between agencies given that transitions frequently occur across and between services.

➤ **Strategy 6.2: Modify a Rapid Rehousing program to focus it on supporting transition points.**



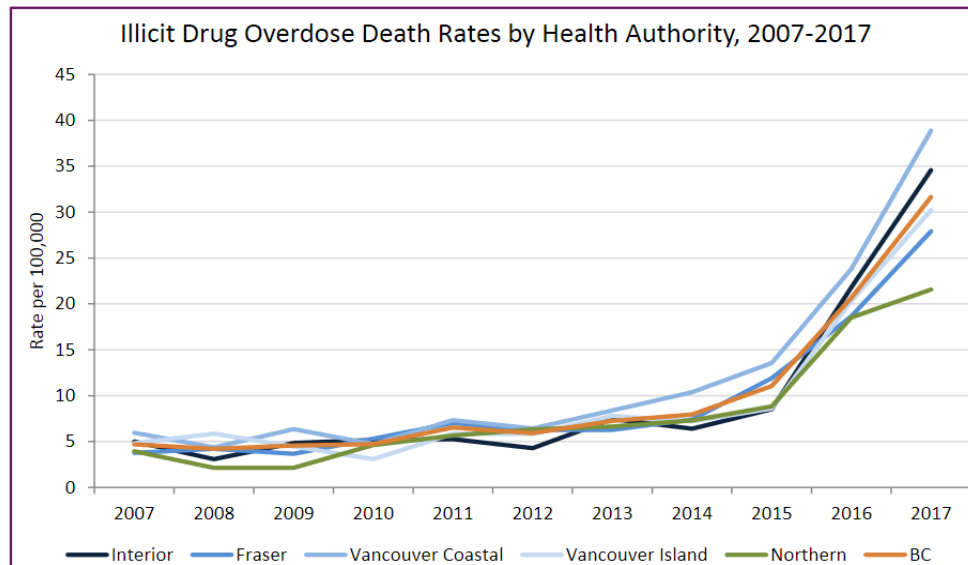
### **Strategy 7: Manage increasing acuity**

The interviews for this Action Plan found consensus on one point: homelessness is becoming harder, more injurious, deeper, more complex, in a word, more acute (exemplified in the opioid crisis).

This problem raises difficult choices for service providers, since dealing with these cases is expensive and complex. The nature and usage of opioids today also produces behaviours that stretch the limits of willing landlords, and demand significant, repeated resources from agencies.

But this is a problem that cannot be avoided, since, in addition to the obvious human costs, it poses a risk to the system of services if left too long. The public and political nature of the opioid crisis also means that elected officials will insist on a response, and may well direct one if it does not come from service providers.

The Action Plan recommends integrating this issue with the transition management strategy described above. This ‘transition management with an acute lens’ would see funding be directed towards managing acute cases (short term), or increasing capacity to intervene early in the pathways to acute outcomes, whether mental health or addictions.



A second gap that was identified in this issue was the lack of interventions in the early stages of addictions, before drug use became entrenched or created irreversible effects. While this is consistent with the evidence about addictions pathways, and may be effective, its connection to homelessness involves a long and complicated chain of causality, and may be difficult to establish such a service when resources are needed for issues with much clearer, direct connections. This may be a case for collaboration with Island Health, and the new Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions.

*“the current arrangement is not sufficient, since agencies end up picking up the work of coordination without any resources.”*

- **Strategy 7.1: Redirect resources to managing acute addictions and mental health issues.**
- **Strategy 7.2: Integrate an ‘acute lens’ with transition management.**

## Strategy 8: Increased sector capacity

The argument for increased steering and coordinating capacity for a system of services is obvious. But what level of coordination?

What emerged in the consultations is that Nanaimo is now complex and large enough that this capacity is more valuable than it was in the past. This coordinating/steering capacity could be less formal than the more centralized structure operating in the City of Victoria; Nanaimo, for instance, does not require a centralized intake process. But ‘informal’ does not mean invisible or voluntary.

The current arrangement is clearly not sufficient, since agencies end up picking up the work of coordination without any resources. This gap limits the effectiveness of the Coalition, hampering the



ability of the Coalition or agencies to pursue more effective partnerships, or to develop more effective, shared systems of tracking outcomes or monitoring service utilization.

There was substantial agreement that Nanaimo could benefit from a more robust capacity to coordinate between providers and other stakeholders, and to provide a centralized steering capacity.

