



The Right Thing to Do

10 Year Update

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010-2020

Canada 

Alberta 



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO





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Message from the Chair

Formed in 2000, the Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee (HISC) has supported the *Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness – Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do* since its conception. As a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, life-long resident of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, and a HISC member for the past eight years, I know firsthand the passion and commitment of HISC, the Community Plan on Homelessness (CPH) team and community agencies that work together to end homelessness in our region.

The region has experienced more than we expected since the plan began in 2010: from multiple fluctuations in the economy directly affecting the community, to the 2016 Horse River Wildfire, to downtown flooding that took place amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the tumultuous situations thrown at our region, we have taken great strides toward ending **chronic** homelessness.

Our community has stood together since before the plan started with a common goal: ending homelessness. While we have not achieved the goal of ending homelessness for everyone in every situation in our community, we have significantly reduced the number of individuals who are experiencing homelessness. We have created programs and services that support those who have been chronically homeless for years and for those who are at risk of becoming homeless. We are working towards expanding a homeless serving system where information can be shared freely and tracked in order to best serve those in need. Most importantly, our community has and will continue to stand together with the commitment to end homelessness

Joy R. Flett
Advisor, Indigenous and Community Relations
Suncor Energy Inc.

The Municipality would like to recognize the members of HISC, the Government of Canada, the Province of Alberta, partners within the RMWB, the 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness, the community members, community advocates, and the organizations and service providers that have supported the CPH since the beginning.

“As a long-standing community member of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, I am proud of the progress that has been made to support individuals in need of housing supports in the community. As the Director of the department supporting those individuals, I am honored to be involved in the work, seeing firsthand the effect this plan has had on the community over the last ten years. We value and appreciate efforts the staff, the agencies, and our partners have committed toward building a community where everyone has a safe place to call home.” - Deanne Bergey, Director of Community and Protective Services

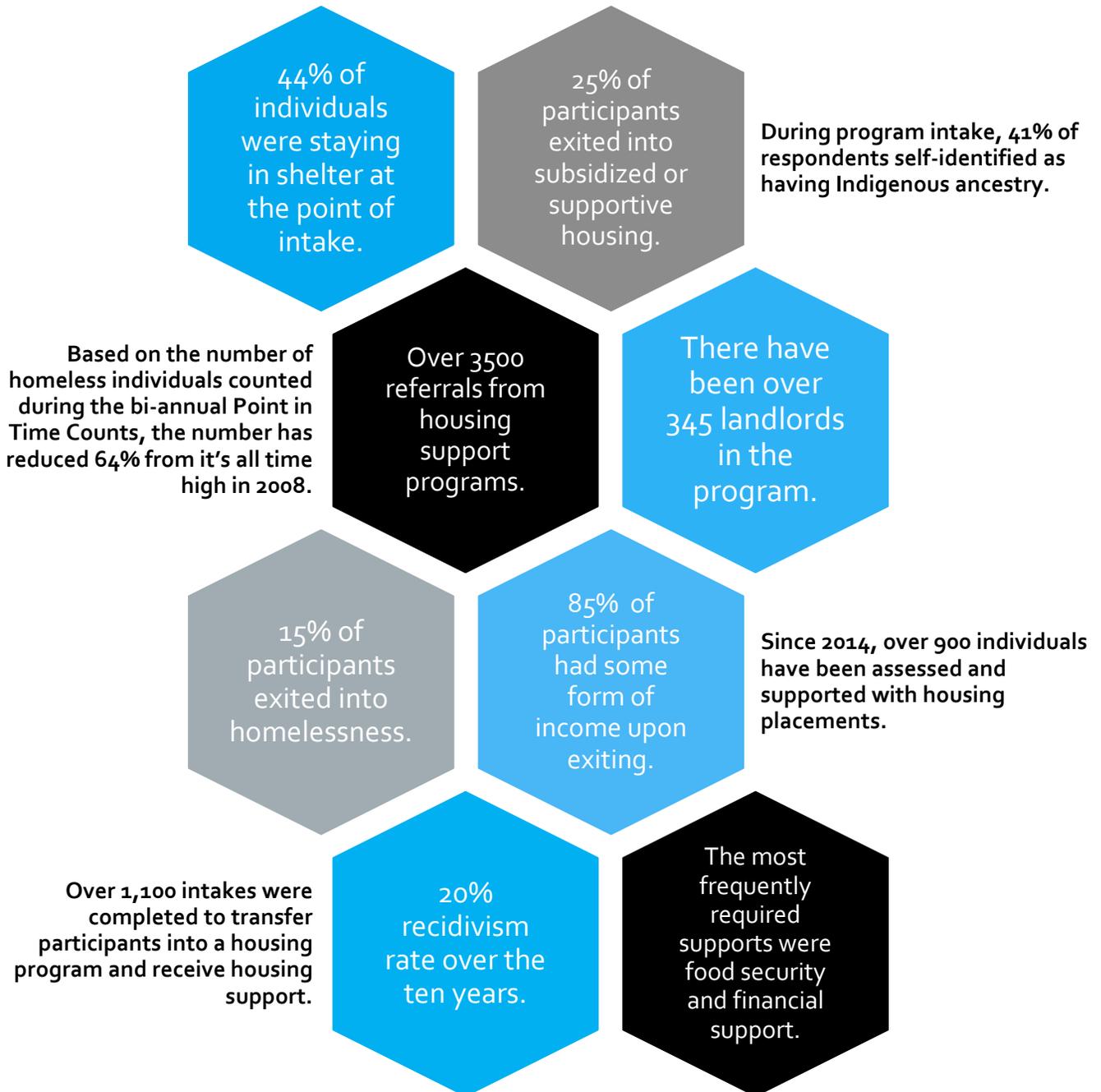
The land on which the CPH is undertaken and where this progress report was written is Treaty 8 Territory, the traditional lands of the Cree and Dene, the unceded territory of the Métis, and the ancient gathering grounds of many Indigenous peoples.



