



CITY OF RICHMOND  
**HOMELESSNESS  
STRATEGY**  
2019–2029  
**2021 UPDATE**





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# INTRODUCTION

Homelessness continues to be a critical issue across Metro Vancouver, including in Richmond. The Metro Vancouver Homeless Count estimated that a minimum of 85 individuals were experiencing homelessness in Richmond in March 2020. Non-profit homeless serving agencies estimate this number to be much higher and that rates continue to increase.

The City of Richmond is committed to playing a proactive leadership role to make homelessness in Richmond rare, brief and non-recurring and to ensure that Richmond is an inclusive community that works in collaboration to provide a continuum of housing and support services. Achieving this vision requires involvement from all sectors—public, non-profit and the private sector—so that all Richmond residents experiencing homelessness can receive the supports and housing options necessary to achieve stability in their lives. The City of Richmond Homelessness Strategy 2019–2029 (Homelessness Strategy) provides an action-oriented framework to guide City and stakeholder involvement in homelessness initiatives in Richmond.

In 2021, Richmond’s non-profit homeless serving agencies saw a marked increase in demand for their services. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a larger number of individuals experiencing homelessness staying in Richmond’s emergency homelessness shelters. Despite more than doubled shelter capacity compared to winter and spring 2020, these shelters typically reported they were approaching or at capacity.

Throughout 2021, the City and key stakeholders continued to make progress in achieving the actions outlined in the Homelessness Strategy. The following report provides a high-level summary of the City of Richmond and its community partners’ response to addressing homelessness over the past year.





## ABOUT THE STRATEGY

Adopted by City Council on September 9, 2019, the City of Richmond Homelessness Strategy is an action-oriented framework that guides City and stakeholder involvement in homelessness initiatives to 2029.

The strategy is guided by the following vision statement:

*By 2029, homelessness in Richmond is rare, brief and non-recurring. Richmond is an inclusive community that works in collaboration to provide a continuum of housing and support services.*

To achieve this vision, the strategy provides the following five strategic directions:

1. Prevent pathways into homelessness;
2. Support residents who are experiencing homelessness;
3. Provide pathways out of homelessness;
4. Foster collaboration and capacity-building among community partners; and
5. Communicate, research and monitor homelessness.

Under the strategic directions, the Homelessness Strategy identifies 32 recommended actions with associated timelines and priorities to be completed over the ten year time frame. The Homelessness Strategy, along with previous strategy updates, is available on the City's website at: [richmond.ca/homelessness](http://richmond.ca/homelessness).



## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, ongoing pressures on Richmond's homeless serving agencies are evident. Homelessness presents significant risks of contracting COVID-19, including challenges related to infection prevention and access to health care for people who become ill. Public health guidance such as self-isolation and physical distancing refers mainly to access to private housing.

In addition, overcrowded drop-in centres and shelter sites, congregate housing environments, and inadequate resources to maintain proper hygiene and infection control practices exacerbate vulnerability for people who work, volunteer and reside in these settings.

At the onset of the pandemic, the City of Richmond, together with the provincial government and community partner organizations, pivoted quickly to deliver services in compliance with public health safety recommendations. While some programs moved to virtual delivery, others implemented the necessary safety measures in order to continue to deliver services in person. With additional safety measures in place, Richmond's homeless serving agencies ensured that individuals experiencing homelessness had adequate access to shelter and other essential resources during this challenging time.

In summer 2021, the City of Richmond, in partnership with BC Housing and Turning Point Recovery Society, supported the extension of the temporary Emergency Response Centre (ERC). ERCs are temporary emergency shelters designed to enable people experiencing homelessness to access accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Operated by Turning Point Recovery Society at the former Minoru Place Activity Centre, Richmond's ERC provides up to 45 shelter spaces and basic supports for people who would otherwise be living unsheltered on the street. The ERC also provides 24/7 staffing, daily meals, showers and access to other community services.



# STAKEHOLDER ROLES

## City of Richmond

The City of Richmond plays a proactive leadership role to address homelessness in the community. It is committed to working in partnership with senior levels of government and the private and non-profit sectors to create the right mix of housing and supportive services for a diverse population, including residents experiencing or at risk of homelessness. While recognizing that senior levels of government have the primary responsibility for funding homeless prevention programs, services and affordable housing, the City is committed to its local leadership role.

From a municipal standpoint, the role of the City is to:

- Ensure the right mix of affordable housing options are available to meet the diverse housing needs of vulnerable residents;
- Facilitate collaboration among community partners to develop prevention services; and
- Support the development of a community-wide system that streamlines the process for connecting people experiencing homelessness with housing and needed services.