- **Strategy 8.1: Implement a half-time position, to be managed by a lead agency, provisionally identified here as the United Way.**

One of the problems in managing services in a community like Nanaimo is the lack of good data that captures activities across services and organizations and coordination between services. This 'gap' occurs at three levels:

- Reliable, current information about service utilization and service pressures. It would be helpful to know how increases in shelter use impact the rest of the services system, or if we are witnessing a steady increase in requests from older women experiencing poverty. This would help align resources with service pressures.
- Some form of outcome tracking, so that funders can rationalize their allocations, and agencies can determine which interventions are effective;
- Some case management capacity to coordinate across services and agencies.

- **Strategy 8.2: Implement a half-time position that can coordinate data gathering and analysis, and help with complex case management issues across agencies.**





## Strategy 9: An Indigenous-specific approach

### *A shared fate...*

There is an important dimension to homelessness in Nanaimo that requires careful consideration: its impact on the Indigenous people who call Nanaimo home.

Like many other people, Indigenous community members face serious challenges that can lead to homelessness: precarious income, high rents, limited shelter beds, social stigma, increasing acuity in addictions, and the many other issues that make finding and keeping housing difficult.

As a result of this shared experience and common circumstances, much of this Action Plan is relevant to the needs of Indigenous individuals, agencies, and communities. To that extent, this Plan is an Indigenous plan that also applies to non-Indigenous people and organizations.

### *And a unique history...*

But there are critical differences in Indigenous homelessness.

First, and most importantly, Indigenous people are never without a 'home,' in the sense that they retain their spiritual ties to their territories and, as Indigenous people, always know where their home is, even if they live away from their territory and even when their ties to that territory are weakened by the forces of colonization and historical trauma. Indigenous people are often without a roof over their head, but they are never, strictly speaking, homeless.

But as we know, Indigenous people in Nanaimo also face additional issues which arise from the unique historical, cultural, and economic situation of Indigenous communities in Canada today. Some of those problems, such as the lingering effects of colonization or the stubbornness of racist beliefs about Indigenous people, make it considerably more challenging for Indigenous people who are homeless. But some of those unique circumstances, such as the role of extended family networks, or the vitality of communal cultural practices, provide important resources that communities can use to mitigate the harms of homelessness for Indigenous people.

For instance, elsewhere in this Action Plan, we describe how the Tillicum Lelum housing complex works to integrate Indigenous homeless people with others in their community, such as Elders, in a way that strengthens their cultural relationships and eases their path out of homelessness. Non-Indigenous society can learn much from these initiatives, which play on the unique strengths of Indigenous life, but can be applied to non-Indigenous circumstances.

But it is also necessary to attend to the very real difficulties faced by Indigenous people, and the significant impact this 'Indigenous difference' makes to service delivery and to the strategies used by the community to end homelessness.

It is not so simple to summarize these points in a short document. The rich and complex history of Indigenous people in Canada and their relationship to 'home' requires more than a few paragraphs in a report, and so this Action Plan encourages readers to immerse themselves in this topic, to learn from



Indigenous people themselves about what it means to 'have a home', or to be dispossessed of one, and what steps are effective in helping Indigenous people secure safe, affordable housing.<sup>21</sup>

But some important points are well known, and can guide the strategies set out in this Action Plan.

- ➔ Many Indigenous people and communities struggle with the traumatic after-effects of colonization. Providing an effective service requires an understanding of this dynamic and of some of the methods used to help Indigenous people to overcome this legacy in their personal lives and in their relationships;
- ➔ Cultural work, and the task of reconnecting people to their communities or to the local Indigenous community, are vital steps in Indigenous therapeutics. It cannot be emphasised enough that this activity should be clearly and firmly supported in the funding and program guidelines used to serve Indigenous people;
- ➔ The demographic and economic profile of Indigenous communities is different than the overall population. Indigenous communities in Canada are younger than the average, have larger families, and are more likely to share housing spaces. The income profile is also different: even off-reserve, in urban Nanaimo where the differences are smaller, Indigenous people make less income and experience longer periods of unemployment than their non-Indigenous neighbours;

As noted above, these points can find expression in each of the strategies in this Action Plan. It is worth reiterating, though, one specific strategy discussed above, which is the need to provide better support to homeless people who avoid services outside of cold weather shelters and food banks. This group is disproportionately made up of older Indigenous men, whose needs are not directly addressed in family- and youth-based models common in Indigenous programming.

