

# Mayor's Task Force on Unsheltered Community Members Draft Report



## Land Acknowledgement

The City of Burnaby is located on the ancestral and unceded homelands of the hə́ŋqəmiṇə́m and Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim speaking peoples. We are grateful for the opportunity to be on this territory.

## Mayor's Message

Over the last five years, the City of Burnaby has emerged as a leader in responding to the housing crisis affecting folks across Canada. This final report from the Mayor's Task Force on Unsheltered Community Members marks another important step as we seek to ensure everyone in Burnaby can find a home, afford a home and feel at home.

Unsheltered community members face unique, systemic barriers to accessing housing. As this final report outlines, overcoming these barriers requires collective action from our community, our partners at the federal and provincial governments, and the service providers who have been working tirelessly on this issue for years.

As the housing crisis pushes more people into housing instability, we've seen a stark rise in the number of unsheltered people in Metro Vancouver. It is imperative that we move quickly to implement the short-term recommendations included in the report and work together as a community to support a long-term framework for addressing homelessness in Burnaby.

I'm grateful to the individuals who took the time to share their experiences, expertise and perspectives with this Task Force. Building on the model we established through the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing, this was a chance to develop a much deeper understanding of the issues facing unsheltered members of our community.

The recommendations included in this report represent the consensus of a diverse group of Burnaby residents and stakeholders, including people with lived experience of being unsheltered. This is a difficult challenge to address, and I'm thankful to everyone for engaging with this process in good faith.

**Mike Hurley, Mayor**

## Chair's Message

I am pleased to present the final report of the Mayor's Task Force on Unsheltered Community Members. This report represents the collective efforts of a diverse group of people, representing governments, non-profit agencies, the Burnaby RCMP, the local business community, and unsheltered individuals themselves.

Over the course of six meetings, and through facilitated sessions with people with lived experience of being unsheltered in Burnaby, the Task Force gained a greater understanding of the issues, risks and barriers to housing facing a significant number of individuals in Burnaby.

Addressing these challenges in a meaningful way will require political will and response from all three levels of government. I am hopeful that the recommendations and findings from this report will foster important collaborative actions and strategies to assist people experiencing homelessness in Burnaby.

The recommendations in this report align with Burnaby's innovative housing policies and programs. Our earlier work with the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing made us a leader among Canadian municipalities when it comes to housing, a clear indication of how a community-driven process can lead to positive outcomes. The challenge before us now is to take these ideas and recommendations and turn them into actions that ensure everyone in Burnaby can thrive.

I am grateful to all members of the Task Force for contributing their thoughts, ideas and solutions to this innovative process. I'd also like to thank City staff who provided support during the Task Force meetings, as well as the unsheltered community members, service providers and frontline workers who helped shape our understanding of this issue.

### Maita Santiago, Task Force Chair



# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	5
Introduction.....	7
The Mayor’s Task Force on Unsheltered Community Members .....	7
Membership.....	8
The Task Force Process .....	9
Why is this Work Important? .....	10
What did we Hear? .....	10
Lived Experience.....	11
Front-line Staff Working in Local Agencies .....	13
Practices in Other Jurisdictions.....	16
Key Take-aways .....	18
What is Being Recommended .....	19
Priority Focus Area 1: Creating shelter spaces.....	19
Priority Focus Area 2: Developing a range of housing types to meet a variety of needs.....	20
Priority Focus Area 3: Coordinating an interagency response to outreach .....	23
Priority Focus Area 4: Providing support services to unsheltered community members.....	24
Concluding Remarks .....	24
Glossary .....	25
Acknowledgements.....	27

## Executive Summary

In April 2023 the City of Burnaby created the Mayor’s Task Force on Unsheltered Community Members to “facilitate the development of a coordinated, integrated, systems-based response to unsheltered community members in our community: a response that prevents pathways into becoming unsheltered and supports pathways out of being unsheltered.”

(Terms of Reference <https://www.burnaby.ca/our-city/projects/mayors-task-force-unsheltered-community-members>)

The Task Force was chaired by Councillor Maita Santiago, with the Mayor serving as Vice Chair, and Councillor Daniel Tetrault serving as a member. Task Force membership included representatives from all three levels of government as well as leaders in the non-profit, housing, health care and public safety sectors who provide programs and services across the City of Burnaby.

At the first meeting, the Task Force identified the following Priority Focus Areas to guide their work:

1. Creating shelter services
2. Developing a range of housing types to meet a variety of needs
3. Coordinating an interagency response to outreach
4. Providing support services to unsheltered community members

To provide additional context and support for the Task Force process, additional focus group discussions were conducted to gather insights, perspectives and guidance. The focus groups were comprised of the following groups:

- » People with lived and living experience of being unsheltered in Burnaby.
- » Outreach staff from multiple agencies working with people who are unsheltered in Burnaby.
- » Front-line service provider staff working with people who are unsheltered and/or staying in the shelter.



