

YEAR 7 UPDATE



PROGRESS REPORT ON
THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO'S
**10 YEAR PLAN
TO END HOMELESSNESS
2010-2020**

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT CPH@RMWB.CA

HEADING HOME

The Homeless Initiative Strategic Committee (HISC) was formed in 2000 to support the Community Plan to End Homelessness. As a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, life-long resident of the RMWB, and a HISC board member for the past five years, I know firsthand the passion and commitment of HISC, the CPH team, and community agencies who all work together to end homelessness in our region.

This update provides a snapshot of the advances made toward achieving the goals set out in the 10 Year Plan to end Homelessness.

1. EDUCATION 2. CHANGE MANAGEMENT 3. PREVENTION 4. RE-HOUSING 5. PROVIDING SUPPORTS

We value and appreciate support efforts toward building a community where everyone has a safe place to call home. Without the dedicated time and effort of this support our journey towards ending homelessness could not be imagined. We are proud of the service providers who continue to reach out to our most vulnerable citizens as they continuously work towards the overarching goal of ending homelessness.

Our community remains resolute in its commitment to end homelessness. In the final two years of the 10 Year Plan to end Homelessness, we as a committee will strive to address outstanding issues and barriers to providing adequate housing and services to those in need.

Sincerely,

Joy R. Flett

*Advisor, Stakeholder and Aboriginal Relations RMWB
Suncor Energy Inc.*

Chair, Homeless Initiative Strategic Committee



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The commitment and support of community partners continues to be instrumental in moving towards ending homelessness in the region. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo would like to thank the community members, organizations, and service providers that support the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, including:

- *Centre of Hope*
- *CHOICES Association of Fort McMurray*
- *Waypoints*
(Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society)
- *Rehoboth Alliance*
(Gethsemane International Assembly)
- *The Salvation Army*
- *YMCA of Northern Alberta*
- *Wood Buffalo Food Bank*
- *Wood Buffalo Wellness Society*
- *Government of Alberta*
- *Government of Canada*



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GLOSSARY

CASE MANAGEMENT

Client-driven approach that provides people experiencing homelessness with supports that help them move forward in their lives. The focus is on assisting and empowering individuals to overcome challenges, establish goals, develop independent living skills, and have access to the services and programs that meet their particular needs.

CENTRALIZED INTAKE

Single point of access for clients to enter Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing programs.

CHRONIC HOMELESS

Individuals who have been experiencing homelessness for a year or more, or who have had at least four episodes of living in homelessness in the past three years.

EMERGENCY SHELTER

Facility intended to provide overnight accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness. The facility may also provide access to food and clothing.

EPISODICALLY HOMELESS

Individuals who have been experiencing homelessness for a short period or off and on several times throughout a three-year period.

HOUSING FIRST

Best practice model for ending chronic homelessness based on the concept that permanent housing is a basic human right and it is a priority that people should be housed as soon as possible with no pre-conditions (such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety). Other challenges and needs can then be addressed and the focus shifts to increasing self-sufficiency, maintaining stability, improving quality of life and moving forward with long-term success. This involves case management and wrap-around support services.

RAPID RE-HOUSING

Program to house, without pre-conditions and for up to six months, individuals who are experiencing homelessness but are at lower risk than Housing First clients and do not require as much support.

RECIDIVISM

When individuals experiencing homelessness enter Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing programs but leave for various reasons and later return to the program.

RETENTION RATE

The number of clients who continue steadily in a program, maintaining stable housing.

WARM TRANSFER

When a client is transferred from one agency to another via a sit-down meeting with all parties involved to ensure the individual is receiving appropriate services.

YEAR 7 HIGHLIGHTS

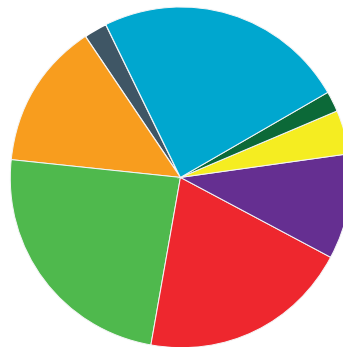


76
INDIVIDUALS
HOUSED



33
PROGRAM
GRADUATES

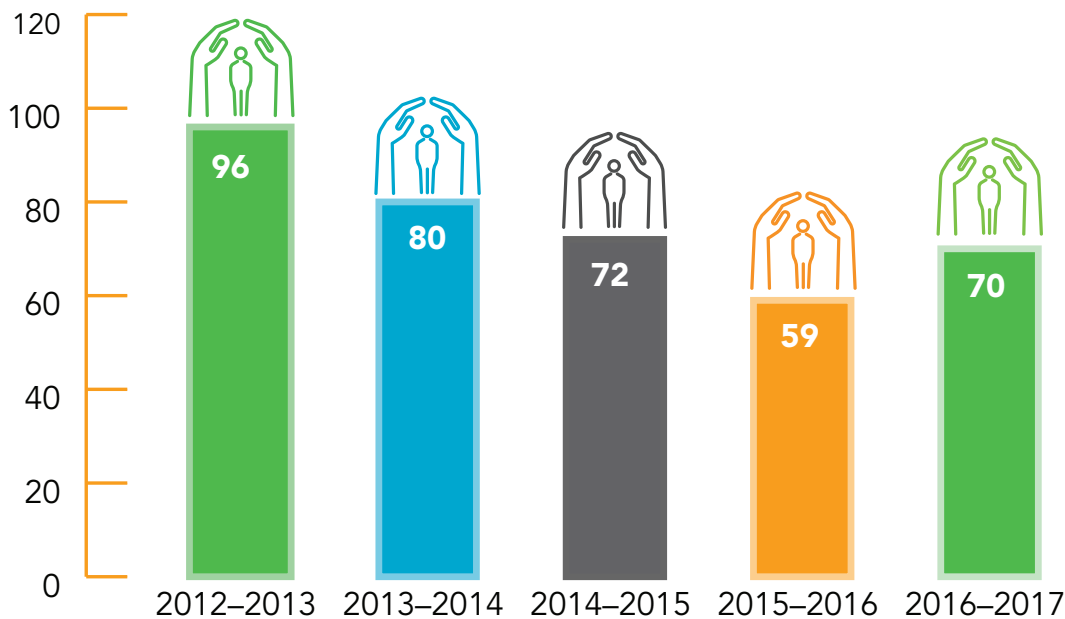
**3 MONTHS
POST HORSE RIVER
WILDFIRE:
32% LEFT THE PROGRAM**



