

Discussion Paper

Developing Manitoba's Homelessness Strategy

Over the coming months, Manitoba Families will lead the development of a whole-of-government strategy to end homelessness in Manitoba. This discussion paper is a starting point for community consultations. We will use the feedback from the consultations to inform the strategy's approach, priorities and actions.

Underlying Approach

→ **Incorporating a whole-of-government response**

We recognize that homelessness is complex and connected to other issues such as poverty, addictions, mental health and family violence. We will embed the strategy within the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy, and coordinate it with the work of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy as well as the Gender-based Violence Strategy. Collaborating across departments will improve our ability to achieve meaningful outcomes, leverage other government strategies, and address multi-system issues.

→ **Aiming to end homelessness**

To date, most provincial efforts to address homelessness have focused on meeting the immediate needs of homeless people. While maintaining these critical supports, Manitoba's strategy will shift our focus to ending homelessness. It will enhance the continuum of supports for people who are homeless or precariously housed to address root causes and be more preventative. It will emphasize transitioning people who experience homelessness to rapid re-housing with the necessary supports to help them stabilize, remain housed and move forward.

→ **Being community-informed**

Stakeholder engagement will be essential throughout the process of developing and implementing the provincial homelessness strategy. Involving Indigenous governments, community-based organizations and people with lived experience is necessary to ensure actions are meaningful, effective and responsive.

→ **Emphasizing reconciliation and Indigenous-led program responses**

Indigenous people are over-represented amongst people experiencing homelessness due to intergenerational trauma and the harms of colonialism and structural racism. According to the most recent point-in-time count (2018), 66 per cent of people experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg were Indigenous, 94 per cent in Thompson, and 81 per cent in Brandon. Efforts to address this disparity and meaningfully advance reconciliation requires including Indigenous leaders and organizations from design to delivery. Manitoba's strategy will draw on the recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, the Calls to Action of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and the Calls to Justice of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

→ **Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic**

The pandemic has disproportionately affected people who are experiencing homelessness or precariously housed. While the province has supported initiatives to deal with the immediate needs of homeless people during the pandemic such as isolation facilities, daytime programming and expanded shelter capacity, we need focused interventions to address longer-term repercussions and lessons learned from the pandemic.

Proposed Pillars for the Homelessness Strategy

1. Modernizing our Emergency Response

→ **Reduce barriers to accessing shelters**

Homeless shelters operate on a continuum of entry criteria with respect to substance use, from low barrier to dry facilities. Low-barrier shelters allow people to stay even if they are intoxicated or using substances. Dry shelters prohibit the entry of people who have been using alcohol or other substances. There is a need for more low-barrier shelter spaces in Manitoba.

→ **Establish a transparent funding model**

The province plans to develop a funding model that is transparent, offers more flexibility, enhances organizations' ability to plan and reduces administrative burden. The province will explore opportunities to move toward community-based administration of provincial funding, where appropriate.

→ **Establish roles and responsibilities (federal, provincial, municipal and Indigenous governments, coordinating agencies, front-line agencies)**

Various programs and services are in place to support people experiencing homelessness in Manitoba. While organizations are doing excellent work, there is a lack of coordination. Outlining roles and responsibilities will help improve communication, reduce duplication and streamline services.

→ **Coordinate with the family violence shelter system**

Manitoba Families, which funds emergency shelters for people experiencing homelessness, and Manitoba Sport, Culture and Heritage, which funds emergency shelters for people experiencing domestic or family violence, will enhance coordination. The focus of this work will be to improve service navigation, identify opportunities to address emerging issues common to both sectors, and reduce systemic barriers.

→ **Shift emphasis to long-term solutions**

Much of the focus of provincial funding, and of the activities of homeless-serving organizations, is crisis-oriented with a focus on meeting immediate needs. This work is vital, and is an important part of the social safety net. However, more can be done by shifting our collective focus to achieving long-term outcomes, like finding and maintaining housing and preventing homelessness.

2. Ensuring Housing is provided with Supports

→ Use Housing First where appropriate

Housing First is a choice-based, person-centered approach premised on providing immediate access to housing with support services. Once participants are housed, service providers work with them on their broader issues. Supports can be clinical (assertive community treatment) or community-based (intensive case management). International research supports the success of this model to address chronic homelessness.

