

# EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAM

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## PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

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4<sup>th</sup> Edition



## A. INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the administration of the Emergency Shelter Program was transferred to BC Housing from the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance as part of the Province’s centralization of housing and homelessness services. The program comprises shelter accommodation, including seasonal and temporary shelter services<sup>1</sup>, Drop-in Services, and other specialized programs. This program framework does not apply to extreme weather shelter services<sup>2</sup>.

Services include:

- **Essential Services** to meet a Client’s immediate needs for accommodation, nutritious meals, security and basic hygiene.
- **Gateway Services** (where funded) to help Clients break the cycle of Homelessness by connecting Clients to appropriate Housing and community services.

Shelters provide short-term responses to the challenge of Homelessness, including temporary accommodation with a strong focus on helping Clients move into Housing. This includes supporting Clients to obtain Housing options and connecting them with appropriate Support Services. Shelters are part of a suite of programs along the housing continuum (Figure 1)<sup>3</sup>.

This framework outlines key program elements, standards and guidelines, and defines the roles and responsibilities of BC Housing and its partners in the delivery and management of the program. BC Housing developed this program framework in partnership with providers and is committed to working cooperatively with the shelter sector for program delivery.

**Figure 1: Housing Continuum**



## B. PRINCIPLES

### Services are accessible and Client focused

- Services are accessible to anyone aged 19 or older who is experiencing Homelessness or is At Risk of Homelessness, regardless of ethno-cultural background, religious beliefs, disability, mental health status, gender identity or sexual orientation. A range of services will be available in the shelter system to ensure access for a diverse population.

<sup>1</sup> Temporary and winter shelters may provide modified or targeted services on a temporary basis in response to specific community needs. See individual agreements for details.

<sup>2</sup> The Extreme Weather Response Program enables communities to temporarily increase the number of emergency shelter beds during extreme weather conditions that threaten the safety and health of homeless individuals and families. The program funds time-limited, temporary shelter beds needed during extreme weather conditions. It is not included in this program and is separately governed by the Extreme Weather Response Program Framework.

<sup>3</sup> The housing continuum extends from emergency shelter and housing for those experiencing homelessness through to affordable rental housing and homeownership. This diagram illustrates the level of supports and services tenants may need to maintain a stable housing situation and ranges from housing with integrated on-site programs and services through to independent housing in the private market.

BC Housing may agree to fund shelters that target specific populations, depending on community needs, the availability of alternative services in the community and the provider's service mandate.

- Providers will be aware of the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identities and work to create an atmosphere of safety and respect.
- Providers will be aware of the nature, dynamics and impact of violence against women and work to create a safe and secure environment.
- Providers will engage with Clients to assist them in identifying and pursuing their goals toward Housing, wellness and self-reliance. This includes providing resources and information to Clients on Housing, health care, income and employment services.
- An atmosphere of dignity, compassion and respect is maintained.

#### **Operations are transparent and accountable**

- Providers maintain reliable records and fulfil regular reporting obligations.
- Providers adopt written policies and procedures that are responsive to Client needs.
- Providers communicate their policy and procedure regarding complaints and appeals to all Clients.
- A monitoring system provides assurance that an adequate quality of service is provided.
- Providers will work towards achieving predetermined program goals and targets.
- BC Housing conducts reviews and assessments to confirm that services delivered are effective at meeting the program's objectives.
- BC Housing will regularly report to the Provincial Government and the public on the effectiveness of the program.

#### **The service environment is welcoming, safe and secure**

- The health and safety of staff and Clients is of the highest importance. While unlawful discrimination is not tolerated, providers are not expected to deliver services in circumstances where the safety or security of any individual may be threatened.
- Providers will have safety protocols in place that provide clear guidance for Client and staff safety. Protocols should be reviewed periodically by the provider.
- All providers will adopt practices which ensure the safety and security of women, men, transgendered individuals, women and children, couples and families, as applicable.
- Co-ed shelters will adopt practices and standards that minimize the risk of male violence and ensure that the specialized safety and security needs of women Clients are met.
- Co-ed shelters will adhere to principles of safe access, safe shared spaces, safe sleeping areas, and privacy.
- Where possible, gender specific common space should be made available for women Clients.

