

YOUR WAY HÔME

MANITOBA'S PLAN TO END
CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS



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Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the Treaty Territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk Nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.

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Ending Chronic Homelessness

There should be no chronic homelessness in a rich country like Canada. Like many other provinces, Manitoba has seen a dramatic increase in homeless encampments over the past several years. These encampments put the safety of all Manitobans at risk – both those living in tents and the families, seniors and businesses nearby.

The previous government failed to take action, but our government is ready to address this humanitarian crisis with a decisive, compassionate and common-sense plan that moves people from tents to housing with the supports they need to thrive.

Our plan is rooted in two fundamental beliefs. Number one, that tents are not an acceptable replacement for safe, warm, secure, and dignified housing. Number two, that all Manitobans deserve to freely enjoy our public spaces knowing they're part of a province where we take care of each other, and no one is forced to sleep outside.

Guided by these principles, the provincial government will take a One Manitoba approach to ending chronic homelessness by coordinating and streamlining the efforts of community organizations and municipal governments to address this issue. This work will be led by the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness and a new Premier's Senior Advisor on Ending Chronic Homelessness.

To facilitate this work, a new position has been created. The Premier's Senior Advisor on Ending Chronic Homelessness will lead the province's coordinated approach to ending chronic homelessness, bringing non-profit organizations, Indigenous governments, municipalities and the private sector together in one plan. The Senior Advisor will also coordinate with provincial departments to ensure we are taking a whole of government approach to ending chronic homelessness.

From Encampments to Housing

Our plan focuses on the estimated 700 Manitobans who are currently living in encampments. While we continue to invest in building social, affordable housing for everyone, our immediate priority is to house these people.

The province will make suitable housing available to people living in encampments, directly offer people access to this housing, and provide the addictions, mental health and primary care supports people need to successfully transition into that housing.

To do this, we are purchasing and renovating several apartment buildings to house people from encampments, and funding wrap-around staffing supports through community partner organizations to support new tenants as they move in. The safety and security of these buildings are paramount to our government, and we will ensure that as we bring people from encampments into housing, we provide adequate and appropriate resources to keep everyone in the neighbourhood safe.

Working with the City of Winnipeg and sector partners on a 30-day timeline, we will offer housing supports to everyone in a designated encampment and work to move people from the encampment into housing. This transition will be supported by a new navigation centre where people will be provided safe and comfortable indoor accommodations while their needs are further assessed and supports provided. Mental health and addictions treatment and other supports between the encampment and more permanent housing options will ensure that more people successfully make the transition from encampments into housing.

When an encampment is empty, we will clean and decommission the site and take measures to monitor the location to ensure the space can be used safely by everyone without new encampments being established. In the coming months, we hope to house over 100 people currently living unsheltered in encampments.

Beyond our immediate efforts to help house people living in encampments, our long-term plan to end chronic homelessness in Manitoba will see us freeing up space in existing Manitoba Housing buildings for people who have left encampments for supportive and transitional housing options and are ready to move to more permanent, independent housing. We will repurpose up to 20% of Manitoba Housing spaces and empower Manitoba Housing to provide more wrap-around supports to people transitioning from encampments into housing.

We also want to work with Manitoba Housing to identify tenants who are best positioned to succeed outside of Manitoba Housing and then connect them with rent supports and subsidies to move them to private rental suites as the next level on the housing spectrum. We will do this work in partnership with landlords and the business community who share our commitment to ending chronic homelessness and giving Manitobans a hand up toward a more independent and successful future. We will also create an inventory of available housing for rent to help people more easily navigate the transition into permanent housing.

Finally, learning from our work in Winnipeg to decommission encampments and move people into housing, we will develop a province-wide encampment plan to help people in other municipalities across the province find housing.

At the end of the next seven years, it is our ambition that every Manitoban has safe and secure housing, our neighbourhoods are safer, and sleeping in a tent is no longer an option because we can provide the housing and supports to help people find their way home.

