

EMERGENCY SHELTER FACT SHEET *for Community Partners*

Background

The Emergency Shelter Program provides funding to emergency shelters and drop-in centres across British Columbia. Management of the program was transferred to BC Housing in the fall of 2005 from the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance as part of the Province's centralization of housing and homelessness services. BC Housing initiated a review in the spring of 2006 in order to better understand the context within which the emergency shelters operate. This review highlighted the need to develop a standardized program and improve consistency in service delivery.

New Emergency Shelter Program Framework

A new program framework for the Emergency Shelter Program was developed in the spring of 2007 to better integrate the Emergency Shelter Program into the housing continuum, making it easier for homeless people to move from emergency shelters into housing with supports.

The new program framework was developed to ensure that emergency shelter providers funded by BC Housing met acceptable and consistent standards of service. The new framework calls for emergency shelters to provide services to help their clients access the continuum of housing and supports to break the cycle of homelessness in addition to the overnight accommodation and basic nutrition and hygiene needs that they have traditionally offered.

October 12th Announcement

On October 12, 2007, the Province of B.C. increased the funding for emergency shelters by \$25 million so they can more effectively work with their clients to break the cycle of homelessness. As a result, most emergency shelters will be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This will allow staff to connect shelter clients with the support services and housing required to increase stability in their lives.

24-hour emergency shelters

Most emergency shelters in Victoria, Metro Vancouver, Kelowna and Prince George will transition to 24-hour service, seven days a week in December 2007. Most emergency shelters will be transitioning to 24-hour service by April 1, 2008.

One-time capital funding

Also on October 12th, the Province of B.C. announced one-time capital funding for Emergency Shelter

Program providers totaling \$1.2 million as part of the Building Repair and Small Capital Replacement fund. This fund will be available on an annual basis for emergency shelter providers to complete necessary building repairs.

Emergency Shelter Program Guiding Principles

Under the new program framework, the Emergency Shelter Program will be guided by four key principles:

1. *Core services that are accessible and client-focused*

All homeless persons age 19 and over have the right to access shelter services regardless of ethno-cultural background, religious beliefs, physical disability, mental health status, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation.

Emergency shelter providers will provide an atmosphere of *dignity, respect* and *compassion*. Individual shelters may have service mandates (i.e. male or female only) due to physical constraints of their building and/or agency expertise.

2. *Transparent and accountable operations*

Emergency shelter providers will maintain reliable and consistent records, fulfill reporting obligations and develop meaningful policies and procedures.

3. *Welcoming, safe and secure service environment*

The health and safety of residents, volunteers and staff is of the highest importance.

4. *A collaborative and innovative sector environment*

Emergency shelter providers will work in partnership with the local community and local service agencies as well as their clients or former clients to ensure that the shelter and its support services are responsive to the community needs.

Services Offered by Emergency Shelters

Emergency shelters will continue to offer over night accommodation, meals and showers. New services offered by shelters include: case planning for their clients; referrals to other community support services (i.e., physical and mental health, Income Assistance, job training, life skill development, etc.); and support in finding appropriate housing.

Services NOT Offered by Emergency Shelters

Services NOT offered by emergency shelters include:

- Medical services – Shelters are not able to provide detox, wound care, prescription drug administration, etc.
- Mental health treatment - Shelters can only refer to mental health services and advocate for their clients to gain access.
- Criminal justice system – Shelters are not equipped to participate in parole conditions or provide court ordered accommodation. Some shelters may choose to work with the courts. If this is the case, the courts are requested to discuss this with the shelter prior to sending a client to the shelter.

Emergency shelters are not the solution to homelessness nor are they able to respond to all problems related to homelessness. Addressing homelessness requires cooperation from all service providers in a community and from all levels of government.

Denying access

While discriminatory criteria for admission are not tolerated, it is recognized that in some situations it is necessary for emergency shelter providers to deny access to individuals.

The grounds for service restriction may include severe disruption to services and where clients are considered to represent a danger to themselves, staff, visitors or other residents.

In order to provide safe accommodation for women, young adults and families with children, separate sleeping accommodation is required as well as safe access to washroom facilities.

Role of BC Housing

BC Housing is responsible for the funding and administration of the Emergency Shelter Program. Its role includes:

- Funding emergency shelter providers by entering into operating agreements;
- Developing provide-wide standards and guidelines in partnership with emergency shelter providers;
- Ensuring all program standards and guidelines are met by conducting regular monitoring and evaluating services; and

- Working with and supporting emergency shelter providers by providing clear guidelines, information and resources where appropriate, supporting capacity development and responding to gaps in the provision of service.

If a community member has concerns regarding the operation of a BC Housing funded emergency shelter, they are encouraged to contact that shelter provider directly. If a resolution of the issue cannot be achieved with the provider, they may then contact BC Housing at the contact information below.

For more information

More information on the Emergency Shelter Program is available at www.bchousing.org or by emailing homeless@bchousing.org

Defining the Homeless Population

Absolute homelessness - Individuals and families who are living in: public spaces without legal claim; a homeless shelter; a public facility or service (i.e., hospital, correctional facility, etc.) and cannot return to a stable residence; or individuals and families who are financially, sexually, physically or emotionally exploited to maintain their shelter.

Homeless due to crisis – Individuals and families who are homeless because their previous residence became uninhabitable due to a human caused or natural disaster (i.e., fire, earthquake, etc.).

Risk of Homeless – Individuals and families who are living in: temporary accommodation where they do not have control over the length and conditions of tenure (i.e., couch surfing, name not on lease) and do not have adequate personal space; time-limited housing designed to help them transition from being homeless to living in a permanent form of housing (i.e., transitional or second-stage housing); or accommodation where tenancy will be terminated within three months of application (i.e., given notice by landlord or pending release from prison).

Hidden Homeless – Individuals and families who are living in temporary accommodation where they do not have control over the length and conditions of tenure but do have adequate personal space.