- 24%—Relocated
- 2%—Incarcerated
- 4%—Death
- 10%—Chose not to continue
- 20%—Disappeared
- 20%—Successfully completed
- 24%—Referred to another program
- 2%—Return to Reserve

AVERAGE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS USING SHELTERS

The slight increase in shelter use in 2016-2017 may be due, in part, to the impact of the Horse River Wildfire.



A PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

In March 2009, the Province released “A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years,” which recognized the growing challenge of homelessness and the need to move towards a Housing First philosophy.

The Housing First model is a client-centred approach that deems housing a basic right in society and removes all pre-conditions to being housed (such as addiction or mental health status). The concept is that the first and primary need for a homeless individual is to obtain stable housing and then other issues can be addressed.

PRIORITIES



RAPID RE-HOUSING: Moving Albertans experiencing homelessness from streets and shelters into permanent housing.



CLIENT-CENTRED SUPPORTS: Helping re-housed clients obtain the assistance they need to restore stability and maintain their housing.



PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS: Emergency assistance and providing an adequate and accessible government program.

WHAT WE MEAN BY ENDING HOMELESSNESS

Ending homelessness is a complex problem that requires collaboration and long-term commitment. Individuals may still need to use emergency shelters at times, and the plan to eliminate homelessness by 2020 must be understood in this context.

That means that while emergency shelters will still be available in the Municipality, those who become homeless will be moved to permanent housing within 21 days of accessing the homeless-serving system.