**“The 12 dimensions (of Indigenous homelessness) underscore the loss of relationships endured by Indigenous Peoples through the processes of Canadian colonization and the disconnection from the Indigenous understanding of home as All My Relations.”**

#### Indigenous holism and the self

Indigenous communities provide a good example for non-Indigenous people in their understanding of homelessness as full community members, not just people defined by their lack of something. In Indigenous communities, even the homeless can inherit songs, own dances, speak and be spoken to in Big House ceremonies, participate in community decisions, and be known for their connections to their ancestors and their current relatives. Indigenous people are understood in all their dimensions, in a holistic framework, which makes it easier to avoid a narrow, and ultimately limiting, view of homeless people as defined by their housing situation.



## Housing as reconciliation

In operationalizing this Action Plan, we should understand ending Indigenous homelessness in the following way: as an act of reconciliation and as a means to undo the harms of colonization.

That is, the strategies recommended in this Plan—if given life and purpose with Indigenous individuals and agencies—should have the effect of meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 2015 call for action, in which non-Indigenous people work to “create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes... between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.”<sup>22</sup>



## Strategy 10: Coordination as Prevention; networking with other agencies

Much of this Action Plan has been concerned with strategies with a direct connection to homelessness or homelessness services. But the work of agencies serving the homeless depends on a whole series of other services that work in the background to prevent or mitigate the circumstances that produce homelessness. One obvious example, mentioned above, is programs for labour market attachment.

But there are a number of other services that help stabilize families or individuals or try to influence their long term development in positive ways. One gap identified in the analysis for this Action Plan was the need to coordinate more closely between homelessness service providers and others.

- **Strategy 10.1: The Coalition host an annual discussion/event between homelessness service providers and other support agencies in the community.**







## Conclusion

Over the last twenty years, Nanaimo has developed a series of strategies to respond to contemporary forms of homelessness, some of which have been discussed in this Action Plan. Those strategies have enabled the community to generate a reasonably robust set of services and interventions that either prevent homelessness from occurring, or mitigate its harms for those who, for whatever reason, cannot secure stable, safe, affordable housing.

The analysis undertaken for this Plan suggests that while the current suite of strategies and services goes a considerable distance towards meeting the needs of the homeless, some critical dimensions of homelessness have changed. The strategic shifts recommended here attempt to account for those changes and to help the community fill in the remaining gaps in the system of supports for those experiencing difficulty with securing housing.

### *A question of voice....*

One final observation about homelessness in Nanaimo needs to be made. This is the possibility, or the imperative, that Nanaimo develop a unique 'voice' about homelessness in Nanaimo and the region. Here, we step outside strategies and services, and remind ourselves that one purpose of a planning process is to help the community and its agencies develop a sense of themselves as a collective; a community coming together around shared goals and shared commitment.