30-Day Encampment Outreach Plan

Starting this winter, the Province of Manitoba will work closely with the City of Winnipeg and community outreach teams to begin decommissioning encampments using a camp to housing approach. This work will be led by the Premier's new Senior Advisor on Ending Chronic Homelessness, with supports from the City of Winnipeg and partner organizations.

Step 1: Site Identification

Work will proceed on a site-by-site basis. An encampment site will be selected based on the availability of suitable housing for everyone residing in that encampment site, and based on the following criteria.

Health and Safety issues, including:

- Public health concerns related to communicable diseases
- Fire safety
- Proximity to roads, highways, railway tracks and other hazardous infrastructure
- Public health concerns, including the presence of biohazard waste and garbage

Public and Community Safety issues, including:

- Criminal or other unlawful activity in or surrounding encampments
- Concerns related to proximity of encampment sites to schools, childcare centres, parks, bus shelters, personal care homes, hospitals and anywhere that supports children or vulnerable people

Step 2: Set a 30-Day Transition Period

After a site is selected, a 30-day transition period will be set where the following work will be undertaken to transition everyone out of an encampment into housing.

Step 3: Transition to Housing

During the 30-day transition period, outreach teams will work closely with people in the encampment to understand their needs and offer them housing and other resources, including:

- Access to social housing units with supports.
- Funding to solve immediate barriers to housing, such as covering a damage deposit payment to allow access to market housing.
- Access to healthcare professionals for those with severe physical or mental health issues so they can be transported to and get support from hospitals or the Crisis Response Centre.

- While the preference is for permanent housing supports, alternate accommodations will also be facilitated, including moving in with a family member or friend, returning to a home community, or other options that the person prefers.
- Assist those previously in encampments by providing transportation to their housing unit, heat treatment for their belongings to prevent the spread of bed bugs and other necessary supports related to their transition.

Step 4: Decommission and Monitoring

Once everyone has been transitioned into housing, the City of Winnipeg will clean and decommission the encampment site, restoring the site to its original public use. The city, province, and community organizations will work together to regularly monitor the site to prevent further encampments from being established.

Ending Chronic Homelessness Framework

While the province takes immediate action to move unsheltered people into suitable housing, we must also implement a framework and plan that will address the shortage of housing and supports needed to end chronic homelessness. For too long Manitobans had a government that ignored the growing numbers of homeless people in our communities, cut supports, and sold off social and affordable housing supply. These actions made it even harder to help find supports for people experiencing homelessness in Manitoba.

After seven and a half years of cuts and neglect, our government created a department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness to bring together housing, homelessness, mental health and addiction services with a mandate to end chronic homelessness in two terms. Since then, the department has worked to develop this framework that combines immediate actions to support homeless people with the most urgent needs, and a long-term plan to address chronic homelessness across the province. The framework incorporates learnings from other jurisdictions and includes activities that will ensure that, by 2031, any Manitoban who becomes unsheltered will be rehoused within weeks of becoming homeless.

For years the need for mental health and addictions supports has increased across Manitoba. Addressing these urgent needs is critical in supporting people moving from encampments to housing to be successful.

In addition to mental health and addictions supports, more housing and social supports are needed. To address these needs, our framework to end chronic homelessness includes the following measures, in addition to the immediate action plan to move people from encampments to housing.

Increasing the supply of social housing with wraparound supports

Meeting our mandate to end chronic homelessness by 2031 will require providing social housing with supports for not only people currently experiencing homelessness, but also those at risk of becoming homeless in the future. The use of existing Manitoba Housing stock will be accomplished by taking advantage of underutilized stock and helping households move into the private or non-profit market by providing household rent subsidies, as well as acquisition of new units.

Over the past year, our government has helped house over 1,200 households, committed \$37 million to 17 projects that will create 525 social RGI units, invested \$2.6 million to keep shelters open in the daytime during cold months, provided \$5 million to fund wrap around support programs for people exiting shelters, supported 1,700 rent relief loans, and provided monthly housing benefits to over 3,200 households.

To build on this success and ensure people exiting homelessness are successful in their new homes and can fully participate in their communities, they need tailored support services. These support services include mental health and addictions treatment, behavioural, case and recovery management, crisis response and prevention, harm reduction, cultural activities, health and other community resources.