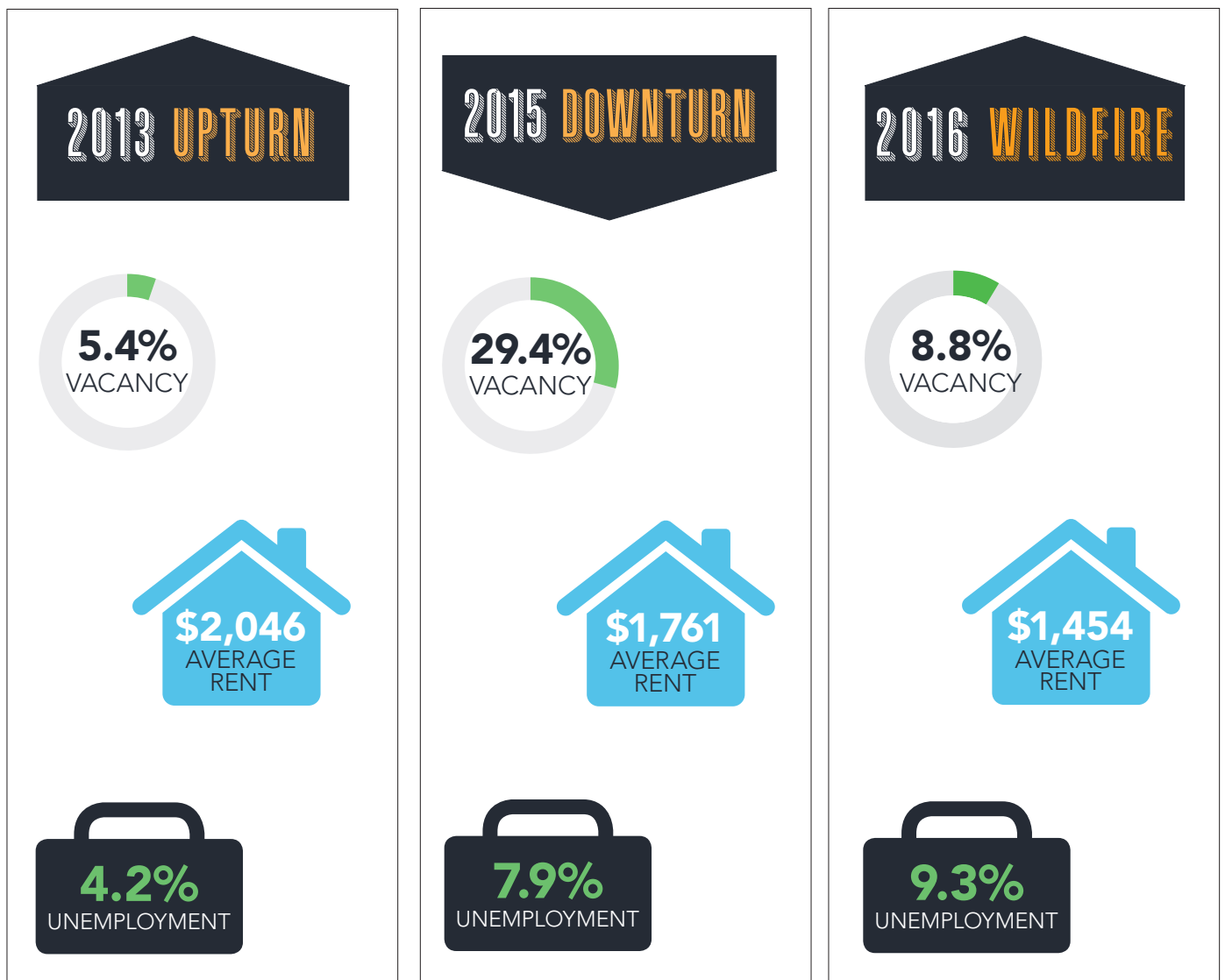
SUCCESS STORY

After realizing that two clients at Marshall House had not evacuated their apartment as instructed during the wildfire, agency workers contacted the RCMP for assistance.

After several telephone calls, the clients were safely evacuated to Edmonton. Staff worked quickly to locate clients at evacuation centres, restore accommodations and support services, and bridge gaps.

THE WOOD BUFFALO CONTEXT

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's history of rapid growth followed by periods of economic downturn, along with its remote location and high cost of living, are important factors to consider when discussing the plan to end homelessness. These factors are linked to rental prices, vacancy and unemployment rates, which all affect attempts to end homelessness in the region.



Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Rental Market Report: Alberta Highlights
Statistics Canada. Labour Force Survey. CANSIM Table 282-0123

2016 HORSE RIVER WILDFIRE

In May 2016, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo experienced the largest natural disaster in Canadian history, a massive wildfire that forced the mandatory evacuation of 88,000 people and destroyed approximately 2,400 structures. The impact on residents and housing continues to be far-reaching and complex. While less understood and documented, the wildfire also affected the homeless, who lost possessions and temporary structures used for housing (such as tents) and are dealing with psychosocial repercussions that have yet to be fully determined.



IMPACT ON CLIENTS

Many individuals experiencing homelessness were evacuated on buses.

Some, but not all clients, returned during re-entry in June 2016.

In the first three months post-wildfire, 20 percent of clients left the program without completing it or being referred to another program.

Post-wildfire, the Canadian Red Cross and other organizations offered unprecedented financial assistance and temporary housing to those experiencing homelessness; consequently, some individuals ended up leaving the Housing First program to take advantage of those resources.



IMPACT ON DATA COLLECTION

During the 2016 Point in Time (PIT) Count, many residents, including those experiencing homelessness, were provided with short-term financial support for housing and/or temporary housing.

This likely affected the count of individuals experiencing homelessness, resulting in misleading data and inflating the success of the Housing First program in 2016.



IMPACT ON AGENCIES

The wildfire affected service providers as well as clients.

Agency staff were affected in both their personal and professional lives.

Many Housing First coordinators attempted to track their clients to ensure that they were safe and accounted for while also trying to ensure that they and their families were safe.

Some staff did not return; post-wildfire turnover was 67 percent.

Many service providers suffered compassion fatigue post-wildfire, including Housing First coordinators as they supported clients experiencing trauma while also coping with their own aftermath.

A PLAN FOR WOOD BUFFALO

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo released its 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness in March 2010.

The Housing First strategy is at its core, emphasizing a collaborative, multi-support system with five goals.



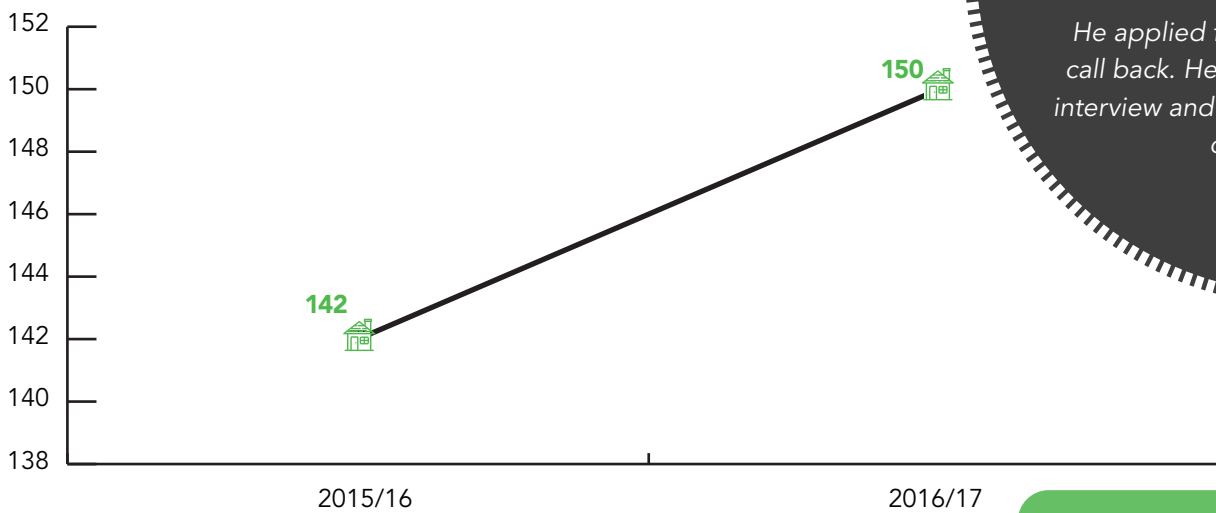
THE IMPACT

GOAL 1: EDUCATION

Build Support to End Homelessness Using the Housing First Approach

Events such as the Homeless Memorial, Housing Connect and the Heading Home Barbeque raise awareness about homelessness and builds support from community organizations, landlords, and the public for homelessness initiatives. As the following chart shows, the number of property managers and landlords involved in the program has steadily increased.

