

Finding Our Way Home

A Report on the Homelessness Crisis in British Columbia

David Chudnovsky, MLA



In a time of prosperity across Canada, the most vulnerable people in British Columbia are being left behind by an uncaring Campbell government.

- Carole James,
Leader of the New Democrats

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“This morning the Metro Vancouver figures came out — a 364 percent increase in street-level homelessness in Vancouver since 2002. Not some other century, not some other government. This government, this minister, this Premier. Explain to the people of British Columbia how you let this happen on your watch.”

- David Chudnovsky, BC Legislature (April 8, 2008)

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Executive Summary

Not since the great depression almost 80 years ago has British Columbia had a homelessness crisis like the one we face today. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people across our province are homeless.

While many think of homelessness as a Lower Mainland problem, it is clear that the crisis faces virtually every town and city across BC.

From Cranbrook to Comox, Hazelton to Kitsilano, Abbotsford to Penticton, Surrey to Smithers, Victoria and Vancouver's downtown eastside – people are living on the streets, couch surfing, surviving temporarily in emergency shelters and transition housing.

In the 1990s the federal government abandoned its traditional role in funding social housing, along with the provinces. Despite this, the British Columbia New Democrat government was one of only two provinces in Canada to maintain a social housing program. This program was one of the first cut by Gordon Campbell's Liberals when they came to power.

Six short years later homelessness is a provincial emergency that needs immediate action.

There are three fundamental reasons to end homelessness in BC. The most important reason to solve the crisis is that it is the right thing to do. People in our province deserve a place to live and we have the resources to make that possible.

Second, homelessness disrupts both the lives of those who have nowhere to live and the stability of our communities. Most British Columbians are ashamed and embarrassed that we face such a crisis. They are rightly uncomfortable when they see



people sleeping on the streets or lining up for emergency shelters.

Third, providing homes and support for those who are homeless is significantly cheaper than continuing to do what we have been doing.

The Simon Fraser University Report, 'Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia, prepared with the active participation of several provincial government ministries (including the Housing Policy Branch under Minister Coleman) concludes that \$18,000 per year can be saved per person with provision of adequate housing and supports.

Others have made even more dramatic calculations. Tim Richter, President & CEO of the Calgary Homeless Foundation reports that in Calgary at least \$323 million was spent in 2007 which equals \$134,000 per chronically homeless person per year.

Using the more conservative Simon Fraser calculation (a savings of \$18,000 per year per homeless person) and their relatively conservative number of 11,500 homeless people, British Columbia could save more than \$1 billion over five years by housing the homeless.

New Democrat homelessness critic David Chudnovsky traveled British Columbia - learning directly from homeless people, service providers and local government officials - about the depth and breadth of the crisis in their communities. This report is a summary of the findings from the province-wide consultation, known as Finding Our Way Home, between December 2007 and April 2008.

Also included are 12 recommendations for change.

The New Democrats invite responses, suggestions, criticism and dialogue on these recommendations. After that process of engagement a final set of recommendations and commitments will be made.

"The homeless people of BC are not an alien species from another planet. They are our sons and our daughters, our brothers and our sisters. They are us."

- David Chudnovsky

Recommendations

- 1) Re-establish the Ministry of Housing
- 2) Eliminate the homeless crisis in 5 years
- 3) Re-invest in a social housing program
- 4) Support local governments and community organizations
- 5) Focus on the whole province
- 6) Expand social housing on existing sites
- 7) Include four key elements in social housing and support programs:
 - “Housing First plus the supports necessary for success”
 - Homelessness prevention
 - Adequate infrastructure
 - Accountability
- 8) Maintain and expand the public land bank
- 9) Protect manufactured home tenants
- 10) Strengthen security of tenure and rights for tenants
- 11) Increase income assistance rates and the minimum wage
- 12) Increase mental health and addiction services



For a more detailed description of the recommendations, please see page 8

What Is Homelessness?

The Ministry's Housing Policy Branch defines homelessness in the following way:

Absolute Homeless – individuals and families who are living in:

- public spaces without legal claim (e.g. on the streets, in abandoned buildings, in tent cities);
- a homeless shelter;
- a public facility or service (e.g. hospital, care facility, rehab or treatment centre, correctional facility) facing immediate discharge and cannot return to a stable residence; or
- individuals who are financially, sexually, physically or emotionally exploited to maintain their shelter.

Hidden Homeless – Individuals and families who are living in temporary accommodation where they do not have control over the length and conditions of tenure (e.g. staying in a guest room, name not on lease).

To this very useful description (which includes couch surfing) should be added individuals who are double bunking (or more) in a single room and those in motel or hotel accommodation which is temporary as a result of appropriate housing not being available.

“We don't like being out here in the cold. We don't like freezing. Right now I've got plastic bags in my socks to keep my feet warm. Wet feet all the time. And one day it was really, really windy and it blew me in a ditch. I'm only 105 pounds. Climbing on my hands and knees trying to get out of the ditch.”

- Ruby, Comox

The Homelessness Crisis In BC - Why Now?

There are many reasons why homelessness has reached the staggering level it has in British Columbia. The federal government must take its share of the blame. In 1994 the federal housing program was cancelled. It provided tens of thousands of high quality social housing and co-op housing units.

By 2001, British Columbia was one of only two provinces in the country with a provincial social housing program. But the Gordon Campbell Liberal government cancelled that program in 2002. If it had simply continued, there would be at least 4,000 additional low-rent units of housing in British Columbia.

