



A Progress Report on Wood Buffalo's
10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

The First Three Years of Housing First

2010 - 2013





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ACRONYMS

Note that a glossary is included at the end of this report.

CBO: Community-Based Organization

CHAT: Community Housing Agencies Team

CMHC: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation

CPH: Community Plan on Homelessness

ETO: Efforts To Outcomes

FOIP: Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

HISC: Homeless Initiative Strategic Committee

NIMBY: Not In My Backyard

SPDAT: Service Prioritization Data Assessment Tool

SROI: Social Return on Investment

STHT: Supportive Transitional Housing Team

Foreword

It has been three years since the launch of *Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do -10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010-2020*. This report documents the progress achieved in implementing the goals and actions prescribed in the plan and demonstrates how our community has progressed toward ending homelessness through commitment, investment and collective action.

We are pleased to announce that the tide is turning on homelessness in Wood Buffalo, as is clear from the progress made in the last three years, including:

- o Using education and awareness as a tool to successfully engage stakeholders from the public, private and social profit sectors in the implementation of Heading Home.
- o Developing closer collaboration and integration amongst homeless service providers to facilitate implementation of the Housing First strategy.
- o Streamlining the homeless serving system to enable 549 individuals to make a quick transition from homelessness to permanent housing and supportive services.

We are grateful to those who continue to support efforts towards building a society where everyone has a safe place to call home. We are proud of the service providers who continue to reach out to our most vulnerable citizens. Special congratulations is reserved for the 549 individuals who, in the last three years, successfully navigated the homeless service system and made the transition from homelessness to permanent housing.

Our community is resolute in its commitment to end homelessness. We look forward to seeing our collective efforts reflected in better outcomes for those who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. Let us move forward together on the ambitious goals set in 2010 and bring Wood Buffalo closer to realizing its collective vision of ending homelessness by 2020.



Diane Shannon
Chair, Homeless Initiative Strategic Committee

Executive Summary

Homelessness is one of Canada's most serious social issues as it affects communities across the country, and The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is no exception. It is an issue that is made more significant by Wood Buffalo's global attraction, because people with diverse and varied needs as demonstrated in the *2012 Housing Needs Count*, come to the region seeking economic prosperity. Addressing these varied needs is one of the greatest challenges in ending homelessness in Wood Buffalo as it requires a specialized approach to policy and service provision in Urban Service Area (Fort McMurray), and Rural Service Area.

The Municipality has made a commitment to respond to the needs of people experiencing homelessness, and those at risk of homelessness, by supporting services, strengthening partnerships with service providers, and building strong and inclusive communities. The Municipality has a long history of addressing homelessness including the provision and promotion of affordable and social housing, as well as administering support for homeless service providers.

In March 2010, Council demonstrated its specific commitment to homelessness by endorsing *Heading Home: The Right Thing To Do – 10 Year Plan To End Homelessness 2010-2020*. This Plan identified a significant change in policy direction from managing individual homelessness to ending homelessness. Housing First, the core strategy of the Plan, links people to permanent housing and support services in an effort to retain permanent housing and in recognition of the complex needs of the target group. This strategy makes accessing long term housing as simple as possible by minimizing barriers.

The critical goals for a successful Housing First strategy in Wood Buffalo, as articulated in the Plan, are: education, change management, prevention, rapid re-housing, and provision of supports. The following progress report details the Municipality's response to these central themes, and chronicles the difference made in the lives of the people who are homeless in the three years following Council's endorsement of *Heading Home: The Right Thing To Do*. Research for this report was comprehensive including a review of relevant documentation and interviews with multiple stakeholders.

The major findings indicate that while there are challenges in implementing a plan of this magnitude, progress has been made towards attaining the specific goals of the Housing First strategy including:

Goal 1 - Education: To initiate change for lasting social impact, the Homeless Initiatives Strategic Committee chose to increase community awareness of the problem of homelessness. This involved increasing information about the extent of homelessness as well as the community's motivation to permanently solve it. **This goal was successfully accomplished** as service providers and property managers are currently contributing to the work of ending homelessness. Consequently, as of March 2013, a total of 549 homeless persons have been housed in Wood Buffalo. Education and awareness efforts will remain ongoing to garner as much support from stakeholders as will be required to attain the objectives of *Heading Home*.

Goal 2 - Change Management: This goal highlights the importance of a change management process as a critical step in securing buy-in from service providers to successfully transition service models to align with the Housing First strategy. A review of indicators suggests that **this goal is on track to be accomplished.**

Goal 3 - Prevention: Prevention involved the development of systems and processes that enable the quick identification of at risk individuals, assistance to sustain housing or where that is not possible, to identify permanent housing options. **This goal is on track to be accomplished** over the next year.

Goal 4 - Re-Housing: Rapid re-housing of homeless persons into safe, affordable, permanent housing is the most critical component of the Plan. Without a commitment and solid plan to rapidly re-house homeless persons, Housing First outcomes can be realized. **The goal is on track to be accomplished** as Housing First clients report having opportunities for constructive and meaningful engagement with service providers and are deriving positive outcomes as a result.