#### **Collaboration among service providers to improve service effectiveness**

- Service delivery effectiveness is enhanced through open and collaborative working relationships among providers, partner agencies, other government agencies and BC Housing.
- Program delivery is responsive to community needs and funding must reflect local needs assessments, strategic plans, best practice research and evidence-based analyses.

## **C. GOALS**

1. Break the cycle of Homelessness by connecting Clients to appropriate Housing and the supports necessary to help them remain Housed.

## D. OBJECTIVES

1. Provide safe, accessible shelter for Clients.
2. Facilitate the movement of Clients into Housing.
3. Support communication, partnerships and collaborative initiatives across the shelter sector.

## E. OUTCOMES

1. The immediate needs of the Clients are met by providing shelter, access to supports, and nutrition and hygiene services.
2. Clients are connected with Housing.
3. Clients are supported to maintain Housing.

## F. MEASURES

Performance measures are designed to measure progress towards program goals, objectives and outcomes (Figure 2). Minimum requirements will be established by BC Housing, subject to the collection of baseline data.

**Figure 2: Performance Measures**

Performance Measure
Number and percentage of Clients Housed within 60 days.
Number and percentage of Clients experiencing Chronic Homelessness Housed within 100 days.
Number and percentage of Clients who are verified remain Housed at 6 and 12 months.

## G. TARGET POPULATIONS AND ELIGIBILITY

Individuals who are experiencing Homelessness or are At Risk of Homelessness are eligible for services. Services are available to all adults (aged 19 and older) and families in need. Due to capacity constraints and service limitations, not all service locations are able to accommodate all eligible Client groups equally. For instance, women and families generally require separate accommodation from male Clients. Where a provider is unable to accommodate an eligible Client, the Client will, wherever possible, be referred to alternate services.

Children under the age of 19 can receive services if they are accompanied by their parent/guardian or if they are referred to the provider by a social worker acting under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. Individuals under the age of 19, presenting without a parent or guardian, should be referred to child and youth serving agencies and/or the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The province-wide Helpline for Children (310-1234; no area code required) is an available resource.

## H. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**BC Housing** is responsible for:

- Funding providers by entering into support services agreements for the provision of services.
- Developing province-wide standards and guidelines with providers.
- Approving and reviewing annual operating budgets and expenditures.
- Conducting regular monitoring and evaluation of services.
- Working with and supporting providers by:

- Assigning a BC Housing representative to act as a liaison;
- Providing clear guidelines and expectations for the provision of services;
- Providing information, resources and assistance where appropriate;
- Supporting capacity development, partnership development, best practices dissemination and service integration;
- Identifying gaps in service provision and working collaboratively to respond to gaps; and
- Providing Database support.

**Providers** are responsible for:

- Delivering services;
- Complying with operational guidelines, program and performance standards;
- Maintaining adequate and accurate Client service records;
- Submitting required financial information;
- Timely entry of data into the Database;
- Informing BC Housing of any critical incidents;
- Notifying BC Housing of any issues that may materially affect the provider's ability to fulfil the terms of the support services agreement;
- Managing staff and providing appropriate training;
- A clear service mandate that outlines how the program will meet Clients needs; and
- Developing partnerships with other service providers to enhance service delivery and Housing outcomes.

## **I. OPERATING FUNDING AND AGREEMENTS**

Providers approved for program funding are required to enter into a support services agreement with BC Housing. Operating budgets are negotiated for each provider based on information submitted by the provider.

Program funding will take into account local demand for services and compliance with program guidelines. BC Housing will administer funds for eligible program costs directly to the provider. Eligible program costs include:

- Program staff salaries;
- Direct program expenses;
- Property management expenses; and
- Administration.

Providers may secure additional funding from other sources for Client services and activities not outlined in the support services agreement.

## **J. SERVICES**

Providers offer Essential Services, Gateway Services and/or Drop-In Services, depending on local need, BC Housing resources and the provider's service mandate. Funded services are provided at no cost to Clients and will be outlined more specifically in individual support services agreements.