Income is an important variable in providing the possibility for affordable housing. But it's clear that incomes have lagged dramatically behind the cost of housing. 250,000 employed British Columbians make \$10 an hour or less. It's virtually impossible at such a wage level to find adequate and affordable housing.

The administration at Kelowna's Mission Gospel emergency shelter reported that 30% of people who use the shelter get up in the morning and go to work. This has been confirmed in other emergency shelters, soup kitchens and food banks across the province.

Those on income assistance have an even bigger challenge in finding affordable housing. The

\$375 per month shelter allowance for single people is totally inadequate. It forces people to supplement their rents with money that should be going to food, clothing, transportation and other purposes. The Campbell Liberals created barriers (such as the 3 week wait, 2 year independence test, etc) which make it much harder to get on income assistance and stay on income assistance.

A recent report of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives which followed welfare recipients in BC since 2004 found that 100% of those studied who were forced to leave welfare became homeless.

The de-institutionalization of people with mental health problems has also contributed to homelessness. Without adequate community-based mental health services many people become vulnerable to homelessness, and to many other challenges – drugs and drug addiction, physical and sexual abuse, intimidation etc.

The recent report of the Vancouver Police Department calls attention to the woeful lack of health services for this population and subsequently the inappropriate and wasteful use of police services to deal with health issues.

Another extremely significant factor which has led to the current crisis of homelessness is the cruel irony that with the dramatic rise in the value of real property there has been a dramatic increase in homelessness. When the cost of buying homes at the top of

“10,500 people are homeless in British Columbia. That’s the population of Williams Lake. If tomorrow the people of Williams Lake had a catastrophe, if there was a flood or a fire and every one of them lost their homes, we as a people, as British Columbians who are caring and decent people, would get together and find homes for those people. We’d build homes for those people. We’d solve their problem. And we’d do it quickly. Today in British Columbia that’s the crisis we have. More people than the population of Williams Lake are homeless today in British Columbia. It’s time for government to take it seriously, to roll up their sleeves and to find a solution for those people.”

- David Chudnovsky

“There are ten thousand households in Kelowna that are having trouble in terms of housing and affordability. And the majority of those households are making \$20,000 or less. So there are people on the brink all over the place and the ones I hear from by telephone are usually families with children. And my big concern as a professional is, while we’re focusing on homelessness - which is the oozing wound, we have children living in situation that they shouldn’t be faced with: moving every month or so, or whatever, just because it’s so hard to find a place that’s affordable and healthy to live in.”

- Alice, Kelowna

the market increases, the demand, and therefore the price of housing in the cheapest part of the market increases too. This is the case, it is worth noting, not just in the Lower Mainland but in communities across the province.

So while some British Columbians have become wealthy because the value of their homes have appreciated, many of their neighbours have become homeless as part of the same phenomenon. The lesson here is that the market alone will not and cannot resolve the current crisis of homelessness in the province.

Also adding pressure to the stock of affordable housing, is the drive to re-develop manufactured home parks, especially in smaller centres across the province. Decades ago, when many of these parks were established, they were often at the outskirts of

towns and cities. With the passage of time and the expansion of municipalities, they are now closer to the centre and the land on which they sit has increased in value. As many of these parks are closed and developed they contribute to problem. A great number of the manufactured homes cannot be moved and their owners are at grave risk of becoming homeless.

Because of the critical shortage of low-cost rental accommodation, landlords are in a position to pick and choose tenants. One phenomenon which has been reported is landlords not only doing credit checks on potential tenants, but criminal record checks as well. Obviously, someone who has been homeless for any length of time has little hope of getting past these obstacles.



“The toughest part is... tomorrow. The toughest part’s tomorrow because you never know what’s going to go on tomorrow.”

- Gerry Mag, Comox

Why We Should End Homelessness

It might seem unnecessary to ask why it is important to deal with the crisis of homelessness in BC. However, significant government commitment and resources are required, and governing is always about making choices. Therefore, the rationales for action are important.

The most important reason to solve the crisis is that it is the right thing to do. People in our province deserve a place to live and we have the resources to make that possible. British Columbians are caring and decent people and believe that everyone is entitled to a home.

“No child in this world should have to live like that – with their parents weeping because they wonder where they’re going to live tomorrow.” (Nellie Anderson, Revelstoke)

Second, homelessness is both a disruption to the lives of those who have nowhere to live and to the stability of our communities. Most British Columbians are ashamed and embarrassed that we face such a crisis. They are rightly uncomfortable when they see people sleeping on the streets or lining up for emergency shelters.

But solutions are not without controversy. Mark Twain wrote, “Everybody is in favour of progress. It’s change they don’t like.” While public opinion increasingly demands solutions to the homelessness crisis, the shrill voices of those who want the solution anywhere but in their own backyards are heard every time a new project is announced.

The leaders of our community, and in particular governmental leaders at the federal, provincial and municipal levels must be proactive in reminding everyone that solutions involve change – and in supporting that change even if it has short-term political consequences. The alternative is the status quo – the warehousing of the poor and marginalized in out-of-the-way neighbourhoods. That strategy is not only inequitable, experience shows it is also unsuccessful.

Finally, providing homes and support for those who are homeless is significantly cheaper than continuing to do what we have been doing. We expend enormous resources on ambulance service, emergency ward treatment, acute care beds, police of-

ficers, court trials and hearings, prisons, emergency shelters and much more, when housing and supports are more appropriate and more cost effective measures.

