



CITY OF RICHMOND
**HOMELESSNESS
STRATEGY**
2019–2029
2020 UPDATE



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INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a critical issue across Metro Vancouver and in Richmond. In 2020, the Metro Vancouver Homeless Count estimated that a minimum of 85 individuals experience homelessness in Richmond, although non-profit service providers in Richmond estimate this number to be much higher.

The City of Richmond is committed to playing a proactive leadership role to make homelessness in Richmond rare, brief and non-recurring. 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 *Homelessness Strategy 2019–2029* provides an action-oriented framework to guide City and stakeholder involvement in homelessness initiatives in Richmond.

In 2020, the first year following the adoption of the *Homelessness Strategy (2019–2029)*, the City began making progress in achieving the actions outlined in the strategy. The following report provides a high-level summary of what the City of Richmond and community partners have achieved to address homelessness over the past year.





ABOUT THE STRATEGY

Adopted by City Council in 2019, the City of Richmond's *Homelessness Strategy (2019-2029)* is an action-oriented framework that guides the City's and stakeholder involvement in homelessness initiatives over the next 10 years.

To provide long-term focus, the Strategy is guided by the following vision statement:

By 2029, homelessness in Richmond will be rare, brief and nonrecurring. Richmond is an inclusive community that works in collaboration to provide a continuum of housing and support services.

To achieve this vision, the *Homelessness Strategy (2019-2029)* provides the following five strategic directions:

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

Over the 10 year time frame for the *Homelessness Strategy (2019–2029)*, the recommended actions have been identified as short-term (1–3 years), medium-term (4–6 years), long-term (7–10 years) or ongoing.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in BC and the provincial government's subsequent declaration of a state of emergency on March 18, 2020 affected individuals throughout the province, with vulnerable populations experiencing the most severe impacts. In the early stages of the pandemic, many individuals experiencing homelessness in Richmond and throughout the province had limited access to essential services and resources with the reduced operating capacity of many non-profits and the temporary closures of community centres and public libraries. In response, the City of Richmond together with the provincial government and community partners, worked quickly to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness had adequate access to shelter and other essential resources during this challenging time.

In Spring 2020, the City of Richmond, in partnership with BC Housing and Turning Point Recovery Society, supported the opening 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, Richmond's ERC, located at the former Minoru Place Activity Centre, provides 40 shelter spaces and basic supports for people living on the street. The ERC also provides 24/7 staffing, daily meals, showers and access to other community supports and services.

In April 2020, the City of Richmond also produced a resource guide for individuals experiencing homelessness, which provided information about available community resources during the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak. The guide included information on community meals and food programs as well as a location map of public washrooms available throughout the city. This guide was shared with City departments that interface with the public, various community partners and was distributed to individuals experiencing homelessness in Richmond.



CITY ROLE

The City of Richmond is committed to playing a proactive leadership role to address homelessness in the community. The City 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 of providing funding for homeless prevention programs, services and affordable housing, the City is committed to remaining a local leader

PROVINCIAL ROLE

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

FEDERAL ROLE

Since 2006, the federal government has invested in a range of homelessness prevention and reduction programs through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. In June 2018, the federal government announced plans to launch Reaching Home, a replacement for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The new program confirms the federal government's commitment to deliver funding for Housing First programs. Reaching Home also prioritizes data-driven homelessness plans, as well as prevention-based outcomes and programs. In Vancouver, Reaching Home funding is delivered through Vancity Community Foundation.



RICHMOND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY PROFILE



Due to the nature of homelessness, it is difficult to gather accurate data on the number of people experiencing homelessness at any one point in time. People may become temporarily or episodically homeless over the course of a year and are not typically counted in 24-hour regional homeless counts. In addition, many individuals may be experiencing “hidden homelessness,” and are staying with friends or family members but do not have a permanent or secure home. The statistics summarized below are intended to provide a summary of general trends, however they are not a complete assessment of individuals experiencing homelessness in Richmond.

Metro Vancouver Homelessness Count

The Metro Vancouver Homeless Count has been conducted regionally every three years since 2002. The 2020 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count found 85 individuals experiencing homelessness. This number represents a 21% increase from the number of individuals counted in 2017.

At the time of the Homelessness Count, 60 (or 70%) of the individuals surveyed were sheltered. The remaining 25 individuals were unsheltered at the time of the Count. Compared to 2017 when there were 29 unsheltered individuals recorded in Richmond, there were 4 fewer unsheltered individuals in Richmond in 2020.

Of the 68 individuals that provided their age, the majority (41 individuals) were between 25 and 41 years of age. Of the remaining individuals, 23 were people 55 years and over and 4 were under 25 years of age.

Of the 66 individuals that stated whether or not they had an Indigenous identity, 14 individuals or 21% identified as Indigenous compared to less than 1% of Richmond’s overall population.

PROGRESS

The *Homelessness Strategy (2019-2029)* outlines 32 actions to accomplish during this 10 year timeframe. The following section provides an overview of the actions achieved in 2020.

Strategic Direction 1: Prevent pathways into homelessness

Why is this important?

In recent years there has been an effort to shift resources and funding to incorporate homelessness prevention practices into local housing strategies. For example, eviction prevention programs and education programs for market landlords can support housing stability for low-income households. Prevention related programs can include coordinating local outreach and intake processes to help families and individuals access available supports (i.e. rent subsidies) and move through a crisis quickly. The goal of this type of service coordination is the reduction of barriers that often prevent individuals and families from successfully navigating local services and accessing critical supports before the crisis deepens. From a municipal standpoint, the role of the City is to ensure that the right mix of affordable housing options are available to meet the housing needs of vulnerable residents and to facilitate collaboration among community partners to develop prevention services.