The outcomes of these focus groups and corresponding ideas for action were presented to Task Force members which helped inform and shape the recommendations. The proposed recommendations for each priority focus area are provided below:

## Proposed Task Force Recommendations

Focus Area 1 : Creating shelter services	
1	Develop a shelter strategy for the City of Burnaby
2	Develop and implement a City of Burnaby Guideline for the Design and Operation of Shelters
Focus Area 2: Developing a range of housing types to meet a variety of needs	
3	Update the City's Housing Needs Assessment, ensuring it accurately reflects the needs of people who need support with housing and complex care
4	Advocate to senior levels of government for rent subsidies to support inclusionary rental units the City has obtained through the development process
5	Work with the development sector to explore temporary transitional housing within buildings slated for redevelopment
6	Leverage City-owned land and housing to increase the stock of affordable housing
7	Identify priority populations and criteria for how City-owned houses are tenanted as they become vacant
8	Consider a land acquisition strategy for the purposes of supporting the housing needs of low, or very low-income households
9	Advocate to the health authority to fund complex care / licensed care housing in Burnaby
10	Create an interagency working group whose mandate is to develop and implement strategies in support of people who are unsheltered
Focus Area 3: Coordinating an interagency response to outreach	
11	Create and manage a By Name List to provide the City with accurate data related to who is unsheltered in Burnaby and inform planning
12	Create and maintain an interagency working group to meet on a regular basis and support people who are unsheltered
Focus Area 4: Providing support services to unsheltered community members	
13	Explore the provision of day programming, services to be provided, its location, and its funding for people who are unsheltered

# Introduction

## The Mayor's Task Force on Unsheltered Community Members

In April 2023, the City of Burnaby created the Mayor's Task Force on Unsheltered Community Members (the Task Force) to assist in the development of a coordinated, integrated, systems-based response to unsheltered people across Burnaby.

The key functions of the Task Force were to:

- » build partnerships to effectively align service delivery and promote innovation and integration in our community's response to unsheltered community members
- » develop a coordinated, multidisciplinary, integrated approach to respond to the needs of unsheltered community members, including mental health and addiction challenges
- » integrate the delivery of mental health and addiction services with other related services, including health, housing, social work, public safety, and others
- » identify actions in HOME: Burnaby's Housing and Homelessness Strategy and any related tasks for immediate implementation

The Terms of Reference provided the following Guiding Principles for Task Force deliberations:

- » Work collaboratively and demonstrate respect for each other and the community members served.
- » Recognize that all community members are valued and can contribute to making a caring, compassionate community.
- » Be informed by people's lived experience and consider the extent to which decisions will meet their diversity of needs.
- » Commit to the work of the Task Force and take responsibility for respective roles in delivering the outcomes of the Task Force.

## Membership

A successful response to unsheltered homelessness requires partnership and collaboration. To ensure an integrated approach, the Task Force had cross-sector representation and included representatives from all levels of government. Members of the Task Force were encouraged to speak on behalf of their respective organizations to address how a coordinated and collaborative approach could be implemented across the City of Burnaby.

The Task Force was chaired by Councillor Maita Santiago, with the Mayor serving as Vice Chair, and Councillor Daniel Tetrault serving as a member. Additional members, including people who are leaders in their field and have a strong knowledge and commitment to the City of Burnaby, were appointed to the Task Force. Membership included representation from:

- » Member of Parliament Terry Beech's office
- » Member of Parliament Jagmeet Singh's office
- » Member of Parliament Peter Julian's office
- » Member of the Legislative Assembly Anne Kang's office
- » Fraser Health
- » Burnaby Primary Care Network
- » BC Housing
- » Progressive Housing Society
- » Lookout Housing and Health Society
- » Society to End Homelessness in Burnaby
- » Work BC Employment Services
- » Seniors/Willingdon Church
- » New Chelsea Society
- » Burnaby Detachment of the RCMP
- » Burnaby Board of Trade

The Task Force was supported by staff from the Public Safety, Planning and Development and Corporate Services departments as well as consultants Diana Bulley and Dominic Flanagan.



## The Task Force Process

The first meeting of the Task Force occurred in June 2023. The group met on seven occasions, with Diana Bulley from Ideospace Consulting acting as Task Force facilitator. Each meeting provided an opportunity to learn more about the needs of unsheltered community members in Burnaby. The meetings highlighted the context and challenges for people who are unsheltered, and provided insight into the steps needed for a successful response. The Task Force also explored examples of best practices in this area and the experience of other jurisdictions in addressing unsheltered homelessness.

The initial meeting of the Task Force identified four priority focus areas:

1. Create shelter services.
2. Develop a range of housing options.
3. Establish a coordinated and integrated approach for outreach to the unsheltered community.
4. Improve support services for unsheltered people.