The Vancouver Police Department report ‘Lost in Transition’, describes both the crisis in the provision of street level mental health services and treatment, and just some of the increased costs that result.

“A conservative economic analysis suggests that police time spent dealing with incidents where a person’s mental illness was a contributing factor in police attendance is equivalent to 90 full-time police officers, at an annual cost of \$9 million. This would not include indirect policing costs, or the costs to other agencies such as the ambulance service, hospitals, or the court system ... The key finding of this research is that there is a profound lack of capacity in mental health resources in Vancouver. The result is an alarmingly high number of calls for police service to incidents that involve mentally ill people in crisis. VPD officers, along with the citizens with whom they come in contact, are bearing the burden of a mental health system that lacks resources and efficient information sharing practices, often with tragic consequences. In an effort to address the current situation, several recommendations are made that centre on the need to better serve people who are mentally ill in Vancouver” (Vancouver Police Department, ‘Lost in Transition’)

The Simon Fraser University Report, ‘Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia’, concludes that \$18,000 per year can be saved per person with provision of adequate housing and supports.

“... the average street homeless adult with SAMI in BC costs the public system in excess of \$55,000 per year. Provision of adequate housing and supports is estimated to reduce this cost to \$37,000 per year. This results in an overall ‘cost avoidance’ of about \$211 million per year. The ‘cost avoidance’ in health care and provincial corrections institution costs are more than sufficient to offset the capital costs and

the costs of providing housing supports to those who are absolutely homeless.”

(Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia)

Tim Richter, President & CEO of the Calgary Homeless Foundation makes an even more dramatic calculation. He reports that in Calgary at least \$323

million was spent in 2007 which equals \$134,000 per chronically homeless person per year.

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The Campbell Government Response

The Campbell Liberal Government has focused much of its effort regarding homelessness on a series of strategies which, while in some cases laudable, do little to reduce the numbers of people without a place to live.

The Ministry, through BC Housing, has expanded the number of “outreach workers” whose responsibility is to make contact with homeless people (often at street level), connect them with various programs and services, attempt to find housing, and sometimes to provide minimal ongoing support. These workers are enormously committed and do excellent work.

But even the best and most committed outreach worker cannot house someone if a home is not available.

“And we’ve got probably seven outreach workers in Kelowna... funded through BC Housing, some out of the drop in centre funded federally, and they’re all working together coordinating ... but at the end of the day somewhere permanent for people to live is the biggest problem.”

- Alice, Kelowna

A second element of the Campbell government’s strategy is the purchase of low-rent hotels (SROs), mostly in Vancouver but also in a couple of other centres.

This too is a good idea, as it protects some small part of the existing stock of low-rent units. But this strategy does absolutely nothing to deal with the 10,000 – 15,000 people who are currently homeless because it simply protects what already exists. People live in those SROs already. Protecting an existing stock is helpful, but it doesn’t help solve the crisis of homelessness in the province.

A third part of the government’s strategy is increasing emergency shelter beds and expanding the hours during which they are open. People use emergency shelters as temporary places to stay when they have nowhere else to live.

Creating emergency shelter beds is necessary. We face a homelessness emergency. But are shelter beds homes? No. Is this a strategy for solving homelessness? Absolutely not.

An additional problem is that the government inappropriately includes emergency shelter beds in their count of housing units they have built since 2001.

Another part of the Campbell government strategy on homelessness is to increase the number of rent subsidies. Rent subsidies are a useful tool in dealing with homelessness problems in some circumstances as long as there is a stock of vacant rental units available. But in the context of a hot real estate market, where there is a 0.1 percent or 0.5 percent or a 1 percent vacancy rate, rent supplements are simply a gift to landlords. The province provides the rent subsidies, and the landlords, because of the high demand, raise the rents.

A Strategic Vision to End Homelessness in BC

"I think that we as citizens in a society are all responsible for each other. So as long as there's homelessness, we are responsible to find a solution. And, the government actually represents us, so please start listening to us. We want solutions, and to be part of the solution." (Loretta, Nelson Mental Health Clubhouse)

In the United States the slogan "Housing First" has gained traction and in many places informs policy. It is a useful concept, as it implies two fundamental principles. First is the notion that having a home is a right. Second, is the idea that housing needs to be provided immediately, independent of the causes of the homelessness or the health of the homeless person.

Even so, "Housing First" is an inadequate response to the crisis of homelessness in BC as it does not provide the resources needed for success. A more comprehensive strategy is necessary:

HOUSING FIRST + THE SUPPORTS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS

For many homeless people simply providing a home will solve the problem. For thousands of others a home is necessary but not sufficient. The Simon Fraser study indicates that more than 10,000 homeless people in BC have either a mental health or addiction problem or both. It is these British Columbians, whose health care challenges contribute to their homelessness, who need ongoing supports to be successful.

Senator Michael Kirby's important work on mental health at the federal level is instructive and persuasive. He is adamant that a "sequential" approach does not work. It doesn't make sense to say to a homeless person, "Get yourself cleaned up, stop your substance abuse and then we will find you someplace to live."

Similarly, it is a recipe for failure to house homeless people with mental health and addictions issues and not provide the necessary supports for them immediately when they are housed.

It is often said in explanation of the current crisis that mental health and addiction problems are complicated. That is, of course, the case. But so are cancer and pneumonia complicated. Nevertheless, as a

community we provide comprehensive and ongoing care for cancer and pneumonia sufferers.