Goal 5 - Provision of Supports: Homeless persons who are provided with permanent housing as well as access to supportive services should experience positive outcomes such as increased functional skills and self-sufficiency. There are indications that **this goal is on track to be accomplished** as clients continue to navigate the Housing First service system.

While it is clear that implementation of the Housing First strategy is improving the conditions of people experiencing homelessness in Wood Buffalo, the following three recommendations have emerged from the findings and will continue to enable the successful implementation of the Plan over the coming years:

- | Engaging more strongly in policy advocacy at the provincial level to bring about systemic change.
- | Increasing service integration within the homeless service system to improve client outcomes.
- | Strengthening and expanding the evidence base to inform service delivery.

This report highlights progress made towards ending homelessness within the region. The information included in this report will support ongoing efforts to improve the conditions of homeless persons by ensuring the Municipality and service providers alike sharpen their focus, prioritize goals and measure continued success toward ending homelessness in Wood Buffalo by 2020.

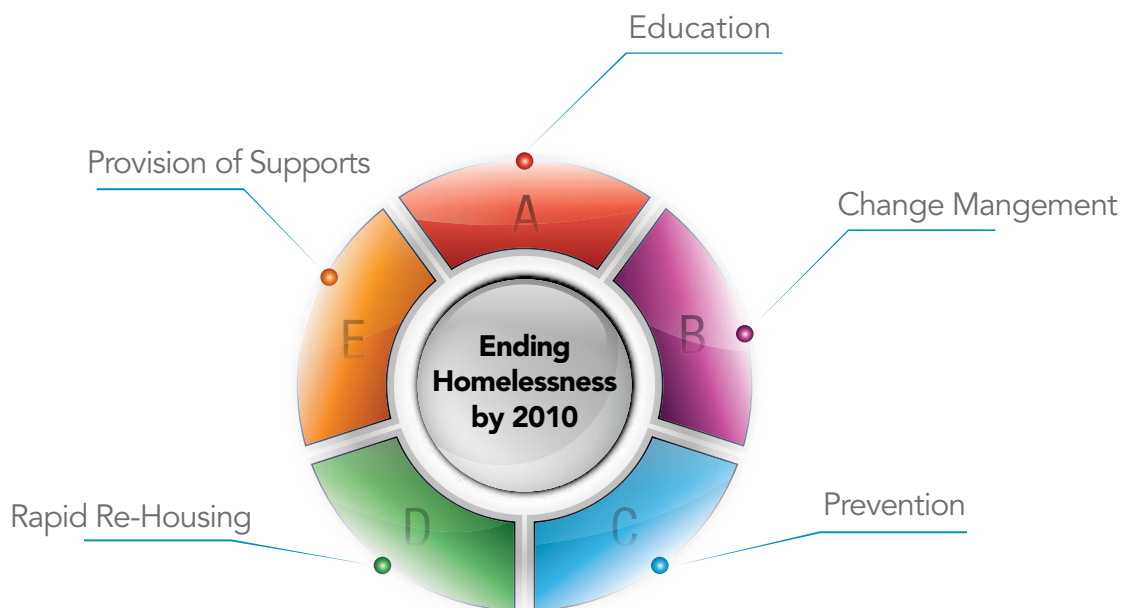
Introduction

Background

Year after year, homelessness leads to the social exclusion of many vulnerable persons across Canada. Emergency shelters and transitional housing provide vulnerable persons access to vital services, but do not address their need for permanent housing. Homelessness is often accompanied by other barriers that contribute to further social exclusion such as mental illness, addiction or substance abuse, lack of access to financial resources or underdeveloped skills to obtain employment. These personal challenges make it even more difficult to break the cycle of homelessness.

Ending homelessness is everyone's responsibility; it requires a collaborative and systemic effort from all levels of government, as well as service providers and the private sector. In March 2009, the Government of Alberta released *A Plan for Alberta, Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, which supports a Housing First strategy, a client-centered approach to ending homelessness that views housing as a basic right in society. The strategy combines housing relocation services and other support services to enable individuals and families to develop the necessary skills to remain in permanent housing; therefore, breaking the cycle of homelessness. Safe, long term, affordable housing provides a solid base from which individuals can access other supportive services to enable them achieve their life goals and aspirations.

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo released its plan on homelessness, *Heading Home: The Right Thing To Do – 10 Year Plan To End Homelessness 2010-2020* in March 2010. The Plan outlines the strategic pathway for ending homelessness by 2020 through sustained effort and investment to support five specific goals.