### Essential Services

- Unless otherwise approved by BC Housing, 24/7 access to the shelter.
- Safe, secure and appropriate overnight accommodation for all Clients. Separate and secure sleeping spaces for men, women, couples and families are to be provided when shelters serve multiple groups.
- A bed for each Client, with a mattress, pillow and appropriate bedding. Bedding will be cleaned on a weekly basis or whenever a new resident occupies the bed. Temporary beds, such as cots and mats, should be used only in exceptional circumstances.
- Appropriate space and security for each Client and their belongings.
- Personal hygiene items, including soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothbrush, toothpaste, and feminine hygiene products.
- Meals, provided as often as specified in the support services agreement, and that meet the standards of Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide.
- No-cost laundry facilities accessible to Clients, either on-site or off-site.

### Gateway Services

- Initial Client needs assessment, including the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT).
- Referrals to appropriate services or resources including medical services, mental health services, alcohol and drug treatment services, employment programs and life skills training.
- Support in applying for and obtaining appropriate Housing, including referrals to housing providers and assistance with Housing applications.
- Assistance obtaining a BC Identification Card.
- Assistance in accessing Income Assistance, Pension Benefits, Disability Benefits, or establishing a bank account, as appropriate.

### Drop in Services

- A safe and secure gathering space for Clients during drop-in hours.
- Meals and snacks.
- Laundry and hygiene services.
- Referrals to other community-based services.
- Cultural programming and activities.
- Other relevant programs as determined by the Provider.

## K. REPORTING AND REVIEW

The intent of the reporting and review process is for BC Housing to work in partnership with providers to identify areas of strength and opportunities to achieve excellence and accountability in the delivery of the program. The cornerstones of review are quality assurance, quality improvement and risk mitigation. Key risks include Client and staff safety, food contamination, and the spread of infectious diseases. Regular reporting and review helps providers and BC Housing to measure progress, work together to better match services to Client needs, support improved service delivery, and demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. Accordingly, the reporting and review tools are designed to open dialogue with providers to help identify and share practices that are working well, as well as elicit feedback from Clients. Reporting and review processes comply with privacy requirements including the *Personal Information Protection Act* and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

### Reporting and Review Tools

The reporting and review system is designed to gather quantitative and qualitative information from providers, BC Housing staff and Clients. Several tools are used to elicit a balanced flow of information (Figure 3) to support the operational needs of BC Housing and the provider, monitor program success, identify emerging needs among people who are experiencing Homelessness or At Risk of Homelessness, and to shape future program planning. Providers may voluntarily administer additional tools, such as Client surveys, and may choose to discuss the results with BC Housing.

**Figure 3: Reporting and Review Tools**

Tool	Frequency	Completed By
Database	Daily	Provider
Financial Review	Annual	BC Housing
Operational Review	As Required	BC Housing

#### Database

Providers report regularly using the Database. BC Housing establishes timelines for data reporting and mandatory fields. Providers are responsible for obtaining client consent.

#### Financial Review

Providers submit audited financial statements and other supporting documentation to BC Housing to facilitate an annual review of financial operations.

#### Operational Review

Operational reviews occur at least once every three years and determine fulfilment of the terms of the support services agreement. The review includes interviews with the provider's management, an on-site visit and physical inspection, and a review of service delivery, policies, procedures and other relevant documents, as requested.

### L. SIGN-OFF

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 Vice President Operations  
 BC Housing

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 Vice President Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer  
 BC Housing

## APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

**Adequate Personal Space:** having freedom from crowding as identified in the Canadian National Occupancy Standards (see Appendix B).

**At Risk of Homelessness:** means individuals and families living in accommodation where tenancy will be terminated within three (3) months of application (e.g., given notice by landlord) and having no other Housing options, or living in time-limited housing designed to help them transition from Homelessness to living in a more permanent form of Housing (e.g., transitional housing or second-stage housing).