A key part of the Task Force's approach was developing a comprehensive picture of the population of unsheltered community members beyond the numbers and basic demographics. To ensure greater understanding of the contexts, experiences and needs of unsheltered people, three facilitated sessions were held. These sessions contained representation from the following groups:

- » People with lived and living experience of being unsheltered in Burnaby
- » Outreach staff from multiple agencies working with unsheltered people in Burnaby
- » Front-line service provider staff working with people who are unsheltered and/or staying in the shelter

The information provided by these focus groups helped shape the work of the Task Force. During the meetings, Task Force members were presented with the findings and ideas for action from these focus groups. Over multiple sessions, Task Force members used this information and their own expertise to engage in group discussions about how the needs of unsheltered community members could be better met in Burnaby.

The ideas for action that stemmed from group discussions over three Task Force meetings and the focus groups with front-line staff, outreach workers and people with lived experience were organized under each priority focus area. Over three working sessions, the facilitator led an interdepartmental team of City staff to review the ideas for action and generate a set of proposed recommendations for consideration by the Task Force at their February 2024 meeting.

## Why is this Work Important?

Multiple factors have contributed to an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Burnaby in recent years. This rise reflects a regional trend across the Metro Vancouver area. The region is experiencing significant housing challenges due to accelerating home prices, rising rents and declines in affordable rental stock due to redevelopment.

Community members in Burnaby are experiencing the effects of these trends and for some people these factors can contribute to increased housing instability. Adequately addressing these challenges will require a response from all three levels of government. Additionally, while there are steps that can be taken in the short term, such as the Tenant Assistance Policy that Burnaby has implemented already, addressing homelessness will require a long-term strategy and commitment.

The results of the 2023 Point-in-Time (PiT) Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver underscored the work that still needs to be done in addressing unsheltered homelessness. The Metro Vancouver Count which took place in March 2023 identified 4,281 individuals experiencing homelessness, compared to 3,634 in 2020, marking a surge of 32% in homelessness. This is the largest increase in homelessness since the regional Counts began in 2005. In Burnaby, the number of people experiencing homelessness rose from 124 in 2020 to 209 in 2023, resulting in a 69% increase. Of this total, 77 people were unsheltered which was a notable surge from the recorded 19 people who were unsheltered in 2020.

The Count collects reasons for people losing their housing and basic demographic information. In Burnaby, the most frequent reason cited for housing loss was insufficient income, but the results also illustrated how health issues like substance use disorders and intimate relationship conflicts contributed to housing loss. Furthermore, the results highlighted how certain populations such as Indigenous peoples, seniors and people with a history of interactions with the child welfare system are overrepresented amongst those experiencing homelessness.

While the Task Force focused on finding the best solutions to address the needs of the unsheltered community, it also placed the needs of this group within the wider context of housing challenges and the role that the municipality can play across Burnaby's housing system. The City recognizes the importance of ensuring housing is accessible for all community members. In 2021, the City of Burnaby developed the HOME Strategy which addresses a range of housing issues including homelessness. The Strategy's fifth goal aims to make homelessness in the city "rare, brief, and one-time" and the Task Force worked to understand how to prevent pathways into homelessness and responses that move people out of homelessness in a timely manner.

## What did we Hear?

The facilitated sessions conducted with people with lived experience and front-line staff provided valuable insights for the Task Force. The information gathered about the current context and challenges around this issue helped guide discussions and inform the Task Force's recommendations.

## Lived Experience

Individuals with lived experience of being unsheltered highlighted multiple barriers to finding stable housing. These barriers are multi-faceted, including the lack of affordable housing, issues with landlords, limited community support and stigma.

### Complete lack of affordable housing

The cost of housing remains the biggest barrier for people. In 2023, the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) assessed the average cost for a one-bedroom apartment in Burnaby to be just over \$1500/month. These unaffordable market rental rates combined with the limited non-market housing stock in the city, led many participants to emphasize the lack of options for and availability of affordable housing in Burnaby. Participants highlighted how people were being priced out of housing and ended up living in RVs or cars because they had no other option.

*“Alternative housing is needed – most of us can’t compete in the regular market anywhere in the Lower Mainland.”*

*“The issues are increasing – so many Canadians are only a paycheck away from homelessness. The system is straining to just keep people’s heads above water.”*

*“For every available room there are 20 people who want it.”*

### Landlord requirements and discrimination

Participants noted the high level of requirements established by many landlords and experiences of discrimination in trying to find housing. Given the dynamics of the current housing market, a power imbalance exists between landlords and potential tenants and consequently landlords can institute a series of requirements, including credit checks, references and criminal record checks. Participants also cited onerous rules, such as no pets, no smoking, no drugs, and recounted discriminatory experiences of stereotyping.

*“Lots of us don’t have much credit or even an online bank account.”*

*“A friend was recently evicted for smoking in her apartment. She is a 60- year-old woman with many sentimental belongings and she will lose everything when she is evicted and she will have to go to a women’s shelter.”*

*“We have the money to pay rent and just want to be safe. But when my partner and I go to look at homes together, they take one look at me and say no straight away.”*

It should also be noted that a contributing factor to the dynamic between landlords and tenants is that Burnaby, like other Metro Vancouver communities, has very low vacancy rates for rental housing. In October 2023, the CMHC reported vacancy rate was approximately 1.2%.