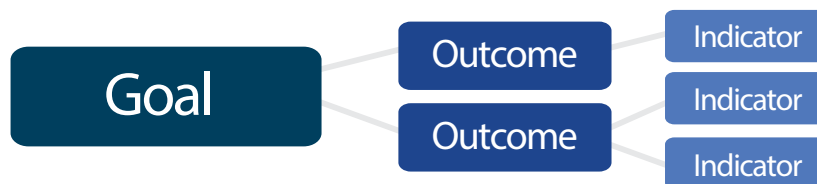
What We Mean By Ending Homelessness

In practice, eliminating a complex social issue as homelessness is improbable, since some individuals will experience homelessness irrespective of the efficacy of their local homeless service system. Therefore, the end goal of ending homelessness by 2020 must be understood within this context. In Wood Buffalo, this goal will only be realized when there is clear service integration amongst service providers such that the homeless can be successfully transitioned into permanent housing within 21 days of accessing the homeless serving system.

About This Report

Heading Home describes a logical sequence from activities, to outcomes that have the best chance of producing the desired end goal stated in the plan. However, homelessness is a complex social issue that does not follow a linear, predetermined path. As such, an analysis of progress made in implementing the Housing First strategy cannot be attempted without first examining the indicators of progress identified in the Plan. For this reason, this report is based on an evaluation model that measures the extent to which goals of the 10-year plan were met. The report objectively describes implementation progress and assesses challenges and barriers in order to improve ongoing efforts to end homelessness by 2020.

Reporting on key findings follows the structure outlined below. Each of the five goals in *Heading Home* is linked to one or more outcomes, while each outcome is connected to at least one distinct indicator. Furthermore, the current (March 2013) status for each of the fifteen outcomes in the plan is reported based on an assessment of the information collected for its associated indicator(s).

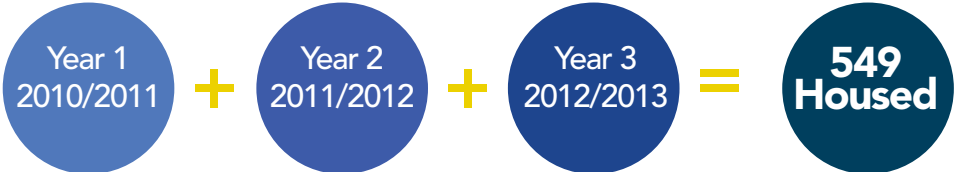


The evaluation of all indicators relied heavily on intervention-specific data collected from various sources including:

- internal reports to funders,
- transcribed minutes of HISC and CHAT meetings
- research on Housing First best practices
- literature on homelessness
- ETO database reports
- funding contracts
- key informant interviews (staff of housing first service providers, HISC membership, CBO staff)
- on-site visits to Housing First service providers

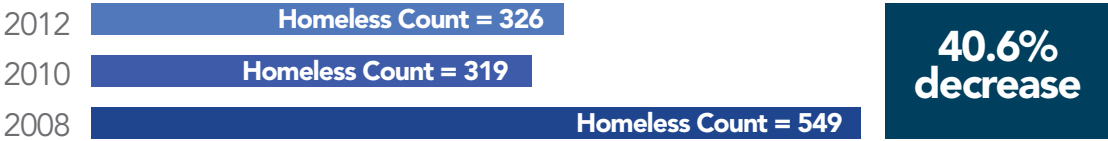
Snapshot of Key Accomplishments 2010 to 2013

Housing Tenure: A Total of 549 Homeless Individual Housed



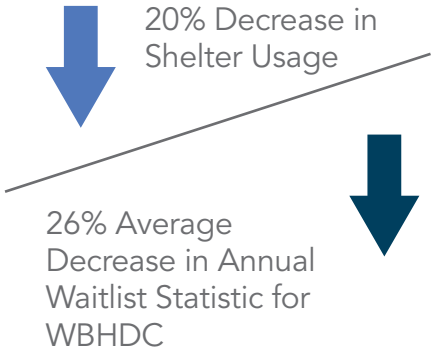
During the three year period from March 2010 to March 2013, Housing First service providers successfully transitioned 549 homeless individuals to permanent housing.

Housing Needs Count Reveal 40.6% Reduction in Homelessness



Between October 2008 and October 2010, the extent of homelessness in Wood Buffalo reduced by about 223 people, which translates into a 40.6% reduction in homelessness. It is important to consider the results of the 2012 Housing Needs Count within the context of the Housing First program and other initiatives that provide linkages to permanent housing, support services to retain housing, and coordination of community-based resources for the homeless. It is only within the context of such community-based collaborative efforts that an explanation can be provided for this reduction in homelessness.