**Case Planning:** means developing a Client-focused and mutually agreed upon plan to assist a Client to integrate more fully into their community. Case Planning will include activities such as an explanation of available options, identification of Client's goals, explanation of how the provider can support the Client to achieve desired outcomes, and the benefits, alternatives and consequences of planned services.

**Chronic Homelessness:** means a Client has experienced Homelessness for six (6) months or more in the past year (i.e. has spent more than one hundred and eighty (180) cumulative nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation) and/or has experienced Homelessness three or more times in the past year. This also includes individuals exiting institutions (e.g. mental health facilities, hospitals, correctional institutions and children leaving care) who have a history of chronic homelessness and cannot identify a fixed address upon their release.

**Clients:** individuals who are eligible for services pursuant to the Emergency Shelter Program.

**Coordinated Access and Assessment (CAA):** means the process to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness have fair and equitable access to appropriate Housing. The system provides a common assessment process, using the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT), and a single point of entry for individuals experiencing homelessness.

**Database:** means the computer application specified by BC Housing to meet the operational and informational needs of the Provider and BC Housing.

**Drop-in Services:** means providing access to meals and amenities that address immediate needs such as showers, laundry, and telephone among others. They often include a safe gathering place with access to information resources and other support services. Drop-In Services do not include providing sleeping accommodations.

**Emergency Shelter Program:** a BC Housing program which provides funding to shelters and Drop-in Services in British Columbia. Management of the program was transferred to BC Housing from the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) in October 2005.

**Essential Services:** means the provision of safe, accessible, shelter accommodation including meeting the Clients' nutrition and hygiene needs.

**Gateway Services:** means services with a strong Housing focus to connect all Clients to appropriate Housing, Referrals and Support Services. Gateway Services includes assessment using the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) and the Coordinated Access and Assessment (CAA) system, Case Planning, information and referrals that assist Clients to access key Support Services in the community. Services stay focused on moving people into Housing with appropriate supports as quickly as possible.

**Homelessness:** refers to a situation where an individual or family is not stably Housed or is living in temporary accommodation where they do not have control over the length and conditions of tenure and do not have Adequate Personal Space. This includes living in public spaces without

legal claim (e.g., on the streets, in abandoned buildings or in tent cities), a homeless shelter, a transition house, a public facility or service (e.g., hospital, care facility, rehabilitation or treatment centre, correctional facility) and cannot return to Housing, or where they are financially, sexually, physically or emotionally exploited to maintain their shelter.

**Housed or Housing:** is defined as accommodation allowing for tenancy of more than thirty (30) days, under conditions in which the individual/family has Adequate Personal Space. This range includes supported, transitional housing to independent social or private market housing. This definition does not include emergency shelters or transition houses.

**Support Services:** may include services to maintain Housing, employment and life skills programs, medical services, addictions treatment, or mental health services among other services. While Support Services can be made available directly onsite, they are more typically provided by other agencies outside the emergency shelter.

**Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT):** means the assessment tool used to measure an individual's level of vulnerability. The tool is designed for use by service providers accustomed to interacting directly with individuals experiencing Homelessness. Training is required to ensure reliable application of the tool. The results are then used to match Clients with Housing.

## APPENDIX B: NATIONAL OCCUPANCY STANDARD

**Note:** The National Occupancy Standard (NOS) should only be used as a guideline for Emergency Shelter Program providers moving Clients to Housing. While it is ideal, it is recognized that the NOS is not always achievable given the available affordable Housing options in a community as well as the fact that Adequate Personal Space is perceived differently from person to person.

The NOS has been developed by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to help determine the number of bedrooms a dwelling should have to provide freedom from crowding. The NOS determines the number of bedrooms a household requires given its size and composition.

According to NOS requirements, suitable housing has enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of resident households. Enough bedrooms based on NOS requirements means one bedroom for:

- Each cohabiting adult couple;
- Each unattached household member 18 years of age and over;
- A same-sex pair of children under age 18; and
- An additional boy or girl in the family, unless there are two opposite sex children under five years of age, in which case they are expected to share a bedroom.

A household of one individual can occupy a bachelor unit (i.e., a unit with no bedroom).