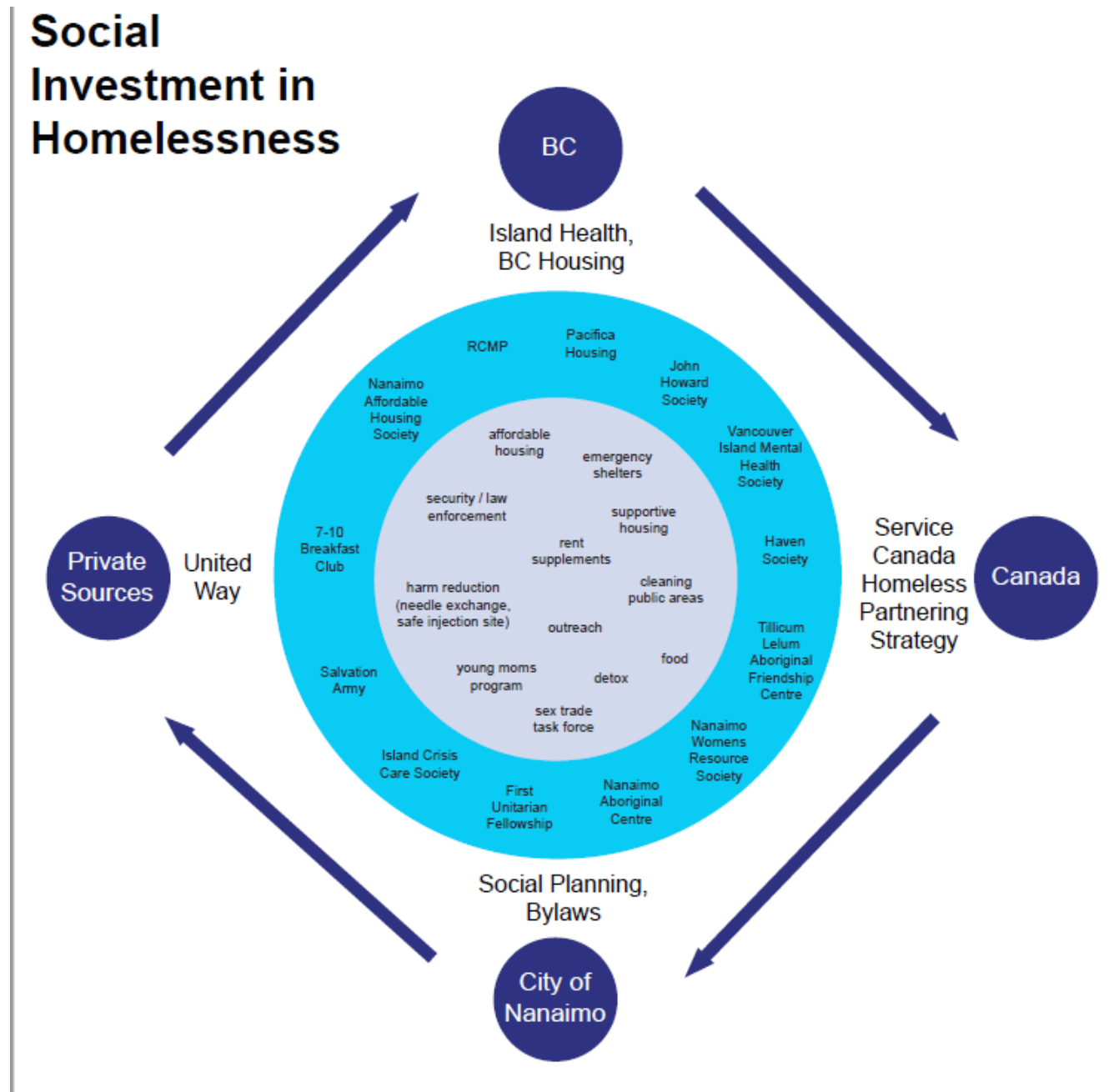
But this 'shared sense' is, inevitably, local and specific. The way in which Nanaimo responds to homelessness, in its public pronouncements, in the issues that engage or enrage citizens, in the terms it uses to discuss the homeless; all this will differ in Nanaimo than in Vancouver or Prince George.

It is beyond the scope of this Plan to articulate that 'voice' and describe how it reflects Nanaimo as a distinct community. But it is worth noting that one can sense the difference by listening closely to, for instance, the discussions in Vancouver, which return repeatedly to the role of off-shore money in the metro Vancouver real estate market, when Vancouverites are not fixated on resolving trauma in the Downtown Eastside.

Or, to take Victoria, which is concerned with the position of the city in the world tourism economy or as a model for progressive mid-sized cities. It is fair to say that Nanaimo does not make these points the centre of its public dialogue on homelessness. One of the recommendations of this Action Plan, then, is that the Coalition members and the Coalition as a collective devote at least some time and attention to thinking about and understanding the specific, local, and very 'Nanaimo' (or 'Nanaimo and Oceanside') way that the community understands and responds to homelessness.



## APPENDIX A: INVESTMENT IN NANAIMO FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES



Appendix image courtesy of City of Nanaimo social planning staff.



## APPENDIX B: NANAIMO HOMELESSNESS COALITION MEMBERS

The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition is made up of non-profit societies, representatives from the three levels of government, faith groups and community members who have an interest in developing and carrying out solutions to homelessness:

- AIDS Vancouver Island
- BC Housing
- City of Nanaimo
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo
- Haven Society
- Island Crisis Care Society
- Island Health
- Men's Resource Centre
- Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
- Nanaimo Region John Howard Society
- Nanaimo Women's Resource Centre
- Nanaimo Youth Services Association
- Pacifica Housing
- Nanaimo RCMP
- Service Canada
- Salvation Army
- Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- United Way
- Vancouver Island Mental Health Society
- Widsten Property Management
- 7-10 Breakfast Club
- Citizens at-large



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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca) 2016 Census. Accessed September 6, 2017 at <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016>

<sup>2</sup> Data accessed from BC Stats, *BC Community Profiles, Nanaimo*, August 23, 2017, at [https://www.welcomebc.ca/getmedia/85f07785-204d-4daa-9d9e-0fd070c9dfc6/Nanaimo\\_CY.pdf.aspx](https://www.welcomebc.ca/getmedia/85f07785-204d-4daa-9d9e-0fd070c9dfc6/Nanaimo_CY.pdf.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> The Nanaimo Homelessness Coalition, 2016. *"Continuing and Shifting Patterns in Nanaimo's Homelessness Population Based on the February 9, 2016 Point in Time Count"*.