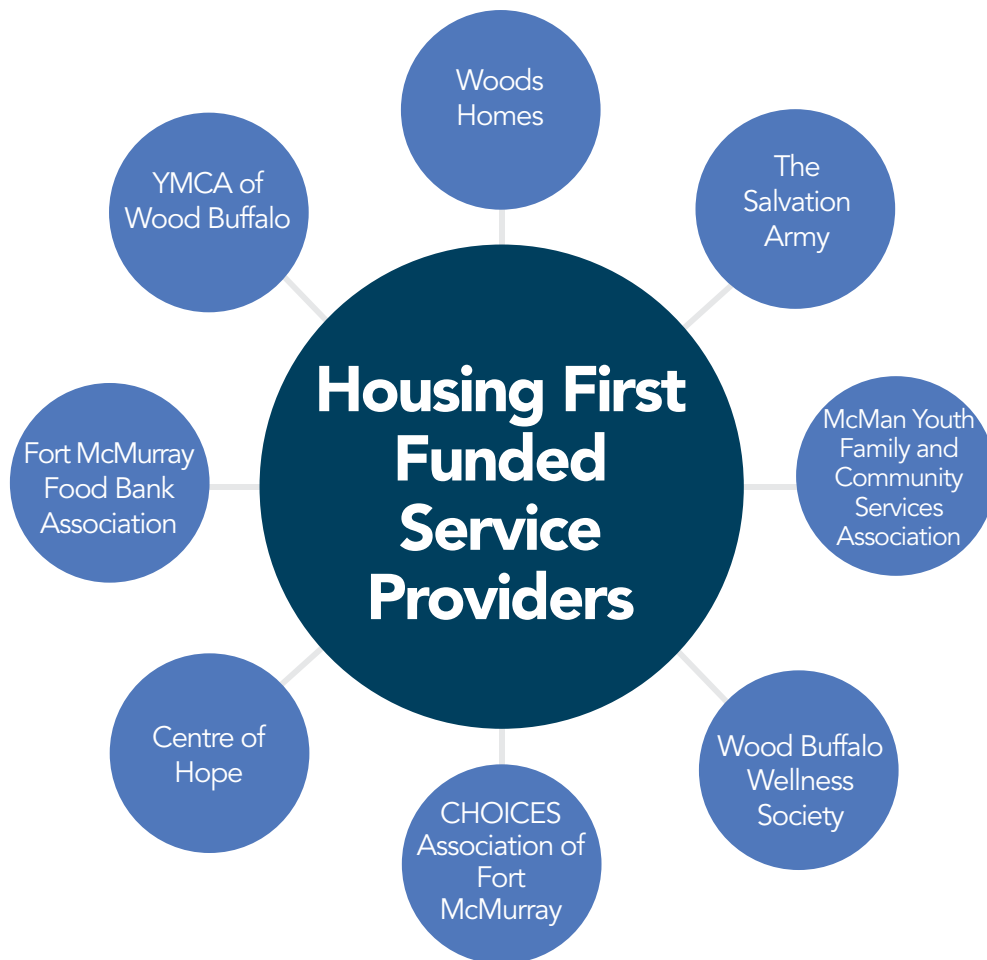
Impact of Housing First on the Larger Community: Decrease in Shelter Usage and Affordable Housing Waitlist



Between 2008, two years before the launch of *Heading Home*, and 2012, two years after the plan was launched, the average monthly shelter census was reduced by about 24 people or 20%. Within the same timeframe, the average annual waitlist for Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation decreased by 110 people or 26%.

Strong commitment to Housing First Amongst Service Providers

Homeless service providers in Wood Buffalo are committed to the vision of a society where everyone has a safe, decent, affordable home. As of March 2013, funding was allocated to eight (8) service providers to operate ten (10) Housing First related initiatives.



Key Findings: Summary

	Outcome	Timeline	Progress Status
Outcome 1	Increase community interest and support for ending homelessness.	Immediate	Accomplished
Outcome 2	Improved coordination of services and systems toward ending homelessness (using Housing First strategy).	Short term	Accomplished
Outcome 3	Improved data management system that supports client data, trend analysis and progress reporting.	Short term	Accomplished
Outcome 4	Improved relationships with mainstream service providers and the private sector landlords to deliver Housing First.	Short term	Progressing slowly
Outcome 5	Homelessness is prevented for those individuals at risk	Midterm	On the right track
Outcome 6	Service system is coordinated to prevent homelessness.	Short term	Accomplished
Outcome 7	Community has an adequate supply of permanent supportive housing to meet the needs of low income people and those at risk of homelessness.	Short term	Progressing slowly
Outcome 8	Housing First initiatives and mainstream support services are sustainably funded and resourced.	Short term	Accomplished
Outcome 9	Community has adequate physical capacity to identify and rapidly rehouse its homeless using the Housing First strategy.	Midterm	On the right track
Outcome 10	Homeless and at-risk persons are meaningfully engaged.	Short term	Accomplished
Outcome 11	Reduction in the length of time people are homeless.	Short term	On the right track
Outcome 13	Formerly homeless individuals demonstrate improved self-sufficiency.	Short term	Accomplished

Note that long term outcomes (Outcomes 12, 14 and 15) are outside the timeframe for this report, so are excluded from this document.

Key Findings: Goal 1 | Education

Build support to end homelessness using Housing First strategy

Coordinated education and awareness efforts are a necessary precursor to implementing Housing First programs for the very first time in any community. The implementation of Housing First in Wood Buffalo was facilitated by a strategic education campaign that successfully built support amongst service providers, property managers and other stakeholders for the new strategy.