NUMBER OF PROPERTY MANAGERS AND LANDLORDS



SUCCESS STORY

Darren has been working with the Salvation Army for several months and has started making his apartment home by setting up his furniture.

He applied for a job and received a call back. He's now preparing for the interview and is very excited about the opportunity.



HOMELESS CONNECT, held in October 2016, served 109 individuals experiencing homelessness and linked them with 41 service providers.

GOAL 2: CHANGE MANAGEMENT

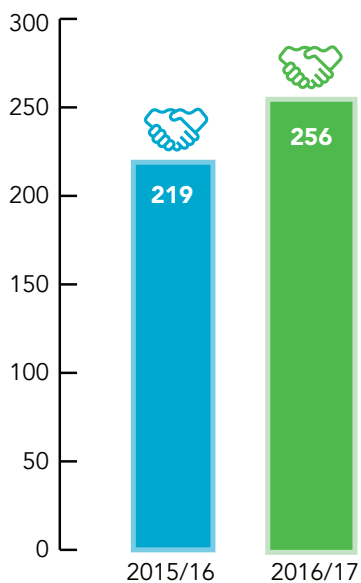
Successfully Transition Local Systems to Housing First

Adopting a Housing First approach requires a move towards centralized intake, collaboration between service providers, and connecting individuals to agencies to ensure that clients receive wrap-around services to support them through the program.

Centralized Intake completed
135 intakes in 2016-2017.

There were 256 transfers connecting individuals to Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing agencies – up 17 percent from 2015-2016.

TRANSFERS CONNECTING INDIVIDUALS TO AGENCIES



SUCCESS STORY

Joel became homeless in 2015 when he lost his job and could not pay his rent. Salvation Army Housing First helped him find a place to live, obtain new glasses, and access employment services. However, he lost his new home and all his belongings in the wildfire. Homeless again, Joel worked closely with the Housing Coordinator and was re-housed.

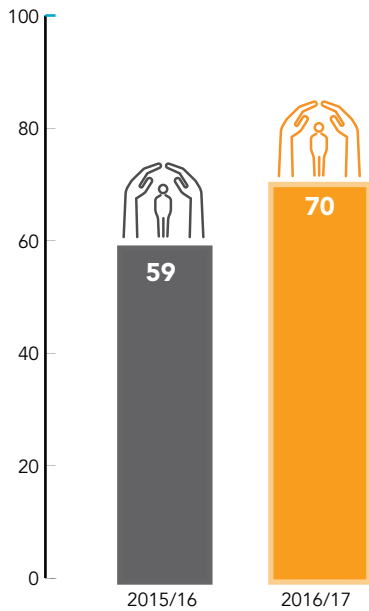
He also worked diligently with CHOICES Association of Fort McMurray, attending weekly appointments in his search for fulltime employment. In September 2016, he did indeed get a job and he continues to be involved in the community, building meaningful relationships and positively influencing those around him

GOAL 3: PREVENTION

Develop a Service System to Prevent Homelessness

A coordinated effort to prevent homelessness includes using the Housing First approach to move individuals from emergency housing to housing stability and identifying assistance required, such as gaining employment, education, and income supports. The slight increase in shelter use in 2016-2017 may, in part, be due to the wild-fire and destruction of homes, apartments, tents, etc.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF CLIENTS USING SHELTERS



SUCCESS STORY

Anne used crack and alcohol daily, was involved in high-risk behaviour, and was homeless when she entered the program.

She has been sober now for three months. With support from the Wood Buffalo Wellness Society, she has been able to maintain stable housing and is regularly engaged with her case coordinator, making plans for the future and setting goals, including treatment.

She is very proud of her accomplishments and is looking forward to what the future holds.



12% of clients took advantage of **job training or educational opportunities.**



57% of clients had **income support or were employed at exit.**

Working with case coordinators to secure income support and/or employment enables clients to become stably housed and increases their chances of success in the program and beyond.