These services will be transitional, helping people to stabilize and develop skills for independent living, or permanent, supporting people with chronic and co-occurring health issues to enjoy a quality of life in the community, depending on the need.

Support services will be expanded as new rental housing units become available. Permanent and transitional housing facilities will include 24/7 support staff as well as food, housekeeping and recreational services. In both types of facilities, residents will be trained and supported to help deliver some on-site services.

Creating a Housing First program in Manitoba Housing

To end chronic homelessness, Manitoba Housing will need to create a new housing stream within its existing structure dedicated to people experiencing homelessness. This stream will follow a Housing First approach, focusing on providing suitable housing. For example, single-family homes or small apartment buildings may be more appropriate than units within large high-rise complexes. In some cases, specific buildings will be designated as permanent supportive housing. Creating this new stream will require redesigning many of Manitoba Housing's programs, policies, partnerships and staffing models. 20 percent of Manitoba Housing's total portfolio, or 2,500 Manitoba Housing units, will be dedicated to the new stream.

A Housing First approach will help move people into stable housing right away, making it easier for them to access mental health and addictions care and other support services that will help them succeed long term. There is strong evidence that a Housing First approach helps significantly more people exit homelessness.

Manitoba Housing will provide property management and food services at its permanent supportive housing buildings while contracting other providers to deliver support services and housekeeping.

Along with the redesign of services, Manitoba Housing will create pathways for applicants and tenants whose primary issue is affordability to move into the private or non-profit sector. This will require the development and subsidizing of new rental units in these sectors that are comparable to their Manitoba Housing units and within their communities.

Manitoba Housing will continue to provide social housing for low-income families and seniors with its remaining 10,000 units that are not dedicated to the new Housing First model.

Aligning coordination between organizations and governments

Jurisdictions that have been successful in reducing chronic homelessness have developed a shared approach with clearly defined objectives and an emphasis on data collection to better understand the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Following their example, the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, in consultation with service providers and leaders from Indigenous and municipal governments, will create the shared vision, principles and objectives of the provincial plan to end chronic homelessness.

The government will develop an outcomes-based framework for the plan that will:

- Establish the data points needed to track progress;
- Set clear deliverables for funded organizations; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of provincially funded programs.

This will include developing reporting requirements for provincially funded service providers and compiling that information into regional reports. The government will also use the data for results-based allocation of new funding.

The government will establish governing councils made up of representatives from Indigenous and municipal governments, mental health and homelessness sectors and people with lived experience. The councils will confirm the general needs assessments and set the priorities for their regions.

Additional factors that contribute to the success of other jurisdictions in addressing homelessness include a sustained and focused effort on collaboration between all levels of government and across service sectors. The province will take the lead on collaborating with Indigenous, municipal and federal governments and across provincial departments. This will include working with administrators from those governments on housing supply, support services and other programs under the plan.

The Government will continue to support policy and program developments that support the goal of ending chronic homelessness and close the gap to decrease the likelihood of people exiting government systems into homelessness. This includes making changes to child welfare, disability and income assistance services to ensure fewer people leaving these services end up homeless, making service navigation improvements between government departments, and providing more community safety and wellness planning including sobering centres.

Recruiting, training and retaining front-line staff

The success of the plan depends on having a multidisciplinary workforce with the experience, knowledge and skills needed to help people exiting homelessness stabilize and maintain their housing.

The government will focus support on existing service providers with established track records and the organizational capability to support a growing workforce. These providers have benefit plans, personnel teams for hiring and training new employees and strong leaders who support their teams. Given the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the homeless population, the government will ensure that Indigenous-led organizations are at the forefront of this plan. The funds budgeted for capacity building will support collaborative recruiting, training and leadership development.

Addressing gaps that lead youth and vulnerable people into homelessness

To meet our government's mandate to end chronic homelessness, we need to reduce the number of youth entering into homelessness from the child welfare system. We also need to help ensure people transitioning out of health care services and corrections systems do not end up homeless. For this to be successful, changes to government services are needed. As many of these transitions are complicated by mental health and addictions challenges, the province is expanding comprehensive mental health and addictions services to go along with new housing and supports. These services are part of what constitutes wrap-around supports.