## Lack of community support and bureaucratic challenges

Challenges exist with the current system for accessing affordable housing programs. To receive assistance, people need to be “part of the system” or “on the list”. Non-profit housing staff working in this area have high caseloads and their volume of work limits their ability to help people in a timely manner. Additionally, turnover amongst front-line staff creates difficulties in providing continual support. Interruptions in support also occur when programs receive only short-term funding and are discontinued.

*“It gets old pouring your heart out to strangers and nothing happening from it [...] after going through it again and again. It is traumatizing.”*

*“I have had six or seven people in one year involved in my case and then they move on.”*

*“If you’re not part of the system or on the list for help, ‘normies’ don’t accept you but government doesn’t help you either – we are falling through the cracks.”*

## Suggestions for improvement

The group identified recommendations for overcoming existing barriers and proposed suggestions about how to create a sense of home for individuals experiencing homelessness. They suggested multiple practices that could help the unsheltered community in Burnaby.

The importance of feeling safe and secure in shelter spaces was highlighted. Participants stressed the importance of having security for their personal belongings and being able to access them in a timely manner. Additionally, challenges exist around creating a sense of stability in shelters and in getting sober in a space where other people may be using substances.

*“...Managing addiction is easier when you have a place where you can take root and feel settled and safe...”*

Other suggestions included: providing a range of housing to support the needs of different groups such as housing for children and families, “middle-ground” housing that extend beyond basic shelters, as well as housing arrangements equipped with on-site or readily available support services on an outreach basis for individuals dealing with substance use issues. Many highlighted the need to feel safe within their own home and the importance of having a door that locks.

*“My door is broken and there’s no lock, I just pull it shut but people can get in so my room is not secure”*

*“...Living in supportive housing is better than being outside, and it’s getting cold now too. But it almost feels like an experiment.”*

Furthermore, the importance of financial support was highlighted, including the increase of rental subsidies and assistance with steps like setting up bank accounts, applying for grants and building credit.

Additional recommendations included establishing programs that provide mental and physical health support through options like counselling, peer support groups, and substance use and detox services. There is also a need for the provision of daytime services such as career support and skill development as well as recreational activities, providing opportunities for social interaction.

*“To be isolated is the worst feeling. More time doing activities and getting experiences leaves us with less time to ruminate and worry about our situation.”*

*“We all have things that are difficult to do. Sometimes you need encouragement and help. Help us help each other and build relationships...”*

## Front-line Staff Working in Local Agencies

Two consultation sessions were held with people who work with unsheltered community members in Burnaby. The following groups were represented:

- » RCMP
- » Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
- » Progressive Housing Society
- » City of Burnaby: Bylaw Services, Parks Operations, Intervention Support
- » Front-line shelter staff

The sessions focused on addressing the primary needs of unsheltered community members, identifying key barriers service provision and proposing actionable steps to improve the lives of unsheltered people.

## Lack of shelter spaces

A primary concern is the insufficient number of shelter spaces in Burnaby for everyone who needs a spot. Exacerbating this problem is the lack of affordable housing options in the city, which prevents people who do have a shelter space from moving out of the shelter. Consequently, people remain in shelters for extended periods, further limiting the availability of shelter spaces.

*“Often people have nowhere to go except the shelter, so they end up staying for 18 months or longer.”*

The group emphasized challenges like people having limited access to basic needs such as food and washrooms and lacking a place to safely store their belongings. Many unsheltered community members have nowhere to go during the day. The funding to provide daytime services is limited and services for unsheltered people are generally underfunded.

*“The Hub was invaluable until it lost its funding. When it was shut down it was a huge loss for the entire city.”*

*“People who have their daily needs met are much more likely to listen and be open to what other supports are available.”*

Additionally, there is a disconnect between the design of services and lived realities of people experiencing homelessness. Unsheltered people are expected to call or email to access many services, but unsheltered individuals do not always have reliable access to phones or laptops, so this is an unrealistic expectation.

*“It is unrealistic that we expect unhoused people to call for services as they often do not have phones and if they miss a call, they are dropped [out of the process].”*

### **More support needed for people dealing with substance use disorders**

The sessions also highlighted the need to improve services for unsheltered people with substance use disorders. Areas for improvement include both changes to harm reduction programs such as increased access to safe supply as well as greater access to detox treatments. Participants noted how treatment services for substance use are fragmented and thus inaccessible to many people. Although detox spaces technically exist, many people are unable to access these spaces when they need to.

Improvements in discharge planning are also needed to better support people who are ready to return to the community. People who are discharged from hospital or support recovery housing without the proper support in place risk returning to using substances and engaging in survival-style drug use as a coping mechanism. To prevent these outcomes, people need ongoing access to counselling and stable housing post-discharge.

*“There are only 3 or 4 detox centres in the Lower Mainland. How is there not more support?”*

*“There is not enough ‘second stage’ housing. People are just sent back out on the streets.”*



## Resources for specific populations

The sessions also underscored that targeted support and resources are needed for certain groups like seniors. For example, shelters need to be better equipped to support seniors with specialty resources like mobility aids. Shelters also currently lack the space to adequately accommodate women and transgender individuals. Additionally, the number of families experiencing homelessness is increasing and shelters in Burnaby are not currently adequately equipped to support them.