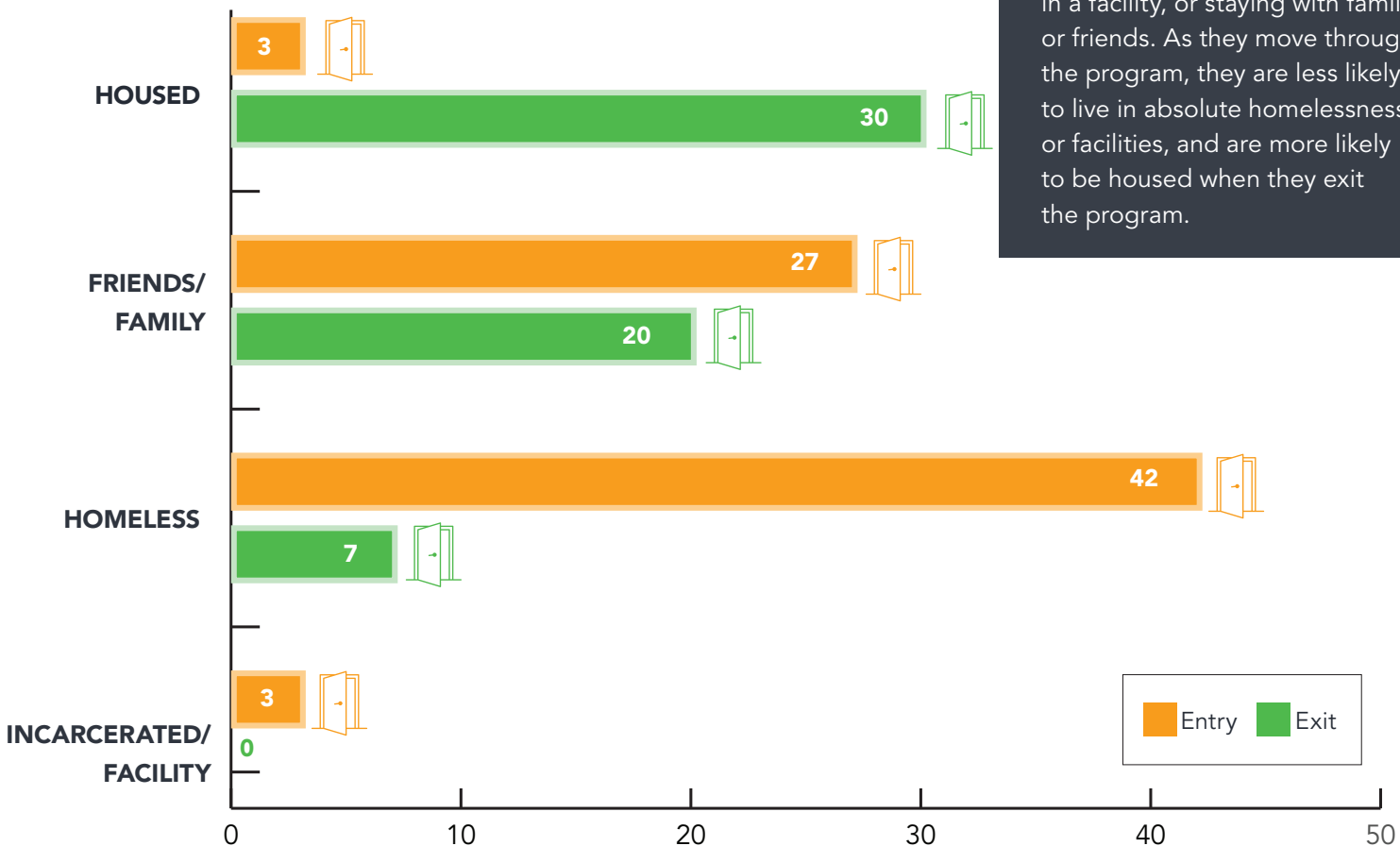
GOAL 4: RE-HOUSING

Rapidly Re-House Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

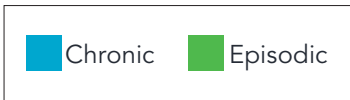
The goal of rapidly re-housing is critical to the plan to end homelessness by quickly moving individuals from homelessness to housing stability. Strategies include serving chronic homeless first, housing stability support, warm transfers, and meaningful engagement.

RESIDENCE UPON ENTRY AND EXIT OF THE PROGRAM 2016/17

Upon entry, as this chart shows, clients are often living in absolute homeless, incarcerated in a facility, or staying with family or friends. As they move through the program, they are less likely to live in absolute homelessness or facilities, and are more likely to be housed when they exit the program.



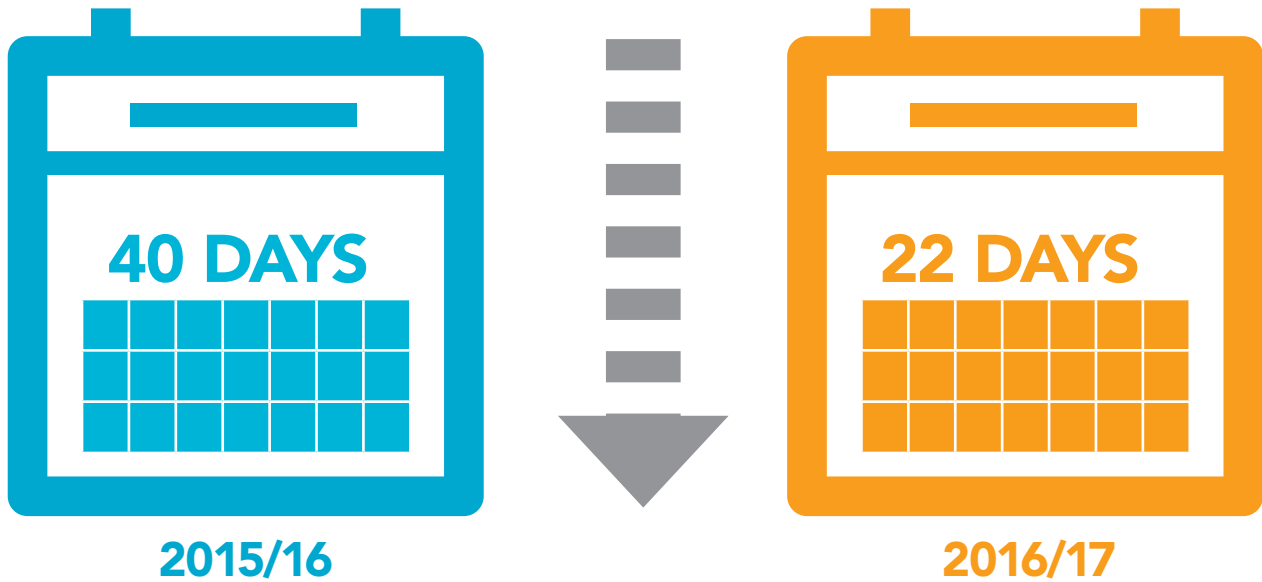
RESIDENCE UPON ENTRY AND EXIT OF THE PROGRAM 2016/17