Outcome 1	Increase community interest and support for ending homelessness Timeline: Pre-planning (immediate outcome)
Status	Accomplished
Indicator of Progress	<p>Indicator: Stakeholders engaged in local activities to support ending homelessness has gradually increased over time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ten (10) Housing First initiatives now exist within community-based agencies; only two such initiatives existed in 2010.• A homeless-serving partnership agreement is in place with the Fort McMurray Food Bank.• Service providers now connect with homeless persons at the local homeless shelters.• Local activities to support Housing First (i.e., BBQ, anniversary celebrations and homeless coffee breaks) have been well attended. <p>Indicator: Groups which are not typically involved in addressing homelessness show support for Housing First (i.e., local landlords).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select groups of property managers demonstrate a willingness to rent to Housing First clients.• Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation works with service providers to secure permanent, affordable dwelling units for Housing First clients. <p>Indicator: Media pertaining to Housing First is positive. "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) type issues have not arisen. The general public reports ongoing support for ending homelessness and agencies prepare to rearrange services to fit with delivering a Housing First strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is positive media coverage of events such as Homeless Connect and the Housing Needs Count.• Media projects have been undertaken that display compelling real life stories of homeless individuals to educate public on homelessness.• Mediation strategies are in place to prevent NIMBY issues including the formation of a Neighbourhood Safety Team in the Alberta Drive area.• Public reports show that NIMBY issues appear to be occurring with the same or slightly less frequency and intensity as in other communities.

Key Findings: Goal 2 | Change Management

Successfully transition local systems to Housing First

For some homeless service providers, the Housing First strategy posed a potential barrier to effective implementation of *Heading Home*, as it required a transformation in the way homeless persons were served in Wood Buffalo. The Plan called for a shift from “managing” homelessness through a Continuum of Care model, to “ending” homelessness through Housing First.

Closer coordination and intergration has been developed among services, from strengthening referral systems to permanent home placement. This goal is on track to be accomplished, although it is worthwhile to extend the timeline for two additional years in order to achieve greater coordination between homeless programs and services.

Outcome 2	Improved coordination of services and systems toward ending homelessness (using Housing First strategy) Timeline: 1-3 years (short term outcome)
Status	Accomplished
Indicator of Progress	<p>Indicator: Agencies report working collaboratively with other service providers to coordinate service to end homelessness with the Housing First strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service providers report more cross-referrals, particularly at the pre-assessment stage. For example, clients who visit the Centre of Hope’s drop-in day shelter are linked with other Housing First agencies as required.• Service providers report frequent ongoing communication and a strong supportive relationship with the Community Based Organization (CBO). <p>Indicator: Clients report appropriate referrals and connections to support services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clients report satisfaction with their experience in the Housing First program. <p>Indicator: Community resources that are available are clearly defined.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CBO is developing an inventory of relevant resources to supplement related information available online. <p>Indicator: Clearly defined processes that articulate new system of Housing First.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service providers report being familiar with the Housing First strategy. A procedure manual is being developed by the CBO to guide implementation. <p>Indicator: Social Return On Investment (SROI) data sources identified and collected information (e.g., cost of hospital stays, shelter use, ambulance usage, police arrests, etc.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whereas no formal SROI has been conducted in Wood Buffalo in relation to Housing First, plans exist to engage in such an exercise using as more data sources become available.

Outcome 3

Improved data management system that supports client data, trend analysis and progress reporting
Timeline: 1-3 years (short term outcome)

Status

Accomplished

Indicator of Progress

Indicator: There is a system of inputting and managing data collected from homelessness statistics.

- An information management system, Efforts to Outcomes (ETO), exists and is being used consistently by the CBO and service providers.

Indicator: Sufficient data collection resources are identified and accessed.

- Housing Needs Counts are conducted every two years to generate useful data about the local homeless population.
- A housing needs assessment is underway in one rural hamlet to measure changes in magnitude and demographics to the local homeless population.

Outcome 4

Improved relationships with mainstream service providers and the private sector landlords to deliver Housing First.

Timeline: 1-3 years (short term outcome)

Status

Progressing slowly

Indicator of Progress

Indicator: Mainstream service providers report they are interested in participating in Housing First locally.

- The Northern Lights Health Care Centre maintains a discharge staff to liaise more effectively with service providers and connect clients to local resources.
- Service providers who do not implement Housing First reported referring clients to Housing First agencies.

Indicator: Local landlords are interested in participating in the Housing First program.

- WBHDC continues to provide subsidized leases to Housing First clients, as other landlords are being actively engaged to support the Housing First strategy.

Indicator: New partnerships and/or agreements have been developed to deliver Housing First. Mainstream service providers and landlords will participate in ongoing planning and consultation.

- Community Housing Agencies Team (CHAT), a vehicle for interagency collaboration, is being revamped to create better opportunities for collaboration amongst service providers.