The situation is dramatically different for those dealing with mental health and addictions challenges. The recent Vancouver Police Department report on mental health problems and their impact on policing clearly indicates a lack of treatment and support which has reached crisis proportions. The problem is not complexity. Rather, it is the stigma and discrimination faced by people with these illnesses. Too often moral and subjective judgments about "personal responsibility" get in the way of a commitment to health care for all.

In this context it is instructive to note Mr. Justice Pitfield's finding in the recent *Insite* case.

"While there is nothing to be said in favour of the injection of controlled substances that leads to addiction, there is much to be said against denying addicts health care services that will ameliorate the effects of their condition. Society does that for other substances such as alcohol and tobacco... Management of the harm in those cases is accepted as a community responsibility. I cannot see any rational or logical reason why the approach should be different when dealing with the addiction to narcotics..." (Mr. Justice Pitfield)

Vancouver's downtown eastside is a unique and important part of the story of homelessness in British Columbia. For decades it has been a mostly successful low income community. When social housing and co-op housing were being funded by the federal and provincial governments many buildings were erected which today form part of a close-knit and dynamic neighbourhood.

This reality is being threatened, on the one hand by rampant speculation, renovation and development of extremely expensive condominiums, and on the other hand – and partially as a result of high-end development – by an explosion of homelessness, addiction and mental health problems.

Future development on the downtown eastside must start with the stabilization of existing low cost housing, the building of needed social housing, and a commitment to the existing neighbourhood, its resilience, history, culture and values.

Recommendations

1) Re-establish the Ministry of Housing

Housing and homelessness are currently addressed by the Ministry of Forests and Range. In order to deal effectively with this crisis and to ensure the necessary coordination, setting of standards and accountability, the focus and resources of a stand-alone ministry and a dedicated minister are required.

2) Eliminate the homeless crisis in 5 years

The Homelessness Act 2008, which will be introduced by MLA David Chudnovsky in the fall session of the legislature, commits government to a plan to eliminate the crisis within 5 years. The plan must address problems in both rural and urban areas, and require the minister to establish annual targets and timelines for the reduction of homelessness. It will also mandate the Auditor General to report yearly on progress.

There are precedents from all over North America where it has been recognized that a concrete plan and goal to end homelessness are required to really make it happen. Today more than 300 US communities have committed themselves to plans as part of a nationwide effort to end homelessness in the United States.

It is, perhaps, important to comment briefly about the so-called "Portland Model". We have much to learn from Portland, especially their commitment to "Housing First." That city reduced homelessness by 70% in the first 18 months of their plan.

However, the situation in Portland (and many American cities which have begun to deal with homelessness) is significantly different from ours in at least one significant aspect. Portland had the 'advantage' of a healthy vacancy rate and therefore the availability of rooms and apartments into which homeless people could be placed. BC is not in the same situation. Low vacancy rates are a problem in almost every city and town in the province.

3) Re-invest in a social housing program

Key to eliminating the homelessness crisis is re-investment in a social housing program. At a minimum, a commitment to 2400 units immediately, plus 1200 annually is required. The \$250 million currently in the B.C. Housing Endowment Fund should be reallocated as an emergency infusion of funds towards these units.

In addition, innovative partnerships must be utilized to further expand the number of units. An end to the homeless crisis requires commitment and participation from all 3 levels of government, the private sector, non-profit organizations and other community institutions and organizations. The more partners willing to participate in the strategy, the more housing units can be built and more supports for success can be put in place.

A result of the dramatic shortage of homes is the development of serious bottlenecks in the shelter/housing that is available. For instance, emergency shelter staff report that people are staying much longer in their facilities than they had in the past, and staff are often ignoring the guidelines and allowing people to stay longer than the period to which they are entitled. As well, homeless people are often moving from one emergency shelter to another rather than finding permanent homes.

Similarly, there are reports from a number of service providers who administer transitional housing that clients are staying longer than they are supposed to because there is simply no place for them to go.

4) Support local governments and community organizations

Local government is a key partner in the battle to end homelessness. More needs to be done to facilitate and encourage local government to work with housing and community organizations and neighbourhoods. Many small and medium sized communities do not have the internal capacity to respond to homelessness. The establishment of a Small Communities Fund would provide resources to assist in the development of housing and other

solutions.

Community Charter tools like inclusionary zoning, which require a percentage of affordable/social housing in developments over a certain size to facilitate a mix of housing, need to be enhanced.

The Vancouver Social Housing Amendment Act, 2008 was introduced by MLA Jenny Kwan. This bill amends the Vancouver Charter to allow for increased density as compensation for the creation of social housing.

These tools can be used to create units for people who are hard to house, as well as families with children, seniors and individuals.

5) Focus on the whole province

Many think homelessness is a Lower Mainland problem or even simply a downtown eastside problem. The crisis exists in almost every city and town across BC. The government must focus on solutions for the whole province.

6) Expand social housing on existing sites

Existing social housing sites offer a valuable opportunity to increase the stock of social housing. When redevelopment takes place, a minimum of two for one replacement of existing units where the site and zoning allow it.

7) Include four key elements in social housing and support programs

In order to effectively address the homelessness crisis, the following principles must be incorporated into any social housing and support programs:

- *“Housing First plus the supports necessary for success”* including low barrier programs to meet people where they are. A theme of the consultation was serious lack of, and the need for many more “damp,” or “wet” services for people who are homeless. This is a component part of the “Housing First” approach, which insists that people do not have to “clean themselves up” before they are entitled to a place to live. However these kinds of facilities (whether emergency shelters, transition housing etc.) are extremely hard to find and the ones that do exist are overburdened and under resourced.