According to the Housing First philosophy, those who are most vulnerable are served first. This chart indicates that agencies are following this approach by serving more chronic than episodic homeless clients. Over time, the number of chronic homeless will decrease as they are housed through the program.

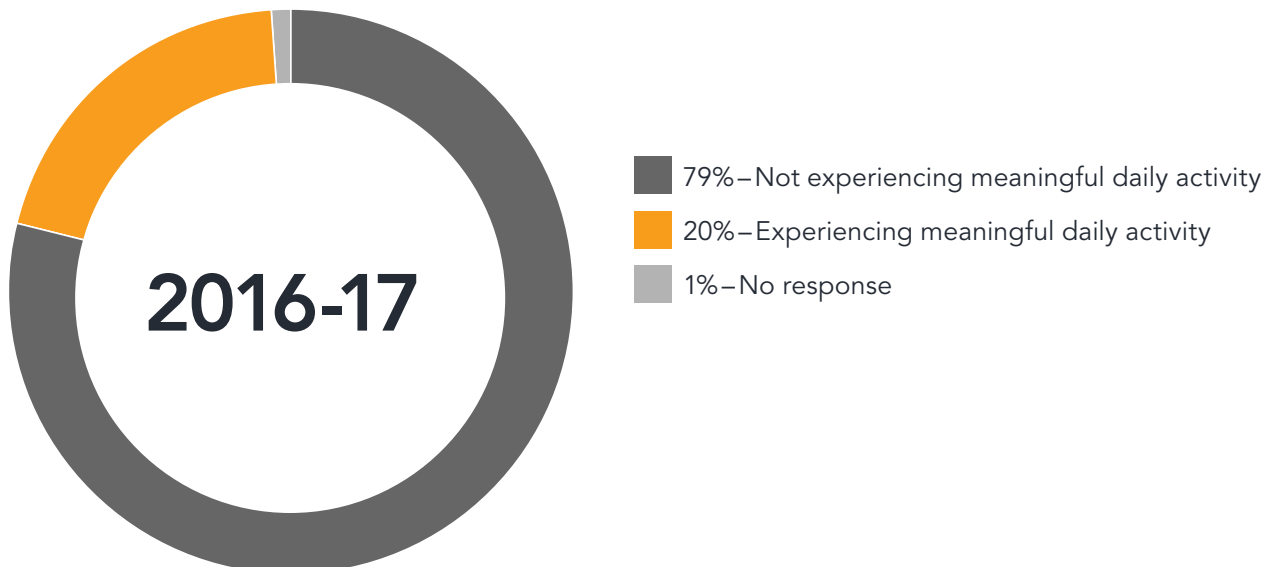
AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME CLIENT WORKS WITH AGENCY TO BE HOUSED

The average length of time that clients work with an agency to secure housing is decreasing, indicating that clients are being more rapidly re-housed.



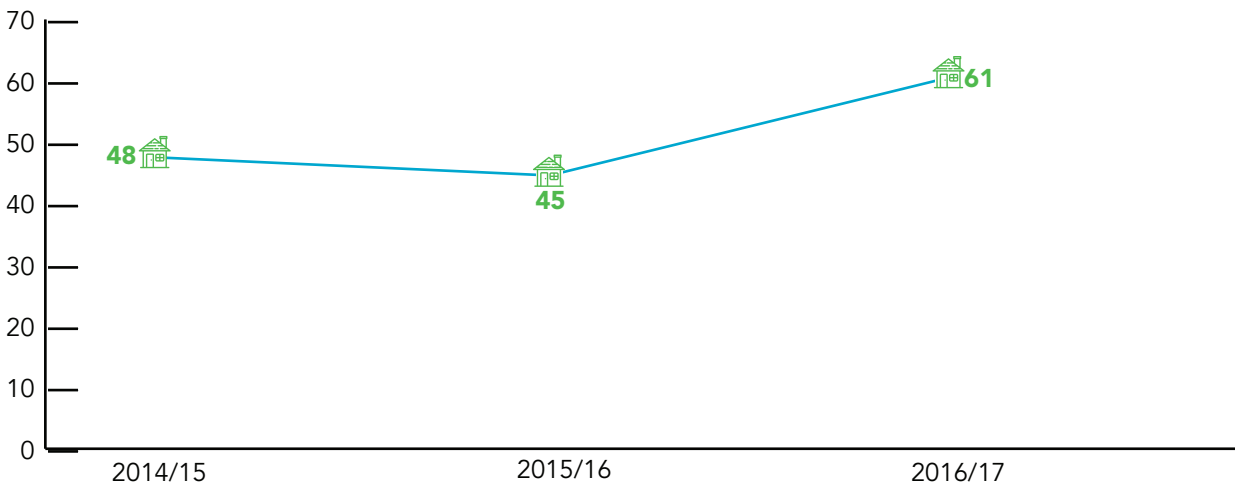
CLIENTS EXPERIENCING MEANINGFUL DAILY ACTIVITY 2016-2017