Key Findings: Goal 3 | Prevention

Develop a service system to prevent homelessness

This goal involves developing a system to quickly identify at-risk individuals in order to provide assistance to sustain existing housing, or where that is not possible, promptly identify permanent housing options to ensure that homelessness is prevented.

The indicator of progress suggests work is in progress, with a liaison position being formally created by the Salvation Army initiative. However, indicators around service system coordination and housing resources are somewhat behind schedule. The prevention goal is a priority area for action planning over the next year, especially incorporating protocols to work with other relevant institutions such as treatment facilities, incarceration, and emergency shelters.

Outcome 5	Homelessness is prevented for those individuals at risk Timeline: 3-5 years (midterm outcome)
Status	On the Right Track
Indicator of Progress	Indicator: Persons discharged from institutions are not released into homelessness. <ul style="list-style-type: none">As per the timeline work towards this indicator is just commencing in the third year.The Salvation Army has a liaison position focused on connecting persons discharged from the hospital and other institutions to relevant supportive services including permanent housing.WBHDC has a full time dedicated Tenant & Community Relations Coordinator working with a case management team towards preventing tenant eviction.
Outcome 6	Service system is coordinated to prevent homelessness Timeline: 1-3 years and on-going (short term outcome)
Status	Accomplished
Indicator of Progress	Indicator: A reduction in the number of people released from institutions into homelessness. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Whereas treatment centres continue to make informal referrals to Housing First agencies, a formal referral system is now in place with the local hospital. Indicator: Zero tolerance policy (more than 21 days duration being homeless) is developed. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Integrated and coordinated referral and support structures are being put in place to prevent loss of housing, or to rapidly re-house the chronically homeless.

Outcome 7

Community has an adequate supply of permanent supportive housing to meet the needs of low income people and those at risk of homelessness
Timeline: 3-5 years (midterm)

Status

Progressing slowly

Indicator of Progress

Indicator: Demand for shelters as affordable rental space for employed people is reduced.

- Between 2008, two years before the launch of Heading Home, and 2012, two years after the plan was launched, the average monthly shelter census was reduced by about 24 people or 20%.

Indicator: WBHDC wait-lists for affordable housing are reduced.

- Within the same timeframe, the average annual waitlist for Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation decreased by 110 people or 26%.
- WBHDC latest development project, Siltstone Ridge (175 units), is planned to open in 2014.

Outcome 8

Housing First initiatives and mainstream support services are sustainably funded and resourced
Timeline: 1-3 years and ongoing (short term)

Status

Accomplished

Indicator of Progress

Indicator: Agencies have sufficient funding available for long term planning and training.

- Housing First service providers receive adequate and consistent funding on an annual basis. The CBO works with the federal and provincial governments to ensure the cyclical nature of the funding does not deter long-term planning by service providers.

Indicator: An increase in the number of training programs, as well as the number of trained, qualified staff working in Housing First.

- The CBO consistently provides training opportunities to strengthen front-line service delivery staff. Training provided to date includes Motivational Interviewing, Youth Homeless Engagement, Case Management, SPDAT, ETO, Aboriginal Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity.

Indicator: The number of supportive agencies working together has increased.

- There are forty (40) supportive agencies involved in the Housing First service system. Although all these agencies do not receive Housing First funding, they work in partnership with the eight (8) funded Housing First service providers.

Key Findings: Goal 4 | Re-housing

Rapidly re-house current homeless individuals

Rapidly re-housing homeless persons into safe, affordable, permanent homes is crucial to the successful implementation of *Heading Home*. Housing First service providers recognize that chronically homeless persons may require several rapid re-housing interventions before establishing stable housing. Without a commitment to rapidly re-house homeless persons, Housing First outcomes cannot be realized.

Note that long term outcomes (Outcomes #12) are outside the timeframe for this report, so are excluded from this document.

Outcome 9	Community has adequate physical capacity to identify and rapidly rehouse its homeless using the Housing First strategy Timeline: 3-5 years and ongoing (midterm)
Status	On the Right Track
Indicator of Progress	Indicator: Increase in the number of units available for rapid re-housing. Housing options are provided to homeless persons prior to placement. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current housing options include market housing and co-occupancy units leased by Housing First service providers. These are available for the duration of the Housing First participation (one year with provisions for an additional year). WBHDC is another option for clients and accommodation is made for high priority client groups where possible. Indicator: Agencies delivering Housing First reports having sufficient resources to support re-housing efforts. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agencies report having adequate supplies/supplier partnerships to provide needed furniture and household necessities.
Outcome 10	Homeless, and at-risk persons are meaningfully engaged Timeline: 1-3 years (short term)
Status	Accomplished
Indicator of Progress	Indicator: Homeless clients report having opportunities for meaningful engagement with service providers. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clients report meaningful engagement with neighbours, housemates and service providers. Additionally, several clients were observed in active volunteer roles.