Specific targeted programs are needed to meet the needs of people coming out of jail who are discharged to shelters, children in care transition

ing to adulthood, people coming out of hospitals with nowhere to go and first nations people;

- *Homelessness prevention* including support for third party rentals by organizations so people with out references / experience renting can get housing; a program that provides support for small landlords who house people who are hard to house; and emergency support for tenants to keep their housing;
- *Adequate infrastructure* including the provision of adequate staffing resources for organizations providing housing for the hard to house;
- *Accountability* to ensure that programs meet targets and standards.

8) Maintain and expand the public land bank

Social housing and the land it sits on is a legacy for our province which should not be sold off. If government chooses to derive additional income from this land then it should be leased, not sold.

To reduce the cost of public social housing, federal, provincial and municipally owned land should be utilized. In addition, SRO sites in communities like the downtown eastside can be used as land for social housing.

9) Protect manufactured home tenants

The Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Amendment Act 2008 introduced by New Democrat MLA Harry Bains strengthens the rights and security of tenure for tenants living in manufactured home parks. This is essential to preventing displacement and increased homelessness.

10) Strengthen security of tenure and rights for tenants

The Residential Tenancy Act Amendment Act 2008 introduced by New Democrat Opposition MLA Diane Thorne provides more protection for tenants facing eviction and provides new rights for tenants to move back into their homes after renovations at reasonable rents. A second Residential Tenancy Act Amendment Act 2008 introduced by New Democrat Opposition MLA Jenny Kwan institutes a rent freeze on single room accommodations for a three-year period to ensure rents do not skyrocket during the 2010 Olympics. Both of these initiatives are key to preventing increased homelessness.

Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance policy allows security deposits to be provided to clients only twice. In rare circumstances a third deposit is provided. This does not make sense. The consequence of the policy is that people are prevented from accessing an apartment or room simply because they do not have the “up front” money for a security deposit.

The Ministry argues that once someone has lost a damage deposit twice it is inappropriate to provide a third one. But this ignores a number of factors. Many people are unaware that they are entitled to have their deposit returned when they leave a rental. Some landlords cheat and choose not to return the deposit even when the renter is entitled to it. For people in marginalized situations a dispute over a security deposit and engagement with the residential tenancy branch is a forbidding and difficult process.

11) Increase income assistance rates and the minimum wage

Inadequate income levels must be increased if British Columbians are to be able to afford housing and the barriers to getting on and staying on income assistance need to be addressed.

12) Increase mental health and addiction services

Homelessness is linked to many other social determinants such as poverty, mental health and addiction. In addition to the recommendations above, increasing mental health and addiction services is essential to effectively addressing homelessness.

A significant problem is the lack of mental health and addictions programs in the regions. Services in Vancouver are inadequate, but the situation outside of the Lower Mainland is even worse. One of the results is that people who need support and treatment flock to Vancouver, and often to the downtown eastside, because there is at least a chance they will get much needed services.

This places an added burden on already dramatically overburdened service providers in Vancouver while it removes fragile people from their own communities where they may have useful family and social supports.

Summary

Throughout the winter and spring, New Democrat homelessness critic David Chudnovsky traveled across BC as part of a province-wide consultation that became known as Finding Our Way Home. He visited over 22 communities and more than 130 organizations. He spoke with hundreds of people, from the people who are homeless themselves, to community advocates and service providers to mayors and municipal officials. During this consultation, the reasons for the crisis, though complicated, became clear. More importantly, the solution also became clear -- people need safe, affordable, supportive housing and they need it now.

Homelessness is a crisis that we can solve. But it will take concerted action and targeted funding, as well as the involvement of all three levels of government, the private sector and the community. This report attempts to outline the most pressing priorities that

were identified through Finding Our Way Home. Your response and ideas to the report and the recommendations are welcome.

By working together we can end the crisis of homelessness, and find the ways home for all British Columbians.

**We would like to hear your
comments and ideas**

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Appendices

APPENDIX I -- BEST PRACTICES

During the course of David Chudnovsky's provincial consultation on homelessness he visited 22 British Columbia communities, met with hundreds of homeless people and consulted with more than 130 service providers, community and advocacy groups and local governments. He observed many programs for homeless people that are successful and are making a difference in people's lives.

What follows is a listing and description of programs and program ideas that should be looked at carefully because of their success and utility. It goes without saying that this is a partial listing based on visits to only some of our communities and there are many more excellent initiatives around the province.

Included are a number of approaches and initiatives that are not at present implemented in British Columbia communities.