Our government will work with service providers to develop a new supportive housing model to replace the existing residential care model, as well as to complete required capital upgrades in existing facilities. The province will use a portion of the rent subsidies and support services budgets to fund the enhanced operations of these facilities, and a portion of the prevention budget to fund the required capital upgrades. Finally, Manitoba Housing will continue to repair and upgrade existing social housing stock so it can be brought back into service.

Inspiring hope and developing pathways to success

Providing people with housing and supports is an important step in solving chronic homelessness in Manitoba. Our vision also includes family reunification, education, employment and all the steps needed to ensure that those who have experienced homelessness can live the full lives they have imagined.

For tenants in supportive housing facilities, this may include helping people pursue personal interests and hobbies, participate in meal and housekeeping services and being able to attend cultural and recreational activities in their community. Training and employment opportunities available for trades and support services could be made available for those who can and wish to pursue them. Furthermore, peer support work, paid or voluntary, may provide the opportunity for people to use their lived experience to help other community members.

Background Information and Critical Analysis

Estimates and demographics of homelessness

Based on the demographic data from the lists and counts in Manitoba, the average age of people experiencing homelessness in Manitoba is 40. Approximately 75 per cent are male, over 65 per cent are in receipt of social assistance and, depending on the community, 70 to 95 per cent are Indigenous. Of the people experiencing homelessness, approximately 50 per cent are chronically homeless, having experienced homelessness for more than six months. It is important to note that by-name-lists and point-in-time counts both significantly underestimate the number of women, youth and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing homelessness.

According to point-in-time counts, the top reasons for people first becoming homeless, in order, are: family breakdown, substance use, eviction, loss of income, health issues, transition from child and family services and exiting incarceration. Winnipeg's 2022 point-in-time count found that 54 per cent of people living unsheltered first became homeless at age 18 or younger, often immediately after aging out of the child welfare system.

Substance use, trauma and harm reduction

Substance use and homelessness are deeply interconnected. Not only can substance use contribute to loss of housing but it is also often used as a coping mechanism for the challenges and trauma of experiencing homelessness in addition to pre-existing traumas.

The Department of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness has a mandate to implement a harm reduction approach to substance use. Harm reduction focuses on minimizing the negative health, social and economic effects of substance use, including the risks of drug poisoning and infections, while providing access to health and social services, including additional withdrawal management and substance use treatment. This approach will be integral to activities under the framework and action plan.

The harm reduction mandate includes establishing Manitoba's first supervised consumption site in Winnipeg. The government is partnering with community organizations to develop harm reduction services and is currently planning to establish the supervised consumption site in conjunction with a sobering center and access to addictions, employment, housing, income support, and primary care services, as well as a safety plan and security around the site.

Housing supply requirements

Social housing, where rent is set at 30 per cent of household income, is often the only type of housing people exiting homelessness can afford. The capacity of Manitoba Housing to address this need has been significantly impaired by minimal investment in new social housing stock since the early 1990s, as well as the sale or management transfer of 20 per cent of its properties between 2017 and 2021 under the previous provincial government. In addition, over 24,000 units with rents under \$750 have been lost in the market due to fires, demolition or renovation and redevelopment.

Private rental market vacancy rates are less than one percent in most communities in Manitoba. This shortage of rentals drives up the cost of rent and makes it harder for people with lower incomes or no rental history to move into market rate housing. Measures to incentivize more private rental market units, such as the government's new Rental Housing Construction Incentive can help alleviate this problem and make it easier for Manitobans to move across the housing spectrum.

Support service requirements

Using the national, evidence-based Needs Based Planning framework, the government estimates the province requires support services for 12,000 households. These services should be distributed across three levels of acuity – low, medium and high. The government will focus on people with the highest acuity of need at the start of the framework and action plan to ensure people who are currently experiencing chronic, unsheltered homelessness are prioritized.

