



**Greater Vancouver
Shelter Strategy**

***2013 - 2016
Strategic Service Plan***

April 22, 2013

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Executive Summary

The Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society (GVSS) is a network of organizations responding together to meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk, and to advocate for systemic solutions. It envisions accessible, high quality temporary shelter and outreach services, connecting people with appropriate housing and supports.

The 2013-16 Strategic Service Plan identifies broadly supported future directions for emergency shelter facilities and outreach services in Metro Vancouver.

The following strategies and goals are intended to help achieve our shared intention to provide services and resources toward ending homelessness.

Strategy 1: Focus on long term solutions

1. Acknowledge and communicate about the need for an increased supply of appropriately resourced supportive and transitional housing.
2. Collaborate to develop and strengthen homelessness prevention strategies.
3. Foster effective practices in helping people find homes and remain housed.

Strategy 2: Continue to improve access to shelter and outreach services

4. Enhance access to shelter throughout the region by creating services in sub-regions where none exist.
5. Improve service accessibility and suitability for youth, older adults, women, families, people with disabilities, people with life threatening illnesses and other population groups.
6. Continue to strategically reduce barriers where possible, while maintaining behavioural expectations to maintain safety.
7. Communicate service availability to the homeless, service providers and the larger community.

Strategy 3: Enhance service effectiveness

8. Partner to strengthen the continuum of services.
9. Continue to shift services to become more individualized and respectful of privacy needs.
10. Foster healthy evolution in the cultures of organizations that serve homeless people.

Strategy 4: Continue to meet needs for networking and coordination

11. Continue to operate the GVSS as a responsive, effective and accountable organization.
12. Continue to strengthen community-based Extreme Weather Response services.
13. Identify emerging sheltering, outreach and housing issues and facilitate coordinated responses.
14. Engage stakeholders and provide policy recommendations.

Introduction

This Strategic Service Plan identifies broadly supported future directions for emergency shelter facilities and outreach services in Metro Vancouver. While the plan primarily focuses on 2013-14 through 2015-16, the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy Society (GVSS) recognizes that this is part of a longer term effort.

Purpose of this Plan

Our intention is for service providers, governments, funding agencies, homelessness networks, and others to use this plan to help guide our work toward ending homelessness.

How We Created the Plan

The GVSS developed the 2013-2016 Strategic Service Plan through an extensive process. The group decided to amalgamate its prior strategic plans and its shelter service plan. The GVSS hosted a facilitated dialogue session in May 2012, developed a draft for feedback from other homelessness tables and partners, prepared a revised draft, and developed the current draft in consultation with GVSS member organizations in April 2013.

The plan draws on other key documents such as:

- ✓ 3 Ways to Home
- ✓ One Step Forward... Results of the 2011 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count
- ✓ Homeless Voices 2010; Homeless Youth Voices; Toward Aging in Place
- ✓ Proceedings of 2011 and 2012 GVSS service planning sessions

Strategic Foundation

Vision

The GVSS envisions accessible, high quality temporary shelter and outreach services, connecting people with appropriate housing and supports.

Mission

The GVSS is a network of organizations responding together to meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk, and to advocate for systemic solutions.

Values

- ❖ All people should have access to permanent, appropriate housing.
- ❖ When people become homeless, rapid re-housing is a priority.
- ❖ People should be able to be sheltered or housed in the community of their choice.
- ❖ When required, people should have supports to maintain their housing.
- ❖ When needed, people should have access to temporary shelter that is safe and healthy.
- ❖ People using homelessness services deserve respect and dignity, including opportunity to make their own choices.
- ❖ Commitment to service excellence.

Service Principles

The GVSS upholds the following principles for shelter and outreach services:

1. Services should be accessible throughout the region, for people of all genders and ages.
2. The shelter system should continue to broaden access, address barriers to service and develop a culture of hospitality.
3. Strengthening partnerships among service providers and others can help improve access to services and coordination of delivery.
4. Shelter and outreach services need to have capacity to support linkage of clients with other services and stabilized housing.
5. Coordinated provision of extreme weather response is required to augment other shelter and outreach services.

Operating Principles

The GVSS operates in accord with the following five principles:

1. Collaboration among funders, service providers, and communities.
2. Representation of diverse communities, perspectives, stakeholders, and interests.
3. Maintaining a safe forum for dialogue.
4. Consensus decision-making.
5. Transparency.

Strategies and Goals

The following four strategies, along with the associated goals and objectives, are intended to help achieve our shared intention: to provide services and resources toward ending homelessness. The strategies are to:

1. Focus on long term solutions;
2. Continue to improve access to shelter and outreach services;
3. Enhance service effectiveness; and
4. Continue to meet needs for networking and coordination.