- Several programs are models of providing ongoing supports for success to people who have found housing with private landlords. Funding and resources for these initiatives come from diverse sources. The programs include:
 - A Community Living BC 'Cluster Program' in Terrace which provides on-site 24 hour support workers for residents with developmental disabilities who also have mental health and/or addictions challenges.
 - Kettle Friendship Society in Vancouver under the Semi Independent Living (SIL) program funded by Vancouver Coastal health region, provides clients in private accommodation with an outreach support worker to assist them in succeeding at their self-determined goals and to enhance their quality of life. The outcome goals are to maximize independence by acquiring or maintaining personal confidence, social supports and skills for daily living.
 - Kettle also offers the SUPER SIL program which can offer support during crises up to a maximum of 3 to 5 times a week. Both of these programs have very long waiting lists for service.
 - Broadway Youth Services has developed a scattered site supported housing program and has now received ongoing funding from MCFD. They have secured 6 units on the private market and are providing youth in those sites with intensive ongoing supports. They also have a partnership with Vancouver Native Housing Society which has made 4 units in one of their buildings available.
- Several agencies have 'Medication Delivery Programs' which provide appropriate medication to clients at their homes on a daily basis.
- A spokesperson for the Vancouver Police Department described a program which has had success in New York in getting people off the street and into temporary emergency shelters. A van (or vans) drive around the city at night in areas where people are often on the street homeless. They are offered a ride to an emergency shelter. The immediate and personal contact is often useful in convincing people to come off the street. A pre-condition to success, of course, is that emergency shelter beds must be available. That is not the case in any BC municipality. The recent report that there were almost 40,000 turn-aways from Metro Vancouver emergency shelters in a nine month period is an example of the problem.
- Cicada Place is a youth housing and services program located in Nelson. It combines a support program and housing facility under one roof. It provides supported transitional housing (for 6 months to 2 years) for 10-13 youths who are participants in the Independence for Youth Program (IFY). The IFY Program offers: weekly group sessions with a focus on independence and responsibility; counselling for IFY youth; and one-on-one sessions for youth who are unable to attend the weekly group meetings or who are in need of other assistance.
- As a result of the homelessness crisis, community organizations have developed in almost every municipality and many neighbourhoods across the province. Two such organizations are noteworthy because they bring together a diverse cross-section of the community.
 - Revelstoke Renters'Voice is a unique grass

roots advocacy and service organization bringing together homeless people, those at risk of being homeless, service providers, local politicians and residents. Renters' Voice advocates for universal access (free from discrimination and inequity) to affordable, suitable and sustainable housing. They support positive and productive relationships between landlords and tenants, renters and owners, and those concerned with accommodations in Revelstoke.

- Community Advocates for Little Mountain (CALM) is an advocacy group which has grown out of BC Housing's redevelopment plans for Little Mountain Social Housing in Vancouver. The group brings together social housing residents and their neighbours in the wider community.

CALM's goals are:

1. Stop the relocation of Little Mountain residents.
2. Start the public consultation.
3. Guide the redevelopment with the community's vision.
4. Achieve a balanced community with increased social housing.

Recently CALM has been focusing on the issue of the sale of public land to fund social housing development.

- Homeless Connect is a concept which has been adopted by dozens of cities in the US and around the world. It is like a trade fair for homeless people that brings homeless people, service providers, and volunteers together. The San Francisco organization describes their activities as follows:

"Every other month over 1000 community volunteers partner with city government, non-profits and the private sector to provide a one-stop shop of health and human services for homeless San Franciscans. Services include medical, mental health, substance abuse, housing, dental, benefits, legal, free eyeglasses, California ID, food, clothing, wheelchair repair and more. The goal of PHC is to provide easy access to services that support the transition the of City's homeless off the streets and into housing." (Homeless Connect)

- Willow Community Bridging Project was a program that existed in Kelowna for a period last year as short term transitional housing. It was funded by the Canadian Mental Health Association and had support, both private and public, from the community. It filled an important need, particularly for providing support to people discharged from hospital with complex health and/or mental health needs. Unfortunately the program is no longer in place.

- Assertive Community Treatment is a comprehensive community-based model for delivering treatment, support and rehabilitation services to people with severe mental illness. It has recently been recognized by the United States federal government as a best practice. The principle of Assertive Community Treatment are:

- Services are targeted to a specified group of individuals with severe mental illness.
- Rather than brokering services, treatment, support and rehabilitation services are provided directly by the assertive community treatment team.
- Team members share responsibility for the individuals served by the team.
- The staff to consumer ratio is small (approximately 1 to 10).
- The range of treatment and services is comprehensive and flexible.
- Interventions are carried out at the locations where problems occur and support is needed rather than in hospital or clinic settings.
- There is no arbitrary time limit on receiving services.
- Treatment and support services are individualized.
- Services are available on a 24-hour basis.
- The team is assertive in engaging individuals in treatment and monitoring their programs.

There are some problems that we don't know how to solve. For instance, finding a cure for AIDS. That's going to take us decades. We will work together to find that cure, but it's really hard to do. The solution to homelessness in British Columbia? Not complicated. You need homes? You need to build some homes."

- David Chudnovsky

APPENDIX II -- LITTLE MOUNTAIN SOCIAL HOUSING REDEVELOPMENT – POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO AVOID

It is important to look at BC Housing's new attitude toward publicly held land and publicly held amenities as shown in the Little Mountain Social Housing redevelopment deal. This is particularly the case because both BC Housing and the Minister have stated that Little Mountain is a model for future projects.

Updating, renovating or replacing the existing units at Little Mountain is a good idea. An increase in density on this beautiful site in the heart of the city is a strategy that could be extremely successful and worthwhile – while at the same time consistent with the needs and desires of both Little Mountain residents and the wider community. In fact, Little Mountain could be a model for a modern, sustainable mixed community including substantially more units of social housing, affordable units and co-op housing with the possibility of market housing as well.

Instead, there are many elements of what is happening at Little Mountain that are extremely problematic. First, the BC Housing strategy has been to move the current residents out of their homes more than two years before any construction will take place. The result destroys a tremendously successful community and leaves 224 units of social housing empty for up to two years at a time when thousands are homeless.