Beyond housing and supports

It is critical we acknowledge that most people experiencing homelessness in Manitoba are Indigenous. This overrepresentation is part of the legacy of colonial structures and practices, which have caused intergenerational trauma that persist to this day. Provincial systems including child welfare, education, health, justice and social assistance have deeply damaged Indigenous peoples' connections to community, family, livelihood, culture and land. This requires a culturally appropriate and nuanced approach that is unique to Manitoba.

However, to effectively serve people and prevent additional homelessness, the province needs to continue the work of integrating and improving gaps in these systems that may contribute to homelessness. This work must support community efforts to address ongoing trauma, including through culturally-informed recreational and occupational programs and land-based healing.

Most frontline service workers in the homeless and mental health sectors are people with lived experience. This will require developing occupational training programs to provide people with formal education and hands-on guidance by experienced support workers.

Furthermore, the province is home to a social enterprise sector focused on providing training and employment in the trades for people with barriers to employment. Not only will social enterprises be key to helping people exiting homelessness live the full lives they have imagined, they will also help us in meeting the labour force requirements needed for increasing the supply of rental housing. With this, the province has an opportunity to support social enterprises as primary and sub-contractors in the delivery of new supply in Brandon and Winnipeg. Established social enterprises also have an opportunity to assist other communities to establish their own enterprises for building and maintaining new supply.

Progress to date

Since taking office in 2023, our government has made significant investments and progress connecting people with housing, supporting the building and renovations of new social and affordable housing units, and supporting people experiencing homelessness.

Starting in December 2023, the province worked closely with community organizations to develop several initiatives to address the critical needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the winter months, with a particular focus on women and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. These initiatives, representing a total investment of \$5.76 million, included: daytime shelter operations, interim housing at hotels, case management services, new transitional and supportive housing units, safe transportation for women, Indigenous-women focused outreach and flexible funding. The winter response assisted over 300 people, including helping 129 individuals secure permanent housing.

Beginning in March 2024, a pilot project was started with CMHA Winnipeg and CMHA Swan Valley where they were provided MB Housing units in downtown Winnipeg and in Dauphin, respectively, to house clients of their provincially funded Housing First teams. The teams also operate service hubs in the buildings, where both their clients and other tenants can access supports. Since then, the teams have successfully housed 32 people exiting homelessness and reduced criminal activities and emergency service visits in the buildings.

Budget 2024 built upon the work started in the 2023/24 Winter Response and the pilot projects by investing \$8 million in new funding to help individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness including: \$5 million for new incentives to end chronic homelessness, \$1 million for rent supplements, \$1 million for a pest control program within Manitoba Housing, \$1 million to provide fast-acting loans to prevent rent or utility arrears and minimize the risk of eviction.

Budget 2024 also invested \$116 million to build at least 350 new units of social and affordable housing and repair over 3,000 more. In fall 2024, the province launched the new Housing Starts Here online portal to simplify the application process to help the non-profit sector, Indigenous governments, and municipalities to access the \$26 million capital grant program. Specific projects announced in 2024/25 with provincial support include:

- \$3.0 million to create 31 units in Transcona in partnership with the Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation
- \$2.28 million to create 15 units of transitional housing with Ikwe-Widdjiitiwin, Family Dynamics and New Journey Housing, through the UWCRC2.0
- \$2.2 million to create 30 units as part of the redevelopment of Centre Village with the Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, AMC and SNA.
- \$1.8 million to create 48 units at the Market Lands site in partnership with UWCRC2.0
- \$0.85 million to create 32 supportive housing units in partnership with Siloam Mission

Manitobans want to see an end to chronic homelessness. We envision a province where everyone is safe in their communities. We want every Manitoban to feel safe when they walk to school, wait for the bus, or head downtown, and we want people who are struggling and living in encampments to be safe, too.

This plan will build on the important progress we've made over the last year, with immediate, concrete action to support and house hundreds of people who are living in encampments, and a long-term vision that will end chronic homelessness by 2031. It's an ambitious plan, but together, we can get it done, and help hundreds of Manitobans find their way home.

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