Strategy 1: Focus on long term solutions

1. ***Acknowledge and communicate about the need for an increased supply of appropriately resourced supportive and transitional housing.*** Organizations involved in shelter and outreach services are well positioned to contribute to efforts toward creating a balanced housing continuum, and to provide evidence about the needs of their clients.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Collaborate across sectors to establish common understanding of current and projected needs for supportive and transitional housing.
 - 1.2 Identify and communicate about successful models and innovative practices for resourcing, building and operating such housing.
 - 1.3 Develop and implement a communication strategy to engage residents, local stakeholders, and all levels of government regarding these housing needs and solutions. (Action example: PSAs)
 - 1.4 Advocate for a national housing strategy.
2. ***Collaborate to develop and strengthen homelessness prevention strategies.*** Prevention is widely acknowledged as a key element of long term solutions to homelessness. Early intervention strategies such as rent banks are vitally important. The availability of strong outreach services can help keep people from becoming unhoused. And as the shelter system becomes increasingly linked to the housing continuum, each shelter has a role to play in rapid re-housing, where possible, as soon as people enter the system.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Advocate for expanded access to rent banks.
- 2.2 Address livability issues in existing low-cost housing, through partnership with appropriate organizations.
- 2.3 Prioritize development and implementation of strategies for prevention of homelessness among older adults (50+ years of age).
- 2.4 Identify other priority populations for prevention strategies.
- 2.5 Continue to provide leadership in participatory action research regarding causes of homelessness, through the Homeless Voices process.

3. ***Foster effective practices in helping people find homes and remain housed.*** Work with and support housing providers to accommodate people who have been homeless. In some cases, this includes continued support to the person after they have been housed. Key service elements to support successful transition to stabilized housing include effective case management, support for wellness options, and appropriate clinical intervention as needed.

Objectives:

- 3.1 Engage with housing provider organizations to identify and promote successful strategies for transitioning to being stably housed.
- 3.2 Collaborate in action research intended to support ongoing learning about what works in supporting various population groups in achieving housing stability.

Strategy 2: Continue to improve access to shelter and outreach services

4. ***Enhance access to shelter throughout the region by creating services in sub-regions where none exist.*** However, new shelter beds should only be added where there is a specific geographic or demographic gap. The primary role of shelters and outreach should be to assist people toward affordable, appropriate housing and services. Ultimately, housing is the solution to homelessness.

Objectives:

- 4.1 Support the Richmond Homelessness Coalition and other key partners to create shelter access for all genders in Richmond.
- 4.2 Work with the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness to create shelter / transitional housing access for Burnaby residents.
- 4.3 Work with other sub-regional tables and regional / provincial networks to assess and address other geographic and demographic service gaps.

5. ***Improve service accessibility and suitability for youth, older adults, women, families, people with disabilities, people with life threatening illnesses and other population groups.*** It is important to recognize the unique needs and abilities of these various population groups and customize shelter and outreach services accordingly. Innovative and preferred practices at the local level may provide examples that can be documented, adapted and applied in other communities.

Objectives:

- 5.1 Address safety and access issues for women and other population groups accessing shelters and outreach services.
- 5.2 Enhance capacity for serving lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender and two-spirited people who need outreach and shelter services.
- 5.3 Review and address shelter resources for youth, using results from the Youth Action Squad and other relevant evidence.
- 5.4 Enhance capacity of services to meet the needs of older adults, using results from the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice.
- 5.5 Enhance capacity for culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal people, immigrants and refugees.

6. ***Continue to strategically reduce barriers where possible, while maintaining behavioural expectations to maintain safety.*** For

example, shelters and Extreme Weather Response sites should accommodate pets and shopping carts where feasible and appropriate. In communities with just one shelter option, it is especially important to provide low barrier access. Physical accessibility, cultural appropriateness, age appropriateness are all vital. It is also crucial to create inclusive environments by focusing on welcoming, hospitality and respect.

Objectives:

- 6.1 Continue to uphold the value of having diverse shelter services, including mixed gender and gender-specific programs as well as variable levels of requirement for sobriety.
- 6.2 Help people access the shelter that best suits their needs by continuing to improve access to information about currently available beds.

- 7. *Communicate service availability to the homeless, service providers and the larger community.*** Continuing to improve access to shelter involves rigorous efforts to communicate about available services at the street level and with front line agencies. It also involves enhancing the capacity of GVSS member organizations to work with the news media and to use social media. Location, levels of accessibility and other variables are some of the considerations in linking people to suitable shelter facilities and programs.

Objectives:

- 7.1: Support provision of information at the street level so that individuals in need of emergency shelter know how and where to access these services.
- 7.2 Use multiple media to engage, inform and disseminate information to all stakeholders.
- 7.3: Provide information to community agencies and others in contact with homeless people regarding shelter services.
- 7.4: Enhance the capacity of GVSS members to work with the news media and to use social media.

Strategy 3: Enhance service effectiveness

8. **Partner to strengthen the continuum of services.** Building and maintaining strong relationships with health and other human service agencies is vital to effective homelessness service provision. Developing mutual trust is important in this, so that referrals and collaboration can occur smoothly.