Outcome 11	Reduction in the length of time people are homeless Timeline: 1-3 years and ongoing (short term)
Status	On the Right Track
Indicator of Progress	<p>Indicator: A reduction in the time (days) a person spends in emergency shelters or transitional housing, as reported by agency statistics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistics on this indicator are not available at this time. However, there is a decreasing trend in shelter usage between 2008 and 2013. <p>Indicator: A decline in the number of shelter beds utilized and needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between 2008, two years before the launch of Heading Home, and 2012, two years after the plan was launched, the average monthly shelter usage declined 20%. <p>Indicator: Incidents of homelessness are less than 21 days per episode.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one emergency shelters has initiated the 21-day-stay rule. <p>Indicator: An increase in the number of permanent housing options obtained by the clients.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to engage private landlords through the development of a Landlord Network, though promising, have yielded minimal results. The CBO continue to advocate for the development of affordable housing as well as permanent supportive housing.

Key Findings: Goal 5 | Provision of Supports

Provide supports for housing stability

Obtaining and retaining permanent housing should be the springboard that enables Housing First clients to increase their vocational, functional and social skills, as well as their levels of income and self-sufficiency. There are indications that this goal is being achieved as more clients enter and leave the Housing First service system.

Note that long term outcomes (Outcomes #14 and #15) are outside the timeframe for this report, so are excluded from this document.

Outcome 1	Formerly homeless individuals demonstrate improved self-sufficiency Timelines: 1-3 years and ongoing (short term)
Status	Accomplished
Indicator of Progress	<p>Indicator: The client's testimonial of how his/her quality of life has improved as a result of being housed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Success stories" as collected by agencies from their clients report increased self-confidence, self-esteem, ability to secure employment and care for dependent children, as well as decreased substance abuse.

Recommendations

In view of the above-mentioned findings, a number of recommendations are put forward as points for further reflection around possible future actions to enhance the implementation of *Heading Home*. The recommendations are formulated under three broad headings:

Advocacy

Bringing about the systemic changes necessary in order to prevent and end homelessness includes engaging even more strongly in policy advocacy. This includes making a much greater and more consistent effort to engage with the relevant stakeholders at the local, provincial and federal level. It also includes ensuring that evidence for the impact of Housing First on the larger community is clearly documented and disseminated through relevant channels like provincial meetings and national conferences.

Service integration

Service intergration is a vehicle for improved outcomes for homeless persons and those at risk of homelessness. The goals of service integration are to improve client outcomes and services through the efficient transfer of clients among service providers, greater client access to supportive services, continuity of care and reduced service duplication. Specific efforts should continue to be made towards a more integrated Housing First service system.

Research, Monitoring and Advancing the Evidence Base

A strong evidence base enables the furthering of best practices for all those working to end homelessness, and is a key element in fostering service integration. While an information management system is in place to monitor implementation of *Heading Home*, there are still many areas where research is needed to inform policy-making and implementation, as well as to better understand promising practices in the local service system.

Conclusion

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is committed to addressing homelessness as articulated in *Heading Home: The Right Thing To Do*. The argument for investing in high-quality, cost-effective interventions to end homelessness, rather than just continuing to manage it, has been made successfully from various international studies. The benefits appear to be greatest for those who are chronically homeless, most of whom typically live in poverty and deal with mental health and/or substance abuse issues. However there is still a strong case for providing long term solutions to those who are homeless for other reasons and ensuring they don't become chronically homeless over time.

Over the last three years, the work accomplished in alignment with the Municipality's *10 Year Plan to End Homelessness by 2020*, appears to provide positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in Wood Buffalo. Still, this work is set in the broader context of Provincial and Federal Government policy agendas. The major findings in this report indicate that to effectively tackle homelessness in Wood Buffalo, the Housing First strategy must be complemented by a range of other strategies to ensure people with complex needs do not fall through the cracks of the existing service system.

Glossary

The following key definitions provide a 'common language' to assist the reader in understanding the contents of this progress report.

Adequate Housing	Housing is reported by residents as not requiring any major repairs. Housing that is inadequate may have excessive mold, inadequate heating or water supply, significant damage, etc.
At-Risk of Homelessness	Refers to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards. Individuals or families whose current housing situation is lacking security or stability are considered to be at-risk of homelessness.
Affordable Housing	Dwellings costing less than 30 per cent of total before-tax household income. Those in extreme housing need pay 50 per cent or more of their income for housing accommodations. Costs for renters include: rent, electricity, fuel, water and other municipal services. For owners, costs include: mortgage payments (principal and interest), property taxes, and any condominium fees, along with payments for electricity, fuel, water and other municipal services.
Basic Shelf Program	A program run by the Fort McMurray Food Bank helping families and individuals maintain food security. The program is based on the strategy of keeping a "basic shelf" of ingredients in your home, with which you learn how to create a variety of meals that are nutritious and affordable.
Baseline Data	Initial collection of data that serves as a basis for comparison with the subsequently acquired data.
Backlog intakes	A stage in the intake process that causes the entire process to slow and where the flow of data is impaired or obstructed.
CBO	Community Based Organization – The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is the designated organization responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Provincial Outreach Support Services Initiative. The CBO receives funding from both the provincial and federal governments to help fulfill its role. The CBO channels this funding to Housing First service providers.
CHAT	Community Housing Agencies Team – a team of representatives that deal directly with homeless persons in the community. This team is primarily made up of front-line service providers and government employees who directly interact with the homeless. The purpose of CHAT is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery and to identify and respond to emerging issues.
Chronically Homeless	A person or family is considered chronically homeless if they have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years (Alberta Plan to End Homelessness, 2008).
Client Group	An identifiable group of persons demonstrating a common characteristic or set of common characteristics. A person may be in one or more client group.