The following chart indicates a gap for clients, and programs will be encouraged to explore ways to meaningfully engage them as the plan moves forward.



CENTRALIZED INTAKE WAIT LIST AVERAGE IN DAYS

Despite a decrease in the average length of time that clients work with agencies to secure housing, the average number of days that they are on the Centralized Intake wait list has increased. This refers to the time from first contact to when they are transferred to an organization to start a housing search.



The length of wait time is a concern as it may be affecting the program's focus on serving individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.



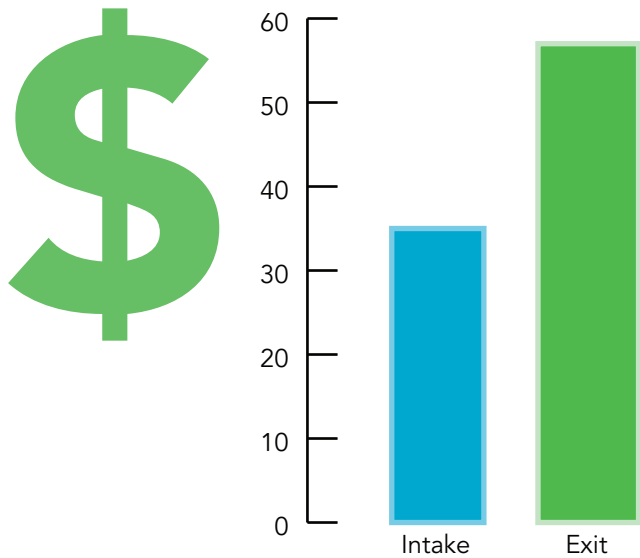
Often the chronic homeless may find it more difficult to wait than the episodic homeless. This may negatively affect the program goal to serve vulnerable residents first.

GOAL 5: PROVISION OF SUPPORTS

Provide Supports for Housing Stability

Ongoing case management and supports are provided to clients until they become more self-sufficient and stably housed. In Year 7, the number of clients who had some form of income upon exit compared to when they were initially housed increased 22 percent.

PERCENTAGE OF CLIENTS WHO HAD SOME FORM OF INCOME 2016-2017



RETENTION RATES were relatively stable from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 at **83%** and **82%** respectively.

7% of individuals exited the program into absolute homelessness.

RECIDIVISM RATE 2016-2017

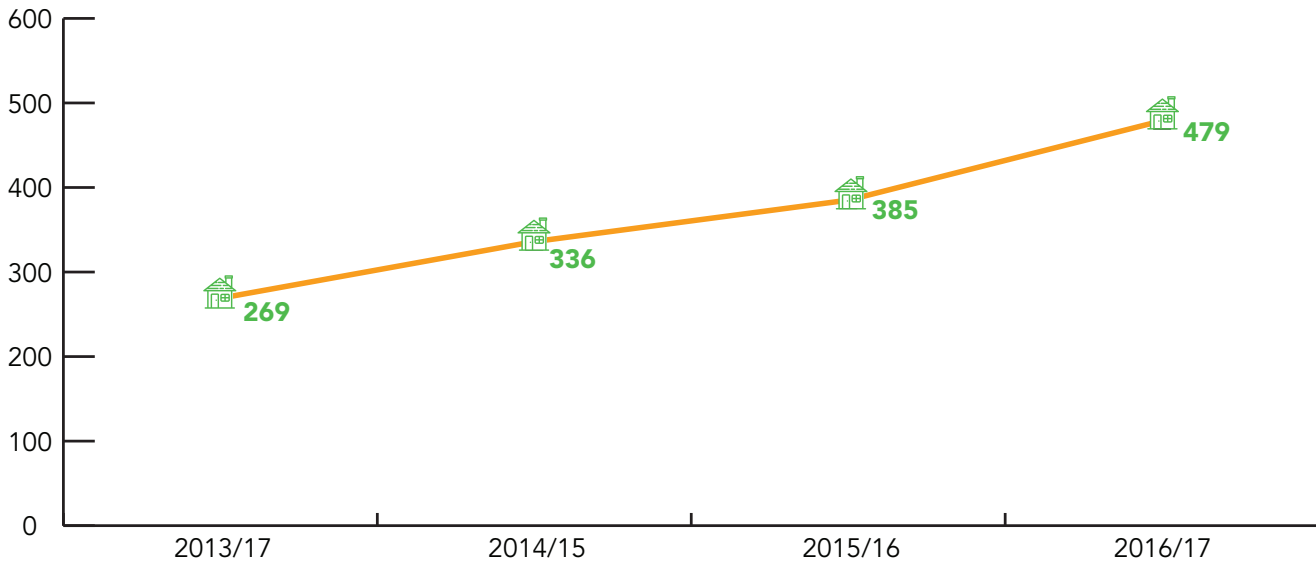
NUMBER OF TIMES CLIENTS HAVE ENTERED THE PROGRAM



47% percent of clients had some form of housing upon exiting the program.