*“Families facing homelessness often leave Burnaby and their support network because we have nothing to offer them.”*

*“Shelters are not a safe space for women or transgender people so people are reluctant to go there.”*

*“1/3 of people in shelters are seniors and have complex needs (heart disease, liver failure).”*

## Over-reliance on enforcement

Another issue that was raised was the over-reliance and emphasis on enforcement in the current approach to handling issues concerning unsheltered community members. Having RCMP and/or bylaw/park officers be the primary response to unsheltered people is not a sustainable method. Continual cycles of enforcement officers “moving an unsheltered person along” contribute to the idea that these individuals are the “problems” and perpetuate stigma.

*“This puts bylaw officers, park officers, and police officers in a bad position because they want to help the person but are pressured by other community members to ‘make it go away’.”*

## Areas for improvement

A key recommendation was to expand the amount of affordable housing in Burnaby and create a variety of housing types, such as low-barrier units with 24-hour support and a mix of congregate and scattered sites. The groups also emphasized the importance of preventive measures like specific support for people when they face landlord difficulties and emergency rental funding options to prevent evictions.

The need to provide daytime services through a comprehensive program like what the Hub used to offer was highlighted. A one-time grant from the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), administered by the City, allowed Progressive Housing to operate the Hub on 6th Street as a drop-in service. When this grant program ended in 2023, the Hub had to reduce its services to offer appointment-based services only. Front-line users and support staff have identified this as a significant gap in service provision. Programs such as the Hub help meet people’s basic needs for food, washrooms, laundry and storage as well as build relationships between unsheltered people and outreach workers.

Other suggestions proposed include the expansion of treatment options by creating a mobile, interdisciplinary team that consists of health care providers and outreach workers to provide treatment support for unsheltered community members.

*“Mobile teams can deal with mental health crises, wound care, and help people navigate systems and services.”*

Responses need to shift from an enforcement focus to an outreach approach by proactively connecting with unsheltered community members to build relationships and provide support. Having outreach workers be the primary response to calls about unsheltered people and/or having them work in partnership with police and bylaw officers should also be considered.

Overall, the sessions highlighted that the City needs a collaborative multi-pronged response to address the broad range of needs of unsheltered people. Agencies need to improve their coordination and engage in regular communication with one another. Outreach needs to be more proactive than reactive and include trauma-informed staff who can support mental, physical and socioeconomic needs of these individuals.

## Practices in other Jurisdictions

The Task Force created an opportunity for the City of Burnaby to explore best and emerging practices in addressing the needs of unsheltered community members. Throughout the process, current areas of best practices in both Canadian and international contexts were explored. Examining these best practices enabled the Task Force to consider what approaches may be replicated and implemented locally to improve the response to unsheltered populations.

### Best and emerging practices

#### Housing First

The Housing First approach emphasizes placing people in permanent, affordable housing as the first step in transitioning someone out of homelessness. It positions stable housing as the necessary prerequisite for people to succeed in other areas of their lives such as employment and recovery programs.

One of the most successful implementations of the Housing First model exists in Finland which has seen a year-over-year reduction in homelessness. In the capital city, Helsinki, instead of lengthy stays at shelters, people are quickly moved into long-term housing and then provided additional support. Providing support and services in addition to housing is crucial to the success of the Housing First model. In Finland, this model provides a range of support services, including assistance with accessing further education, career training, work programs and life skills such as cooking.

Although the Finnish approach represents a potential framework for the municipality to draw from, shifting to a similar framework would require a drastic transformation. Adopting this model requires a significant commitment from all levels of government to fund and develop a range of transitional and social housing units. Finland's success stems from a decades-long political commitment and illustrates how meaningfully addressing homelessness will take multi-year “big picture” strategies.

### Alternative forms of housing: Tiny homes

Municipalities in British Columbia such as Victoria, Duncan and Kelowna have adopted a “Tiny home” model to provide temporary housing to unsheltered community members. For example, the City of Kelowna, in partnership with BC Housing's Homeless Encampment Action Response Temporary Housing (HEARTH) program, constructed 60 transitional housing units, with each unit having a locking door, storage space, a bed, heater and mini fridge. The site known as STEP Place has 24/7 staffing, shared washrooms and laundry and a communal kitchen. A version of this model was used by the City of Vancouver which created a Tiny Shelter Pilot Project that constructed 10 tiny shelter units next to an existing shelter.

These units provide greater privacy for populations who may feel uncomfortable in the congregate shelter model, thus, helping to address the privacy and security challenges which exist in many communal shelters. The structures enable people to have their own space, security for their personal belongings, and a greater sense of safety as they await a long-term housing solution. These existing projects provide insights for the City of Burnaby to understand the benefits and potential obstacles in pursuing these forms of alternative shelter.