Co-occupancy	State in which occupancy is shared with other tenants with equal access to common areas.
Core Housing First Programs	Refers to the four core Housing First providers in 2012, Y.M.C.A. Immigrant and Settlement Services, McMan Youth and Family Community Services Association, The Salvation Army and Centre of Hope.
CPH	Community Plan on Homelessness - 2007-10; Community Plan on Homelessness and Affordable Housing that was prepared as a three-year-plan to address assets, gaps and set priorities for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. The Plan guided funding to various partners and became a component of the National Homelessness Partnership Strategy.
CMHC	Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation – is Canada’s national housing agency. CMHC is a provider for mortgage loans insurance, mortgage-back securities, housing policies, as well as programs and housing research.
ETO	Efforts to Outcomes – is a comprehensive case management and data collection software system that ensures community needs, impacts and detailed information on homeless citizens’ experiences are captured. The purpose of this data collection system is for performance management and to use the data to track progress.
Emergency Shelter	Temporary accommodations for individuals experiencing homelessness.
FOIP	Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of Alberta. Public bodies include all provincial government departments, agencies, boards and commissions.
HISC	Homelessness Initiative Strategic Committee – formerly the Homelessness Initiatives Steering Committee, is a group of community leaders and stakeholders that meet monthly to advocate for ending homelessness in our region.
Housing First Strategy	A strategy to housing homeless persons where permanent housing is provided along with support services. Providing support services helps formerly homeless persons to maintain their housing over the long term. The Housing First strategy attempts to breaks the cycle of homelessness. The overall goal is to move a homeless client quickly into permanent housing with supports and move them to greater self-reliance.
Housing Stock	The total number of residential units, including mobile homes, available for non-transient occupancy.
Indicator	A concrete measure that is observable and provides evidence the desired outcome is being achieved. Usually involves a noticeable change, increase, decrease, improvement or depreciation in numerical value.
Mat Program	A shelter program that operates in cold weather months by The Salvation Army and accommodates those under the influence of drugs and alcohol.
Market Housing	Housing based on the free market economy.
Permanent Housing	A secure home using housing options that is appropriate for the individual or family.

NIMBY	Not In My Backyard – used to describe when individuals object to the establishment of certain neighbourhood projects, such as homeless shelters, which they perceive to be dangerous, unsightly, or otherwise undesirable. A person may agree that a community or neighbourhood needs such an institution or service, but would want the location to be far away from his/her place of residence.
Rapid Re-housing	Ensure individuals are assessed quickly to determine housing need and the support services required. Moving the homeless from the streets and shelters into permanent housing.
SPDAT	Service Prioritization Data Assessment Tool - launched in 2011, improves intake processes using existing resources. The tool is designed to assist service providers. The provider can help individuals and families by accessing programs and services best aligned to end client's homelessness.
SROI	Social Return on Investment – also known as social benefit cost ratio, is a method for understanding, measuring, and reporting on both the social and financial value being generated by an organization, program or community plan, relative to investments.
STHT	Supportive Transitional Housing Team founded in 2002, which became a society in 2009. The team previously formed is now a society is made up of twelve agencies that play a pivotal role in providing viable and tangible solutions to a number of Fort McMurray's homelessness issues. By offering the wrap around support services, they are able to address the compounded needs of client.
Supportive Housing	Housing facilities that provide services beyond basic needs and that, while not permanent, generally require a longer length of stay than emergency housing facilities (up to three years). These facilities offer more privacy to residents than emergency housing, and place a greater emphasis on participation of clients. It is targeted to those in need of structure, support, and skill-building to move from homelessness to housing stability, and ultimately to prevent a return to homelessness.
Transitional Housing	A secure living environment where an individual can receive assistance and practice life skills before living independently.
Vulnerable Persons	Persons who because of age, disability, or other circumstances are in a position of dependence on others or are otherwise at a greater risk than the general population, whether permanent or temporary.
Zero Tolerance Policy	A policy in shelters that imposes automatic punishment or eviction for infractions of a stated rule, with the intention of eliminating undesirable conduct (i.e., substance abuse).

Contact Information

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