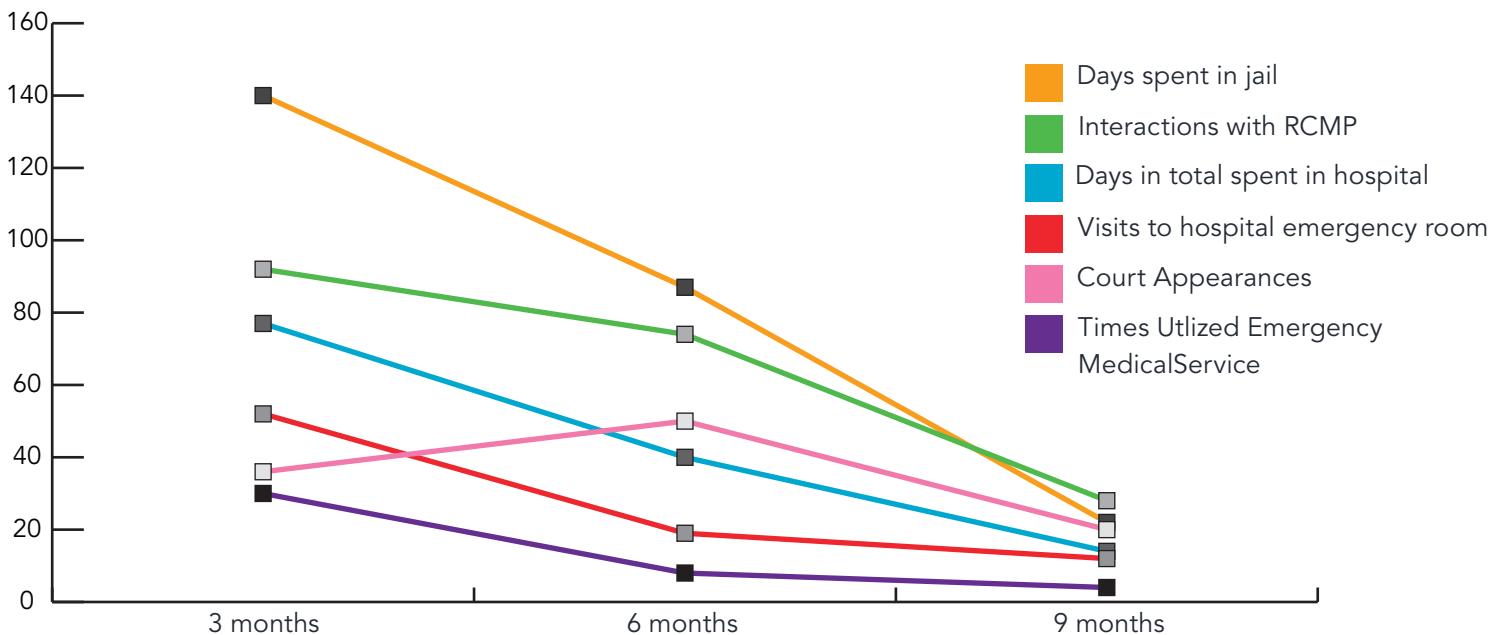
AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME HOUSED

One goal of the plan is that permanent housing is sustained continuously for nine months (270) days or longer. As the following graph shows, the average length of time that clients remain housed has steadily increased to an average of 479 days in 2016-2017.



CLIENT INTERACTIONS WITH FACILITIES THROUGHOUT PROGRAM PARTICIPATION 2016-2017

Over the course of clients' participation in Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing programs, negative experiences with facilities and law enforcement decreased, including hospital and emergency room visits, interactions with the RCMP, jail, or court appearances.



NEXT STEPS



AGENCY STAFF TURNOVER

During 2016-2017 and particularly in the months after the fire, agencies reported high staff turnover. This has an impact not only on clients but also on agencies in terms of capacity, training needs, and continuity of knowledge.

Turnover can negatively affect agency and client relationships and trust, client retention, etc. Initiatives focused on increasing staff retention, including pay and training standards, will be addressed in upcoming program years.



SERVING CHRONIC HOMELESS

The Housing First philosophy emphasizes serving the most vulnerable first, principally those experiencing chronic homelessness.

Factors such as available spaces in the program and staff turnover have contributed to long wait times for clients. This may explain the higher number of episodic clients in the program as it would be more difficult for chronic homeless to wait while episodic clients may be able to wait the length of time necessary.

A focused effort to train new staff and make systems changes in the decision-making process for housing clients are important to ensure that the programs follow the Housing First philosophy of serving the most vulnerable first.



MEANINGFUL DAILY ACTIVITIES

Meaningful daily activities for clients are an important part of preventing a return to homelessness and fostering positive change in their lives.

Current data indicates that there should be more emphasis on this area to engage clients and provide meaningful daily activities.



DATA MANAGEMENT

Data management has been improved, including increasing the capacity of agencies to collect information about and report on their programs.

Further improvements are necessary to organize data and provide more accurate and detailed reporting about the plan to better track success, gaps, and opportunities as the program moves forward. This is a priority going forward.