### Coordinated Response Teams

In recent years, there has been a focus on how to improve outreach programs to members of the unsheltered community. In British Columbia, new models have included the Homeless Encampment Action Response Team (HEART) which is a coordinated team of local agencies that collect and share information in their response to encampments. This approach originated from a pilot program in the City of Victoria where a multidisciplinary team met weekly to coordinate their outreach response to unsheltered community members. This collaborative approach allowed the team to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the outreach programs and identify shelter and support options for unsheltered people.

## By-Name-Lists

In many jurisdictions, innovative data programs have been piloted to try and create a better understanding of the scope and characteristics of the unsheltered population in a community. By-Name-Lists collect information about the demographics of unsheltered people and track how people move in and out of homelessness. This framework has been implemented in communities across Canada and the United States.

In Edmonton, the By-Name-List compiles data from over 60 agencies which interact with unsheltered community members and enables the collection of real-time data. Like any measure, these lists likely undercount the number of people experiencing homelessness given that they only count individuals who interact with services and people can decline to be counted. However, there are significant benefits to collecting this data as it provides insights into the pathways of how people move in and out of homelessness and helps highlight potential gaps in services.

## Key Take-aways

There were common themes about these areas of good practices, in particular the need for a single agency to lead the coordination and oversight of the outreach response for unsheltered people within any given municipality.

Innovation in housing policy also requires a need to become proactive as opposed to reactive which reinforces the need to implement a data-driven approach as seen by the creation of By-Name-Lists.

Integrated outreach services focus on more than just housing an individual. Instead, successful practices involve support services that include access to physical and mental health programs, financial advice, employment guidance and educational opportunities. These services help ensure people can maintain their housing and prevent people from cycling back into homelessness.

The City of Burnaby recognizes the need to develop a data-driven approach which informs real-time decision making. The integrated outreach approach to assisting unsheltered community members should identify pathways bringing people into shelter and housing as well as identify preventive pathways against homelessness. These preventive pathways would include inappropriate discharges from acute care hospitals into homelessness, be it an emergency shelter or the street.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to identify what's working well in neighbouring municipalities and build on shared learning and information regarding effective interventions within the Metro Vancouver region.

Finally, while the City can play a key role in facilitating collaborative partnerships for outreach planning aimed at assisting members of the unsheltered community, the importance of shared ownership in addressing homelessness needs to be emphasized. The underlying principle for all the recommendations is the need to develop strategic and operational partnerships which focus on addressing the needs of the unsheltered community members.

# What is Being Recommended

*Priority 1 Immediate start*

*Priority 2 Targeted start date: No later than October 31, 2024*

## Focus Area 1: Creating shelter spaces

### Recommendation 1. Develop a Shelter Strategy for the City of Burnaby (Priority 1)

The objectives of a City-wide shelter strategy need to include the prioritization of additional shelter spaces. Due to redevelopment of the site, the shelter on Douglas Road is scheduled to close in 2025; the temporary winter shelter on Buller Avenue is scheduled to close at the end of April 2024. These two sites currently provide approximately 80 shelter spaces.

The shelter strategy should be part of a year-round planning cycle which looks to increase the overall shelter capacity for the city. The strategy should ensure the shelters are fully accessible to a mix of populations, including seniors, women, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and families. The fastest growing homeless demographic in Metro Vancouver is seniors, so accessibility for this population which may have chronic physical health issues as well as limited mobility needs to be addressed. This should include the use of pods in all year-round shelters.

The strategy needs to be implemented with key partners such as Fraser Health to ensure the appropriate level of health support services is incorporated into the day-to-day operations of the shelters.

The guiding principles for the shelter strategy should include engagement with people with lived and living experience of using shelters as well as front-line staff working in shelters. Other principles would include identifying the obstacles that prevent people from using shelters, particularly their concerns regarding safety. To encourage people to move inside, a key component of the strategy will need to address the storage of people's belongings.

Consideration should be given to the accessibility of shelters, in particular, shelters need to be located in appropriate geographic areas and they need to be accessible by public transit and close to relevant community "hubs".

The strategy can only be effectively implemented with key partners such as Fraser Health and BC Housing to ensure the appropriate level of resources and health support is incorporated into the day-to-day operations of the shelters.

## **Recommendation 2: Develop and implement a City of Burnaby Guideline for the Design and Operation of Emergency Shelters (Priority 2)**

The City should review and aim to build on existing Provincial guidelines on the design and operation of shelter programs. The guideline would consider best practices for areas like accessibility, safety, hygiene and storage. Additionally, the guideline should look into how the City can address the needs of different populations like seniors and families.

Creating a clear framework would ensure that Burnaby's standards and approach are applied to all shelters across the city. This guideline would be developed in consultation with people with lived experience of staying in shelters, and through engagement with front-line staff and other experts.