→ Emphasize Indigenous housing providers

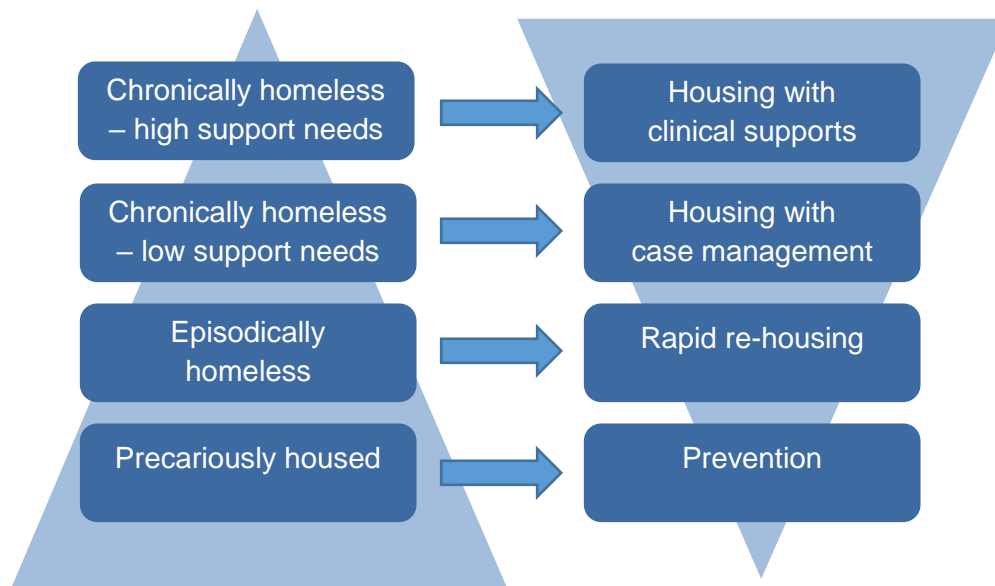
Indigenous-led responses will be a central component of the homelessness strategy. The province will prioritize support for Indigenous organizations to develop housing to meet the needs of their communities.

→ Identify opportunities to increase housing supply

Increasing the supply of social housing is critical to making meaningful progress on ending homelessness. Improving access will enable more people who are homeless or precariously housed to find housing that meets their needs and have successful tenancies in the long-term.

3. Focusing on Prevention

Prevention is more effective and less expensive than intervening after an issue is entrenched. To establish a focus on prevention, Manitoba's homelessness strategy will include the full continuum of preventative measures including universal, targeted and person-specific supports. The goal of these initiatives will be to prevent people from becoming homeless or quickly re-house people who are experiencing homelessness.



→ Prevent family, youth and Indigenous homelessness

A greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention reduces the incidence and duration of homelessness. Prevention efforts will focus on Indigenous youth and families transitioning to urban centres, addressing systems that discharge people into homelessness, and rapid re-housing through community partnerships.

→ **Focus on points of transition**

Significant life transitions can increase the risk of homelessness, such as aging out of the child welfare system, being discharged after an extended hospital stay, exiting the correctional system and separating of spouses. Ensuring appropriate planning and supports are in place, closing gaps in service and providing service navigation are essential to reduce the chance of these transitions leading to homelessness.

4. Developing Person-centered, Seamless Service Navigation and Delivery

→ **Foster a person-centered approach**

A person-centered approach focuses on meeting people “where they are” rather than offering a rigid, ‘one-size-fits-all’ program. Support services are offered to address their individual needs and goals including cultural, emotional, mental and physical. At its core, person-centered practice offers people choice, control and flexibility, and puts them at the centre of decision-making.

→ **Develop seamless service navigation and delivery**

Fragmented systems and services, each with their own complex rules and eligibility criteria, often result in frustration and hopelessness. By developing seamless service pathways, people are more likely to receive the right services, at the right time. Moving toward a more coordinated service delivery system will require strengthening collaboration across governments, departments and service providers.

5. Understanding the Unique Nature of Homelessness in Rural and Northern Manitoba

→ **Ensure the strategy is relevant to rural and northern Manitoba**

There are people who are experiencing homelessness or precariously housed in all urban centres and many rural and First Nations’ communities across Manitoba. Smaller communities require support to build their capacity to prevent and address homelessness and coordinate regional responses. We will require programs tailored to the needs and realities of smaller and more isolated communities.

Governance

Successful implementation of this strategy will require those who contributed to its development to act collectively, dismantling the siloes that inhibit action across sectors, across departments and across governments. To ensure actions under this strategy remain relevant and to be accountable to our community, we will develop a broad governance model, inclusive of Indigenous people, people with lived experience of homelessness, the private sector and the homeless-serving sector.