Second, BC Housing is planning simply to replace the existing 224 units of social housing at Little Mountain. The Minister has used a number of different figures to describe the plans for the site in regards to market housing. He has indicated that anywhere from 1,200 to 2,000 total homes will be built. But at a time when thousands of people have nowhere to live, the question needs to be asked: "What should our priority be? Should it be more than 1,000 additional million dollar condos, or should it be additional social housing, affordable housing and co-op housing?" The answer is simple. The new Little Mountain should have at least double or triple the number of

existing social housing units.

Third, the Campbell government's development strategy is based on selling off valuable public land as a precondition for the expansion and redevelopment of social housing. In fact, both the Minister and BC Housing have made it absolutely clear that, not only is this a strategy for Little Mountain, but it is a model for all future developments as well.

There are at least two significant problems with this approach. First, it suggests that only when public land is available for sale can significant redevelopment and expansion of social housing take place. Second, it is a needless and short-sighted squandering of the legacy which belongs rightly to the people of British Columbia. If government believes that it is necessary to generate revenue from public land then a much more prudent strategy would be to lease the land and create an ongoing, and escalating, source of income.

The reality is that the resources are available to fund social housing without forever selling off the precious property of British Columbians. The recommendations in this report clearly show how.

The market has shown itself incapable of providing the low cost and affordable housing that British Columbians needs. This 'model strategy' takes us further down a road which has proven itself unsuccessful. Already the future of the Little Mountain redevelopment has been shaped to meet the needs of the private developer, not the needs of the people of the province.



APPENDIX III - THE DEBATE ABOUT NUMBERS

David Chudnovsky, New Democrat critic for homelessness wrote to Minister Rich Coleman in September 2007 to ask how many homeless people there were in the province. When he received no response Chudnovsky carried out a survey through his office which showed, very conservatively, that there were a minimum of 10,580 homeless people in BC. Moreover, the survey showed that in virtually every city and town in the province there is a crisis of homelessness

Also in the fall of 2007, SFU's Faculty of Health Sciences released a comprehensive report indicating the number of homeless people in BC was far greater than previous government figures suggested. The 148-page report, Housing and Support for Adults with Severe Addictions and/or Mental Illness in British Columbia, commissioned by the B.C. health ministry, estimated 8,000 to 15,500 adults in the province with severe addictions or mental illness were homeless. Since that time they have used 11,750 (the average of their estimates). Note that this number takes into account only those who have a mental health issue and/or an addiction challenge. Thousands of homeless people have neither.

In March, the Metro Vancouver and Fraser Valley homelessness counts were reported. They confirm substantial growth in homelessness and are consistent with Chudnovsky's November survey and the Simon Fraser numbers.

Minister Coleman has used a number of different figures, and until January 2008 he refused to put forward any number at all. In a letter received from the Minister by David Chudnovsky in February 2008, the

Minister used the number 4,500-5,500. He repeated this in the media and it was used by the Ministry's Housing Policy Branch. In budget estimates in May, 2008 the Minister used a number of figures but seemed to settle on something in excess of 6,000.

EXCERPT FROM HANSARD – MAY 7, 2008

Hon. R. Coleman: It's not a quantifiable number. With our homeless counts that we do in communities in Metro Vancouver, Vancouver, greater Victoria.... It's about 4,500 in the major population of British Columbia. If you extracted those numbers out you might be up to 7,000 to 8,000 people, depending on which count you were taking. We do know what the count was in Vancouver. We do know what the count was in the Fraser Valley. We do know what the count is in Victoria. If you look at those population bases and you extract it across the population of B.C., you can extract up to a number of maybe 6,000 plus.

D. Chudnovsky: Well, I want to deal first with what the minister has just said. We seem to have housed 2,000 homeless people in the time it took the minister to answer the question. He started by saying to extract the Lower Mainland and Victoria numbers you'd get about 8,000, then he finished by saying 6,000. So — or extrapolate the numbers — you would get 8,000, and then he said 6,000. Which is it?

Hon. R. Coleman: Well, I did say over 6,000. Like I said, the number is not quantifiable.

“There are two reasons why the homeless count is a vital exercise. First, we need to know the breadth and the depth of the crisis so we can develop appropriate policies and legislation to improve the situation. Second, we owe it to every one of the thousands of people in our province who are homeless to notice them – to acknowledge them – to tell them in at least this small way that they matter.”

- David Chudnovsky

APPENDIX IV-- THE TOUR – FINDING OUR WAY HOME

Nanaimo

7/10 Club
Samaritan House
Salvation Army
Nanaimo Affordable Housing
Nanaimo Women's Centre
Salvation Army/New Hope Center
Nanaimo City Council

Courtenay/Comox

Comox Strathcona Regional District
Vancouver Island Health Authority
Addictions/Mental Health Workers
Salvation Army
Washington Inn
Lilli House Transitional House
Comox Valley Affordable Housing Society, Dawn to Dusk, L'Arche
Courtenay Women's Centre
Wachiyai Friendship Centre Society
Wachiyai Friendship Centre Elders Lunch

Kamloops

Elizabeth Fry Society
RCMP Beat Constables
Kamloops City Council and staff
Kamloops Food Bank and Outreach Society
ASK, Kamloops AIDS Society
Interior Indian Friendship Centre
Kamloops Youth Safe House