## The Province of BC

BC Housing is the provincial crown corporation responsible for delivering funding and programs related to housing and homelessness. BC Housing delivers funding to a variety of services, including shelter operations, homelessness prevention, outreach supports and services, and supportive housing projects for individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Current provincial funding programs include the Supportive Housing Fund, which provides capital and operating funding for new supportive housing developments.

## The Government of Canada

In 2019, the federal government released Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy 2019–2029. Reaching Home is a community-based program aimed at reducing and preventing homelessness. The Government of Canada's homelessness program supports some of Metro Vancouver's most vulnerable residents by improving access to safe, stable and affordable housing. Reaching Home requires funded communities to develop and implement community-driven homelessness plans as well as coordinated access to services and homelessness management information systems that drive data-informed decisions to improve programs.



# METRO VANCOUVER HOMELESS COUNT

Due to the nature of homelessness, it is difficult to gather data on the number of people experiencing homelessness at any one point in time. People who may become temporarily or episodically homeless over the course of a year are not typically counted in 24-hour homeless counts. In addition, many individuals may be experiencing “hidden homelessness,” staying with family members, friends, or strangers and do not have a permanent or secure home of their own. The Metro Vancouver Homeless Count has been conducted regionally every three years since 2002. Homeless count statistics provide a summary of general trends, however they are known to undercount the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in communities. In the most recent Count (2020), a total of 85 individuals reported they were experiencing homelessness in Richmond. This number represents a 21% increase from the number of individuals counted in the city in 2017.

Of the 85 Richmond residents who self-identified as experiencing homelessness at the time of the 2020 Homeless Count:

- 60 individuals (71%) reported they stayed in a shelter that night. The remaining 25 individuals (29%) reported they were unsheltered. This suggests there was a slight decrease in the number of unsheltered individuals in Richmond in 2020 compared to 2017.
- Of the 68 individuals who provided their age, the majority (41) were between 25 and 41 years of age. Of the remaining individuals, 23 were 55 years and over and four were under 25 years of age.
- 14 out of 66 respondents (21%) identified as Indigenous. Since Indigenous peoples comprise only 1% of Richmond’s general population, Indigenous peoples are overrepresented among Richmond’s population who identify as homeless.



## PROGRESS MADE IN 2021

The City of Richmond Homelessness Strategy 2019–2029 outlines five strategic directions and 32 actions to accomplish during this ten year timeframe. The following section highlights the progress achieved in each of the five strategic directions in 2021.



## Strategic Direction 1: Prevent pathways into homelessness

### Why is this important?

Investments by all levels of government and the private sector in safe, affordable and stable rental housing with supports has been particularly successful for many households and is widely recognized as the most effective strategy to end homelessness. In recent years, there has been an emphasis nationally, provincially and locally on shifting funding and other resources from emergency, temporary responses to long-term, strategic investments in housing with supports and homelessness prevention. Tenants living in supportive housing units are provided the individualized supports they need to successfully maintain and retain their housing, preventing inflow into or returns to homelessness. Research indicates that individuals who have entered the homelessness services system (e.g. accessed shelter supports) are more likely to experience reoccurring instances of homelessness. Preventing people from ever entering the homelessness services system is the most effective and often the least resource intensive approach to reducing homelessness.

### Actions and Achievements

- In 2021, the City continued its collaboration with five non-profit organizations: Coast Mental Health, Pathways Clubhouse, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., Tikva Housing Society, and Turning Point Recovery Society, through Storeys, a 129-unit affordable housing development and social service hub. Storeys combines affordable rental housing with support services that stabilize housing for some of the community's most vulnerable residents.
- RainCity Housing and Support Society continued to assist tenants previously experiencing homelessness living at Alderbridge Supportive Housing. This temporary modular supportive housing development, which opened in 2019, provides residents who previously experienced homelessness with a place to live with wrap-around services as tenants move towards housing independence and improve their quality of life. Alderbridge Supportive Housing staff continue to report significant success in improving the health and well-being of their tenants.
- The City continued to work with BC Housing and Pathways Clubhouse to plan for the development of a six-storey, 80-unit affordable housing building at 5491 No. 2 Road. The low rental rates in this development will help provide housing stability for low-income residents who cannot afford market rental housing, including those who are or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2022.