## **Focus Area 2: Developing a range of housing types to meet a variety of needs**

### **Recommendation 3: Update the City's Housing Needs Assessment, ensuring it accurately reflects the needs of people who need supportive housing and complex care (Priority 1)**

The City recently completed its Housing Needs Report in 2021. Under the new Provincial legislation, all local governments are required to update their Housing Needs Report by January 1, 2025. It is recommended that community partners proactively share data with the City to fulfill this requirement as well as any other relevant data where appropriate and relevant to the Housing Needs Report.

### **Recommendation 4: Advocate to senior levels of government for rent subsidies to support inclusionary rental units the City has obtained through the development process (Priority 2)**

The City's Rental Use Zoning Policy requires new residential developments to allocate 20% of their total market unit count as below-market units, priced at 20% below CMHC market median rates. However, given the high median rents in the city, this rate may still be unaffordable to some very low-income families.

To ensure a portion of these units are accessible to very low-income families, the City should advocate to senior levels of government to provide ongoing funding to attach housing subsidies to specific units. Although housing subsidies are usually attached to the individuals, linking subsidies to these units would increase the supply of low-income housing in the city.



### **Recommendation 5: Work with the development sector to explore temporary transitional housing within buildings slated for redevelopment (Priority 2)**

At times, older residential buildings may remain vacant for a period before being demolished and turned into higher-density housing. While the City's Tenant Assistance Policy has helped reduce vacancy durations, there may be potential opportunities to use these older buildings as "Meanwhile Spaces" for unsheltered individuals while more permanent housing options are provided.

Here in Metro Vancouver, Journey Home Community is actively exploring the "Meanwhile Spaces" concept, which repurposes vacant buildings awaiting demolition or slated for rezoning to provide temporary housing for refugee families "in the meanwhile".

<https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/meanwhile-using-empty-buildings-to-provide-housing-for-refugee-claimants/>

### **Recommendation 6: Leverage City-owned land and housing stock to increase the supply of affordable housing (Priority 1)**

It is advised that the City undertakes an inventory and review of existing City-owned housing, identifies sites and explores the feasibility of offering this stock as affordable rental as they become vacant. Explore the possibility of these being repurposed to increase the availability of affordable housing either through redevelopment or renovation.

### **Recommendation 7: Identify priority populations and criteria for how City-owned houses are tenanted as they become vacant (Priority 2)**

After completing the review of City-owned properties, the City should engage with local non-profits to develop criteria and identify populations for these properties. The City could explore low-cost leasing options with non-profit housing providers to provide increased housing options for priority populations, including low-income families or newcomer families.

### **Recommendation 8: Consider land acquisitions for the purposes of supporting the housing needs of low, or very low-income households (Priority 2)**

Given that the City has few remaining land holdings that support housing development, Burnaby should explore creating an acquisition strategy to identify suitable land for non-market housing that supports priority populations. To assist in these acquisitions, the City should explore possible partnerships with senior levels of government and BC Housing.

### **Recommendation 9: Advocate to the health authority to fund complex care/licensed care housing in Burnaby (Priority 1)**

Complex care housing provides support for people with greater needs due to conditions like substance use disorders, mental health issues and poor physical health. The complex care model can also provide the necessary housing and support to the increasing number of people with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) in the unsheltered population.

Many individuals who are chronically homeless (experiencing homelessness for one year or more) have significant health issues. Complex care housing helps address the needs of this group who require greater support to ensure housing stability. According to the 2023 Metro Vancouver homeless count, approximately 70% of people surveyed had been homeless for more than one year.

The Province, in partnership with local health authorities, has recently announced expansions to complex care services in British Columbia. Burnaby however still lacks complex care units, although there is an existing need for them. The units can be offered throughout a scattered supportive housing program, like what we have seen with the Intensive Case Management (ICM) Team model, or in a designated site that only offers complex care services.

The City should advocate to Fraser Health and relevant government organizations such as BC Housing for the appropriate levels of capital and operational funding to establish a complex care housing program in Burnaby. This would allow people to receive enough support within the community instead of being forced to get treatment in a different municipality.

### **Recommendation 10: Create an interagency working group whose mandate is to develop and implement strategies in support of unsheltered people (Priority 1)**

The purpose of this group would be to work with government and community partners on “big picture” actions such as developing the Shelter Strategy rather than involving in day-to-day operations. Led by the City of Burnaby, other potential members would include Fraser Health, BC Housing, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, local non-profits, as well as people with lived experience.

The work of the group would then be guided by the newly established Shelter Strategy, the results of the Housing Needs Assessment and related plans and policies such as the HOME Strategy. This work could include establishing a set of metrics that allows the City to track unsheltered homelessness trends and evaluate the efficacy of interventions as well as identify areas for improvement. This would enable the City to take targeted actions toward achieving its goal of making the homelessness experience rare, brief and one time.

### Focus Area 3: Coordinating an interagency response to outreach

#### Recommendation 11: Create and manage a By-Name-List to provide the City with accurate data on unsheltered populations in Burnaby and inform planning (Priority 1)

A By-Name-List (BNL) creates a real-time record of people known to be experiencing homelessness in the community. The list includes certain demographic information and provides insight into how people access services and move in and out of the system. A BNL will not provide a full count of people experiencing homelessness due to the challenges of measuring the “hidden homeless” and people refusing to participate in the list. However, there are still benefits to this program as it allows service providers to tailor responses to people’s individual needs and to evaluate the effectiveness of these responses. The data collected can be used to inform the actions of the City moving forward.

