

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 capacity and demand 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.

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 people facing homelessness to access the support services and housing required to increase stability in their lives.

The new program framework was developed to ensure that emergency shelter providers funded by BC Housing meet acceptable and consistent standards of service. The new framework calls for emergency shelters to provide 'gateway services' to help their clients break the cycle of homelessness in addition to services they previously offered which provided overnight accommodation, and met the basic nutrition and hygiene needs of their clients.

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 with an increased staff to bed ratio. This will allow their staff to connect clients with the support services and housing required to increase stability in their lives.

Guiding Principles

The new Emergency Shelter Program Framework defines four guiding 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*.

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.

Core Services

The two core services offered by emergency shelters are *essential services* and *gateway services*.

Essential Services

Essential services meet the *immediate* needs of the homeless by providing safe shelter and nutrition, including:

- 24-hour access to emergency services;
 - Written policies and procedures for admission, allowable length of stay, and extensions;
 - Clearly defined reasons or conditions of expulsion;
 - Safe, secure and appropriate sleeping accommodation for all clients;
 - Separate and secure sleeping arrangements for men, women, and families;
 - Appropriate bedding and toiletries to ensure hygiene standards are met; and
 - Three meals per day.
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Gateway Services

Gateway services meet the clients' *longer term* needs by offering support services that help individuals to move through the housing and services continuum, including:

- Provision of on-site support services, case management, and planning services available to all interested individuals;
- Linkages and referrals to both on and off-site support services (i.e., income assistance, employment training, transitional and supportive housing, mental health and addictions services, primary health care, and life skills training).

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 province-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.

Role of the Emergency Shelter Providers

Emergency shelter providers are the primary delivery agent for emergency shelter service. Each agency is responsible for the following:

- Delivery of shelter services as outlined in the Emergency Shelter Program Framework and the operating agreement;
- Compliance with program standards and a demonstrated effort towards achieving program guidelines;
- Availability and preparedness of staff for annual services reviews;
- Development of a service mandate and written policies that outline how the program will meet the needs of emergency shelter clients;

- Notifying BC Housing of changes to emergency shelter services that could affect the service agreement; and
- Identification of trends among the client population and pressures facing local communities.

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.