## Strategic Direction 2:

### Support residents who are experiencing homelessness

#### Why is this important?

As each experience of homelessness is unique, it is important for a community to have a variety of services to respond to the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. Homeless serving agencies have an important role in supporting residents by providing compassionate, non-judgmental services that work to support people and to create stability within their lives. The City's role within these actions is to facilitate partnerships and collaboration among service providers.

#### Actions and Achievements

- In response to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, the City, in partnership with BC Housing and Turning Point Recovery Society, supported the extension of the temporary Emergency Response Centre (ERC). The ERC, located at the former Minoru Place Activity Centre, provides 45 shelter spaces, meals and basic supports for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness during the pandemic.
- In 2021, the City received a total of \$3.35 million in funding from the province through the Union of British Columbia Municipalities' (UBCM) Strengthening Communities' Services Program. This program addresses the needs of Richmond residents experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Highlighted initiatives include:
  - The City worked in partnership with Turning Point Recovery Society to open a Drop-In Centre, including a shower and laundry program that provides: day-time supports, such as computers and computer literacy training, access to the internet; programs, including SMART addiction recovery, service navigation and referral; and warm drinks, snacks and lunches. Centrally located at the Brighthouse Pavilion, the Centre welcomes people experiencing homelessness on a drop-in basis.
  - Beginning in fall 2021, the City partnered with Vancouver Coastal Health to create a multidisciplinary, team-based approach to providing clinical supports to vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness. The initiative supports clients' resiliency through intensive outreach services, occupational therapists' housing support and navigational assistance to access other programs.



- The City opened Richmond’s first Warming Centre at the South Arm Outdoor Pool building in November 2021. Operated by The Salvation Army, the Warming Centre is activated at night when extreme cold weather threatens the health of those who are unsheltered in the community. Up to 15 people can be accommodated at a time during periods of extreme winter weather. Participants are provided warm drinks, snacks and meals, and mats and chairs to sleep or rest. The Warming Centre offered services when activated from November 2021 to March 31, 2022.
- The City continued to work in partnership with BC Housing and The Salvation Army to support the operation of the Richmond House Shelter. The shelter provides 30 year-round beds, three meals a day, shower and laundry facilities, and support to locate housing, services and recreational opportunities to women and men experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Richmond, in a pet-friendly environment. An additional 15 winter shelter beds were provided from November 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022 to accommodate the winter season.



## Strategic Direction 3: Provide pathways out of homelessness

### Why is this important?

Individuals experiencing homelessness are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed then provided with services and supports. Supportive housing options include rent supplement units with individualized supports related to physical and mental health, education, employment, substance abuse or other needed services. The City's role within these actions is to support service provider organizations in coordinating service delivery and to advocate to the provincial and federal governments for increased funding for affordable housing in Richmond.

### Actions and Achievements

- The City worked in partnership with BC Housing to plan for Bridgeport Supportive Housing, a 40-unit temporary supportive housing development at 2520–2640 Smith Street. Bridgeport Supportive Housing will be the second temporary modular supportive housing development in Richmond. The project will be constructed on City-owned land with BC Housing funding and operated by Community Builders, an experienced non-profit housing provider. The development will provide housing and on-site services for individuals experiencing homelessness and is expected to open in summer 2022.
- The City continued to work in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR) and the Richmond RCMP's Vulnerable Persons Unit to provide street outreach services to people experiencing homelessness on City land, including in public parks and public parking areas. Services included help to complete applications for MSDPR Financial Assistance and for access to housing units as well as support accessing a wide range of needed services for individuals experiencing homelessness.

## Strategic Direction 4: Foster collaboration and capacity-building among community partners

### Why is this important?

Homelessness is a complex issue and cannot be solved by one organization or one level of government alone. Collaboration and service coordination is the most efficient and cost effective way to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness and to build capacity within the non-profit sector to provide enhanced service provision. The role of the City within this strategic direction is to facilitate and support collaboration among non-profit housing and service providers to address agreed upon actions.

### Actions and Achievements

- The City hired a Program Lead, Homelessness in summer 2021, following Council's approval of this new position. The Program Lead, Homelessness plays a leadership role in advancing key initiatives in the Homelessness Strategy, coordinating inter-departmental actions relating to homelessness, and enhancing partnerships and collaboration with City departments and external organizations.
- The City met on an ongoing basis with BC Housing, Vancouver Coastal Health, the Richmond RCMP's Vulnerable Persons Unit, MSDPR staff and a range of other government departments and organizations to collaborate and share information. On a number of occasions, the City also met with housing providers, private developers and stakeholder groups to explore ideas for new affordable housing developments.
- After temporarily suspending meetings of the City's Community Homelessness Table in order to address the immediate pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic, City planning began in 2021 to re-establish regular meetings starting in January 2022. Non-profit agencies participating on the Table include RainCity Housing and Support Society, Chimo Community Services, The Salvation Army, Turning Point Recovery Society and Vancouver Coastal Health.