- In 2020, the City continued planning for the Pathways affordable housing project, an 80 unit affordable housing development. The City of Richmond, Pathways Clubhouse, and BC Housing have partnered to build new, affordable rental housing at 5491 No. 2 Road. The proposed project is a six-storey building with 80 new homes for single people, families and seniors. Rental rates are proposed to be set to accommodate both low-income and moderate-income households, and will provide much need affordable housing to Richmond residents. The building will be operated by Pathways Clubhouse, a Richmond-based organization that has been offering services to Richmond residents since 1984. Construction is scheduled to start in late 2021. The low rental rates in this development will help to prevent housing stability for low-income residents who cannot afford market rental housing and may be at risk of homelessness.
- In 2020, the City undertook a review and best practise analysis of opportunities to support local rent bank initiatives and to identify best practices implemented elsewhere in British Columbia. The research found that rent banks are an important eviction prevention tool, which help to support housing stability for low-income households. In Richmond, Chimo Community Services currently operates a rent bank for Richmond residents, which is part of the BC Rent Bank network.

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 each client. Homelessness 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.

- In Spring 2020, the City of Richmond, in partnership with BC Housing and Turning Point Recovery Society, supported the opening of the temporary Emergency Response Centre (ERC). Operated by Turning Point Recovery Society, Richmond's ERC provides 40 shelter spaces and basic supports for people living on the street. The ERC also provides daily meals, showers and referrals to other supports and services.
- The Richmond House Shelter, now in its second year of operation, provides 30 year-round shelter beds for women and men experiencing homelessness in Richmond. The shelter is operated by The Salvation Army and provides three meals a day and other practical assistance to residents. Richmond House provides a crucial source of temporary accommodation for individuals who lack permanent housing in Richmond.
- During the 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021 winter seasons (November 1 to March 31), 15 additional winter shelter beds were provided at the Richmond House Shelter. These beds added important capacity to enable individuals experiencing homelessness to remain indoors during periods of extreme weather.
- In April 2020, the City of Richmond produced a resource guide for individuals experiencing homelessness, which provided information about available community resources during the early stages of the pandemic. The guide included information on no or low cost community meals and food programs as well as a location map of public washrooms available throughout the city. This guide was shared with City departments that interface with the community, various community partners and was distributed to individuals experiencing homelessness in Richmond.



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. Various models, including Housing First and supportive housing, supplement housing units with supports related to physical and mental health, education, employment or substance abuse. 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.

2020 Highlighted Achievements

- In November 2020, the City in partnership with BC Housing, announced a proposed 40-unit modular supportive housing development in the Bridgeport area of Richmond. The proposed modular housing building, located at 2520-2640 Smith Street, will be the second 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.
- In its second year of operation, the 40 unit Alderbridge Supportive Housing building at 6999 Alderbridge Way continues to provide much needed housing and services for individuals experiencing homelessness. This modular housing building was constructed on City-owned land in partnership with BC Housing through its Rapid Response to Homelessness Program. The 40-unit building, which has a five year lease, provides housing and on-site services for individuals experiencing homelessness in Richmond and is run by RainCity Housing, an experienced supportive housing provider.

Strategic Direction 4: Foster collaboration 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 services providers to address agreed upon actions.

- In 2020, the City focused on fostering and sustaining partnerships with key stakeholders in the community. Examples include the continuation of the Alderbridge Housing Community Advisory Committee and ongoing meetings with the consortium involved in the Storeys building, which includes Coast Mental Health, SUCCESS, Tikva, Turning Point Recovery Society and Pathways Clubhouse.
- On an ongoing basis, the City also met, shared information and collaborated with BC Housing, Vancouver Coastal Health, the RCMP's Vulnerable Persons Unit, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction and a range of other government departments and organizations. On a number of occasions, the City also met with housing providers, private developers, and other stakeholder groups to explore ideas for new affordable housing developments.
- In 2020, the City initiated the Richmond Community Homelessness Table, which is comprised of leaders from various non-profit service providers in Richmond. The Table is an important forum for collaboration and communication regarding current initiatives and future partnership opportunities.
- In 2020, the City created the Program Lead, Homelessness staff position, following Council approval. This position will play a leadership role in advancing key initiatives in the *Homelessness Strategy (2019-2029)*, will coordinate internal actions relating to homelessness, and will facilitate partnerships with external organizations. The hiring process is currently being completed for this position.



Strategic Direction 5: Communicate, research and monitor homelessness

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 regarding homelessness 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.

- The City supported the BC Non-Profit Housing Association and Vancity Community Foundation in completing the 2020 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count, a point-in-time count of individuals experiencing homelessness in the region. 85 Richmond residents were identified as experiencing homelessness during the count, which represents a 22% increase compared to the 2017 Homeless Count.
- The City continued to liaise with local service providers to monitor ongoing trends related to homelessness, which was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on feedback from local organizations, there was evidence to indicate that homelessness had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. This information was used to inform the development of the Richmond Emergency Response Centre and the Bridgeport Supportive Housing. Staff also used this information to plan for a permanent supportive housing development in partnership in BC Housing.

CONCLUSION

Guided by the *Homelessness Strategy (2019-2029)*, the City of Richmond remains committed to playing a proactive leadership role to facilitate solutions to homelessness in partnership with a wide range of community stakeholders. Moving forward, the City, with involvement from all sectors, will continue working towards the vision in the *Homelessness Strategy (2019-2029)* to make experiences of homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

With involvement from all sectors—public, non-profit, and the private sector—all Richmond residents experiencing homelessness can receive the supports and housing options necessary to achieve stability in their lives.





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