Objectives:

- 8.1: Continue to build community capacity for inter-agency collaboration and cooperation through communities of practice, joint planning, and shared action.
- 8.2 Seek necessary funds and/or in-kind resources to support expansion of collaboration and other forms of partnership among service providers.

9. **Continue to shift services to become more individualized and respectful of privacy needs.** The range of shelter guests and outreach clients is becoming more diverse, and their requirements more unique. Design of new shelter facilities needs to shift toward having options for private rooms, where feasible and cost effective. Also, collection of intake data needs to be done in a way that empowers people to self-identify their gender and other specifics.

Objectives:

- 9.1: Design any new shelters with inclusion of at least some private rooms if that format suits the expected population mix to be served.
- 9.2 Identify what outreach and shelter data is essential, and build capacity and resourcing for consistent collection and management of that data in ways that uphold strong standards of privacy and personal empowerment.

10. **Foster healthy evolution in the cultures of organizations that serve homeless people.** This aim is for all homeless service organizations to develop cultures of inclusion and listening, so that the voices of clients, frontline workers, and others can effectively contribute to creating excellence. Cross training, development of 'soft' skills, shared training, integration of preferred practices and sharing of expertise are all important. To serve as a safety net, shelters and related services need to be flexible and responsive.

Objectives:

- 10.1 Identify and document innovative and preferred practices in front line service, management and overall organizational culture.
- 10.2 Explore opportunities for recognition of service providers for outstanding practices.
- 10.3 Seek resources and partnerships in order to facilitate sharing of preferred practices and skills among service providers.

Strategy 4: Continue to meet needs for networking and coordination

11. ***Continue to operate the GVSS as a responsive, effective and accountable organization.*** Maintaining the GVSS as a healthy table includes regularly attending to governance, administrative support, communication among partners, and coordination with other networks. It also involves ongoing cycles of planning and evaluation.

Objectives:

- 11.1 Prepare action plans and budgets annually.
- 11.2 Work with BC Housing, the Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, and other key partners to secure resources and confirm strategies for shelter and outreach data collection.
- 11.3 Evaluate and report on the performance of the Society biannually, using information collected from shelters and other information.
- 11.4 Continue to coordinate with Shelter Net BC, Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee, sub-regional homelessness tables, and others.
- 11.5 Continue to develop strong coordination with youth service networks.
- 11.6 Maintain administrative and facilitation support for the Society.
- 11.7 Implement a governance model for the Society.
- 11.8 Maintain effective forms of communication among GVSS partners.

12. ***Continue to strengthen community-based Extreme Weather Response services.*** It is important to continue to support Extreme Weather Response by providing information resources, planning tools, access to training, media relations, and other support. In addition, there is an urgent need to further develop coordinated, community-based extreme heat response to reduce health and safety risks for people who are homeless during heat waves.

Objectives

- 12.1: Continue to provide support and coordination to extreme weather response planning and winter operations.
- 12.2 Continue to expand and develop EWR services as needed, with priority to areas having no permanent shelter.
- 12.3 Provide extreme weather response media relations services through the winter season.
- 12.4 Support development of extreme heat response plans.
- 12.5 Seek resources to provide coordination of extreme heat response to protect people who are homeless during heat waves.

13. ***Identify emerging sheltering, outreach and housing issues and facilitate coordinated responses.*** Part of the strength of homelessness networks such as the GVSS and sub-regional task forces is the ability to identify issues early, share information and strategically coordinate action so that the collective response becomes more effective.

Objectives:

- 13.1 Continue to provide a forum for early identification of issues faced by shelter and outreach services.
- 13.2 Continue to engage with sub-regional task force tables regarding issues and responses.
- 13.3 Facilitate a coordinated response to issues faced by shelter and outreach services.
- 13.4 Demonstrate evidence of shelter need at the community and regional levels.
- 13.5 Communicate with stakeholder organizations about issues and responses.

14. ***Engage stakeholders and provide policy recommendations.*** The GVSS has been engaging people with experience of homelessness since 2007, eliciting and communicating their input through the 'Homeless Voices' initiative. More recently, the GVSS has spearheaded engagement of front line workers and managers, through a 'community of practice' process. Such input, along with facilitated dialogue among diverse service agencies and decision makers, is a powerful basis for developing policy recommendations such as the directions set out in this *Strategic Service Plan*.

Objectives:

- 14.1: Engage people with experience of being homeless in provision of input for policy and programs.
- 14.2 Engage front line workers, managers and others in provision of input for policy and programs, through the Homeless Seniors Community of Practice and other means.
- 14.3 Engage diverse agencies and decision makers in setting directions for shelter and outreach services as part of a broader strategy to end homelessness.
- 14.4: Provide information and recommendations regarding the continuum of housing to government and multi-stakeholder organizations concerned with homelessness.

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