- The City continued to focus on sustaining partnerships with key stakeholders in the community. Staff continued to support and participate on two committees tasked with the successful integration of programs in their surrounding communities: the Alderbridge Housing Community Advisory Committee, which includes staff from the City, BC Housing, RainCity Housing and Support Society, neighbouring residents and local businesses; and The Salvation Army's Community Council, comprised of staff and board members and representatives of BC Housing, Richmond Women's Resource Centre, Vancouver Coastal Health, the Richmond RCMP and local businesses. The committees regularly review project goals, objectives, strategic plans, and program policies and procedures.
- The City collaborated with Lu'ma Native Housing Society (LNHS), the organization accountable for working with communities across Metro Vancouver to implement Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy for preventing and reducing homelessness. City staff collaborated with LNHS representatives to plan a Richmond community stakeholder consultation to engage service providers in developing a community-wide homelessness services system that streamlines connecting people experiencing homelessness with housing and supports. The goal of the consultations, which begin in January 2022, is to inform the selection of Richmond's access points or key referral agencies through an environmental scan of Richmond's homeless serving agencies.





## Strategic Direction 5: Communicate, research and monitor homelessness



### Why is this important?

Richmond is committed to fostering an inclusive and healthy community. Public perception can be a significant barrier to a community's ability to provide critical supportive housing and services for residents experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Positive changes in public perceptions can help people experiencing homelessness in the community feel accepted, safe and supported. The City's main role is to help facilitate awareness and education opportunities regarding homelessness and supportive services, and to share information.

### Actions and Achievements

- The City continued to liaise with local service providers to monitor ongoing trends related to homelessness, which has been particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on feedback from local organizations, there was evidence that homelessness increased during the pandemic. This information was used to inform program design at the upcoming Bridgeport Supportive Housing development.
- Information from the Metro Vancouver Homeless Count was used by City and BC Housing staff in 2021 to plan for the Bridgeport Supportive Housing development. This Homeless Count information was also used to develop the City of Richmond's successful application for funding through the UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services Program. Many of the projects are highlighted in this report, including the following projects initiated in 2021:
  - The City began to develop a series of community homelessness dialogue sessions that will provide a forum to share real stories and perspectives from people with living and lived experience of homelessness in a safe, respectful and neutral environment. The dialogue sessions, anticipated for spring 2022, will provide an opportunity to address stigma and discrimination, and engage residents and businesses in a broader discussion about building an inclusive community.
  - The City engaged the Homelessness Services Association of BC to develop and deliver homelessness training to City staff who interface with the public. The purpose of the training is to educate and empower staff to work effectively with all Richmond residents, and for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Richmond to access life-changing supports through their interaction with City staff. Planning for the training is underway and is anticipated to be provided in spring 2022.

## CONCLUSION

In 2021, the collaborative projects described above contributed significantly towards achieving the vision of the City of Richmond Homelessness Strategy 2019–2029:

*By 2029, homelessness in Richmond is rare, brief and non-recurring. Richmond is an inclusive community that works in collaboration to provide a continuum of housing and support services.*

Significant progress was made by the City in collaboration with its partners in addressing the Homelessness Strategy's five strategic directions and 32 recommended actions. At the close of 2021, seven activities were complete, eight were in progress, 14 were ongoing, and three were not yet initiated. Notably, over the next three years the Bridgeport and Pathways affordable housing projects will provide Richmond's lowest income residents a total of 120 new affordable housing units. The City and partner organizations' tenacity in bringing Richmond new, affordable housing stock with supports, will stabilize their tenants' lives, enabling them to maintain their housing and improve their quality of life. Prioritization of this work recognizes that housing with individualized supports is the primary evidence-informed route to reducing and ending homelessness.

In 2021, the City's successful application for UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services funds, resulted in the infusion of \$3.35 million into Richmond's services and supports, advancing the progress of several Homelessness Strategy actions that had not yet been initiated. With these and many other important City initiatives complete or underway, significant progress has been made towards achieving the Homelessness Strategy's strategic directions and vision. The City of Richmond Homelessness Strategy 2019–2029 continues to be an effective framework for preventing and addressing homelessness in Richmond.





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