<sup>4</sup> The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) defines 'homelessness' as: "...a situation where an individual or family is without stable, permanent, or appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire it as a result of systemic or societal barriers that include the lack of affordable and appropriate housing, an individual's or household's financial circumstances, or because of their mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination..." See the CAEH report on the *"State of Homelessness in Canada 2013"*. (Toronto: Stephen Gaetz, Donaldson, Jesse; Richter, Tim; & Gulliver, Tanya (2013)). The CAEH draw their definition from the Canadian Homelessness Research Network.

<sup>5</sup> 'Absolute homelessness' included the unsheltered homeless, and those at emergency, extreme weather shelters, or transition houses.

<sup>6</sup> The Point in Time Count occurred at a time (February) when homelessness is less visible, and does not include people who are vulnerably housed.

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/social-culture-environment/community-social-service-programs/response-to-homelessness.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> The interviews were in-person and used a semi-structured question format. In this method, key questions are used to help define the topics to be explored while allowing the interviewees to explore or elaborate ideas or issues that are important to them. The interviews were conversational in nature and conducted in the workplaces of the respondents, and typically involved between one and four representatives of the organization. The results were codified and then analyzed in terms of themes, implied or explicit gaps, schemas, networks and topics. The questions were structured, in part, to elicit feedback on gaps in the current system of services in Nanaimo. Anonymized summaries of the interviews are available from Springbok Management Services upon request. Please send requests for information to: P.O. Box 38004, Victoria, BC, V8W 3N2, or a [charleshorn@shaw.ca](mailto:charleshorn@shaw.ca).

<sup>9</sup> Data from BC Stats population estimates, accessed August 22, 2017, at <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population/population-estimates>.

<sup>10</sup> Data taken from the Vancouver Island Real Estate Board, accessed September 2, 2017, at [http://www.vireb.com/assets/uploads/08aug\\_17\\_vireb\\_stats\\_package\\_64292.pdf](http://www.vireb.com/assets/uploads/08aug_17_vireb_stats_package_64292.pdf) See also the discussion in the *State of the Island Economic Report, 2016*, p.41.

<sup>11</sup> Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Housing Market Information: Rental Market Report British Columbia Highlights, 2016. [https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64487/64487\\_2016\\_A01.pdf](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64487/64487_2016_A01.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> See the data analysis at Economic Development Nanaimo: <http://www.investnanaimo.com/income-1/>. Median income for Nanaimo reported in the 2016 Census was \$28,200, BC's median income was \$31,713. Source data is the 2016 Census and Canada Revenue Agency. See also <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>



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<sup>13</sup> British Columbia Coroner's Office, *Illicit Drug Overdose Deaths in BC January 1, 2007 – July 31, 2017, September 2017*. <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/death-investigation/statistical/illicit-drug.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> *Abbotsford (City) v Shantz*, 2015 BCSC 190.

<sup>15</sup> See "Capacity Woes continue at Nanaimo Homeless Shelters", *Nanaimo News Now*, accessed September 2, 2017 at <http://nanaimonewsnow.com/article/539621/capacity-woes-continue-nanaimo-homeless-shelters>. See also the Island Crisis Care Society and Richard Powell (2014); *Summary of Need for Emergency Shelter and Related Housing Services for Women in Nanaimo*.

<sup>16</sup> *Summary of Need for Emergency Shelter and Related Housing Services for Women in Nanaimo*, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Larsen, L., E. Poortinga and D. E. Hurdle. (2004). "Sleeping Rough: Exploring the Differences between Shelter-Using and Non-Shelter-Using Homeless Individuals." *Environment and Behavior* 36(4): 578-591.

<sup>18</sup> The 2016 *Nanaimo Point in Time Count* reports that almost 60% of shelter users also used the food bank, and 49% used the hot meal program.

<sup>19</sup> See the 2016 *Nanaimo Point in Time Count*, Figure 22 and Table 1, p.22.

<sup>20</sup> See the National Alliance to End Homelessness, <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/rapid-rehousing-a-history-and-core-components/>

<sup>21</sup> See the discussion of Indigenous homelessness at: <http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHIndigenousHomelessnessDefinition.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, released at the TRC Closing Event, 2015.