The City should take the lead in establishing this program. As part of the initial development, it is recommended that Burnaby staff conduct an environmental scan of other jurisdictions’ By-Name-Lists. Subsequently, the City should identify the objectives, purposes and characteristics of the By-Name-List and determine clear data collection protocols, privacy protections and possible agencies to oversee the operation of the list.

#### Recommendation 12: Create and maintain an interagency working group to meet on a regular basis and support unsheltered people (Priority 1)

The City’s Intervention Support staff should create and facilitate an operational working group of lead agencies engaged in outreach activities. The goal of the working group would be to conduct regular meetings to facilitate coordinated, focused and efficient outreach to unsheltered community members. This would help prevent duplication of outreach services and ensure that individuals are not overlooked by outreach staff.

Participants could include City Planning and Intervention Support staff, RCMP, Fraser Health, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, relevant non-profit housing providers, BC Housing, Society to End Homelessness, and the Primary Care Network.

## Focus Area 4: Providing support services to unsheltered community members

### Recommendation 13: Explore the provision of day programming, services to be provided, location, and funding sources for unsheltered people (Priority 1)

Members of the unsheltered community would benefit significantly from daytime programming at a site that provides basic needs like meals, washrooms and laundry services. The City should evaluate the model of services that used to be provided by the Hub in Burnaby and current programs in other communities such as the City of Vancouver's Gathering Place Community Center.

City staff should work with local partners to determine additional daytime services that may be needed and to identify an appropriate location(s). To avoid disruptions in services, the City should identify sustainable sources of funding that would enable these services to be ongoing.

## Concluding Remarks

The Task Force members recognized that homelessness can only be addressed through partnership and collaboration and cannot be solved by one single entity or one single approach. Each organisation at the Task Force table must recognize its roles and responsibilities in addressing unsheltered homelessness. Moving forward, this collaborative approach will serve as the cornerstone for the next steps and implementation phases and be used to shape measurable and shared outcomes.

The Task Force provided an opportunity for key stakeholders to learn from each other about how best to respond to the needs of unsheltered people and also to develop a deeper understanding of the roles different organizations play in preventing and addressing housing insecurity in the City. This learning process will enable the development of a more effective and sustainable strategy as the City looks to the future.

# Glossary

## Affordable Housing

Affordable housing should comprise less than 30 percent of a household's gross income. This principle applies to whether the housing is market or non-market.

## By Name List

A list of every person in a community experiencing homelessness updated in real time. Personal information collected and shared with a person's consent can include their name, homeless history and housing needs.

## Complex Care Housing

A provincial government program that provides health, mental health, substance use and other supports in a home environment. The program is geared towards individuals who are at-risk of or experiencing homelessness who have complex mental health or substance use issues, and who may also be living with other challenges like acquired brain injury, developmental disability, and histories of trauma. The housing services and health supports are attached to the individual and will look different depending on community and individual needs.

## Emergency Shelters

These facilities provide temporary shelter for anyone who is homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Many are operated by non-profit societies with government supports, such as funding for construction and/or operation.

## Year-Round Shelters

These facilities operate 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Temporary Winter Shelters

These facilities are generally open from November 01 to April 30 and closed from May 1 to October 31 in a given year. Hours of operations may range from being only open during the night or run up to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### Extreme Weather Response (EWR) Shelter

These facilities are open in the winter when a local community declares an alert under the Assistance to Shelter Act that sleeping outside could threaten a person's health and safety. During an alert, these facilities are open every night.

### Emergency Warming Centre

The City's emergency warming centre adds extra shelter capacity during periods of unusually cold weather. Run by the City, the emergency warming centre operates overnight and supplements existing shelter services in the community. The facility is open every night until the extreme weather alert is cancelled.

### Housing First

Housing First prioritizes placing people in permanent, affordable housing as they transition out of homelessness. Stable housing is emphasized as a necessary prerequisite for people to succeed in other areas of their lives such as employment and recovery programs.

### Non-market housing

Housing options outside of the private housing market, generally targeted at low- and middle-income families and seniors.

### Sheltered Homelessness

Individuals who are counted as part of the sheltered homeless are accessing temporary shelter in facilities like shelters or transition houses or are in hospital or police holding with no place to return to once released (No Fixed Address).

### Supportive Housing

Subsidized housing with on-site services and supports for individuals at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. Operated by non-profit societies with government supports, such as funding for construction and/or operation. Supportive housing provides a range of on-site, non-clinical supports such as: life skills training, connections to health care, mental health or substance-use services. Staff are on-site 24/7 to provide support.

### Unsheltered Homelessness

Individuals who are counted as unsheltered community members are sleeping outside in informal shelters like tents, in vehicles, or staying with others but have no permanent address.



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