Kelowna

Community Development Planner-City of Kelowna
Union Gospel Mission
Canadian Mental Health, The Willow
John Howard Society
NOW Canada Safe Centre
Mayor Sharon Shepherd, City of Kelowna

Penticton

Ooknakane Friendship Centre, Crisis Line
Christopher Housing Society
Soupiterra
South Okanagan/Similkameen Brain Injury Society
City Council, Social Development Advisory Council

Cranbrook

The Refuge Men's Shelter
Salvation Army Breakfast Program
Food Bank
Women's Centre
Ankors AIDS Support Group
Salvation Army Lunch Program
Community Assistance Program (MEIA)
Housing Coalition
Mayor of Cranbrook
Member of Parliament

Nelson

Salvation Army Emergency Shelter
Stepping Stones Emergency Shelter
United Church Food Cupboard
Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen
Mental Health Clubhouse
2 Cicada Place Youth Housing
Nelson Youth Centre
Youth Outreach Worker
Member of Parliament

Castlegar/Trail

Food Bank, St. David's Anglican Church
Temporary ad hoc emergency shelter
Freedom Quest Regional Youth Services
Mental Health and Addiction Services
Castlegar Community Services Society
Trail Mental Health and Addictions Advocates and Volunteers
Salvation Army Kate's Kitchen

Revelstoke

Mental Health and Addictions, Interior Health
Renters'Voice
Community Connections (Revelstoke) Society
Food Bank
Women's Shelter
Revelstoke Community Housing Society
City Council

Prince George

Association for Women Advocating for Women
Connections Youth Emergency Shelter
St. Vincent de Paul - Lunch Program
Prince George Native Friendship Centre
Elizabeth Fry Society

Burns Lake/Vanderhoof

Omineca Safe House Society
 Nechako Valley Community Services
 Vanderhoof Neighbourlink
 Lake District Community Services
 Burns Lake Village Hall

Smithers/Hazelton

Smithers Town hall
 Schizophrenia Society
 Broadway Place Emergency Shelter
 Northern Society for Domestic Peace
 Chief Marjorie McRae, Hazelton

Terrace

Kermode Friendship Society: Breakfast Kitchen
 Terrace Schizophrenia Society
 Terrace Anti-Poverty Group Society
 Ksan Housing Society
 Mayor and Council
 Muks-kum-ol Housing Society
 North West Addictions

Victoria

Our Place Society
 Umbrella Addictions and Mental Health Resource
 Cool Aid Society
 PEERS
 Saint Vincent De Paul Society
 Victoria Native Friendship Centre
 Mustard Seed
 Together Against Poverty
 Streetlink

Abbotsford

Cyrus Youth Centre
 Abbotsford Food Bank
 Salvation Army
 Mennonite Central Committee
 Women's Resource Centre
 Triangle

Surrey

Front Room
 Options Services to Communities Society
 Highland House
 Phoenix Drug and Alcohol Recovery and Education Society
 Newton Advocacy Centre

Burnaby

Burnaby RCMP
 Southside Church Drop-In Program

Vancouver

Broadway Youth Resource Centre
 Raincity Housing Fraser Street
 Luma Housing
 Wilson Heights United Church
 Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
 Vancouver Police Department
 Lookout Shelter
 Carnegie Action Committee
 VANDU
 Raincity Main Office
 Pivot
 United We Can

"I believe addiction is a symptom of mental and emotional disorders, and I really think what this province fails to address, and it seems to have gotten worse as they privatize treatment centres. The best model I ever saw was, Crossroads in Kelowna. That facility, you could go in there and detox, and then you were allowed to go into a 28 day recovery program and then there was an apartment block attached right next door to the facility that you were allowed to stay there indefinitely, up to a year.

"And I think that's a real problem in this province, that the addiction issue isn't addressed in long-term support. They do their 28 days and they're back out, you know, to fend for themselves, and they, 28 days just hasn't afforded them the skills to even come close to being restored to full citizenship, you know?"

- Rolly, Nelson Mental Health Clubhouse

APPENDIX V--HOMELESSNESS ACT

HOMELESSNESS ACT, 2008

Mr. David Chudnovsky

Explanatory Note

The issue of homelessness in British Columbia has been steadily worsening over recent years, and now exists as an unprecedented crisis. Many factors contribute to the problem such as rising costs of housing, increased poverty rates among women and children, and lack of affordable housing. However, the government's actions so far have done little to reverse the trend, much less alleviate the problem. The Act commits the government to a plan to eliminate the crisis of homelessness in British Columbia within five years. The plan will address problems in both rural and urban areas. The Act requires the Minister to establish annual targets and timelines for the reduction of homelessness. The Act mandates the Auditor General to report yearly to the Legislature on progress toward the goal of eliminating homelessness.

HER MAJESTY, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia, enacts as follows:

Definitions

1 "Minister" means the Minister of Forests and Range

"the plan" means the five-year plan referred to in section 1

Establishment of a five-year plan for the elimination of homelessness

2 (1) The Minister must establish a comprehensive five-year plan to resolve the crisis of homelessness in British Columbia.

(2) The plan must have annual targets and timelines for the reduction of the number of homeless people in British Columbia.

(3) The plan must address the problem of homelessness both in rural and urban areas of British Columbia.

(4) The Auditor General must review annually the targets, timelines, and results of the Minister's plan, and report his or her findings to the Legislative Assembly.

Coming into force

3 This Act comes into force on the date of Royal Assent

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