Ten Years in Review

April 2010 to March 2020

The following is a summary of data from the duration of the 10 Year Plan.

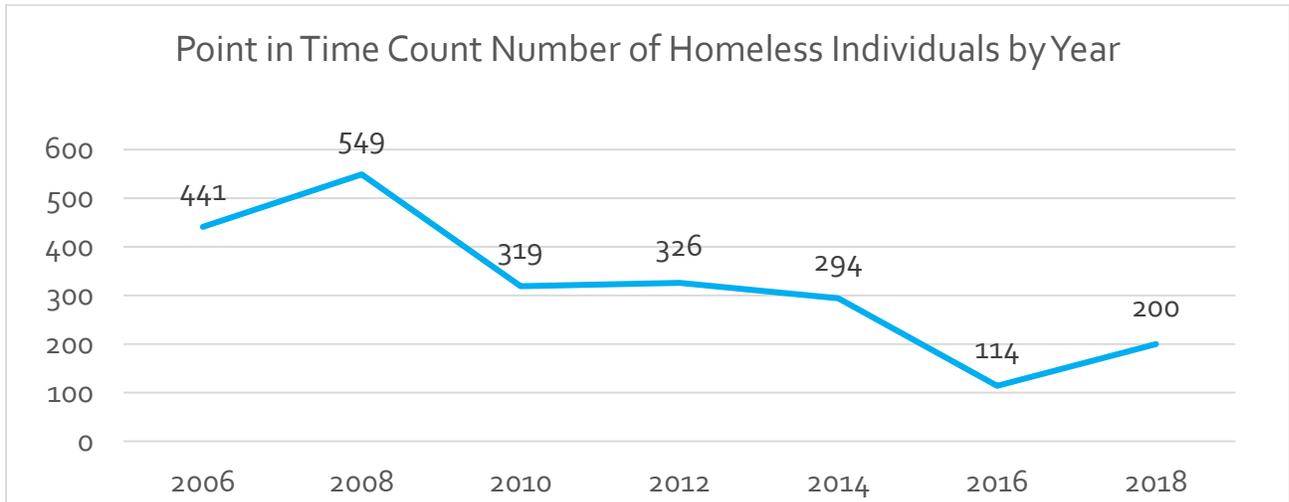




Plan Achievements

Reduction in Homelessness

There has been notable success in housing the homeless since implementing the Provincial Plan in 2009 and the Municipality’s Plan in 2010.



The population of homeless individuals, as counted during the bi-annual Point in Time Count, has seen a 64% reduction from an all-time high of 549 individuals in 2008. *The low numbers in 2016 and 2018 were contributed to by a change in methodology plus the 2016 Wildfire.

Social Gatherings and Support Events

Since the plan’s inception in 2010, the CPH team has held various events aimed at bringing together individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and agencies who support and serve them.

One of the most successful events has been the annual Community Plan to End Homelessness BBQ, which began in 2010/2011. The event brings together individuals and families experiencing homelessness to provide food, essentials, and further resources through connection to community agencies. This event also brings community awareness to poverty and homelessness. Over the last few years, more than 70 individuals and family members experiencing homelessness have joined support agency staff at this annual event.

Homeless Connect is an annual one-day event where agencies and service providers come together to offer free services to individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The event aims to provide services that help open doors out of homelessness, build lasting partnerships, and raise public awareness of homelessness in the community. The first annual Homeless



Connect in 2011 included 24 service providers and was attended by 61 individuals. The event continues to expand each year due to growing interest and awareness. There have now been 9 successful Homeless Connects, each providing wrap around support to some of the most vulnerable in the community. More than 45 service providers and 150-166 individuals attended the 2016-2019 events.

Housing and homelessness in the rural areas had been determined a priority within the region and to build relationships and determine the specific needs and barriers faced by each community. With the support of Federal Community Capacity Innovation Funding, in February and March 2020, the CPH Team planned and implemented Poverty Connect events in Janvier, Conklin, Fort McKay and Anzac. The four events hosted various community agencies providing community-specific program and resource information. Lunch was served to 131 individuals, and residents had opportunity to provide input about housing and homelessness in their community. Information collected during the rural Poverty Connects will be used to develop strategies to better support homelessness initiatives in rural communities.

Coordinated Access System

A **Coordinated Access** System (CAS) is designed to streamline the process for people experiencing homelessness to access the housing and support services needed to permanently end their homelessness.

The Municipality started the development of a **Coordinated Access** System (CAS) and a **By-Name List** (BNL) in 2017, working with partners across the Province and country to observe and follow best practices. A BNL is a list of individuals or families experiencing homelessness who are looking for housing placement in the community. The BNL includes a robust set of data points that support **coordinated access** and service prioritization at a household level and an understanding of homeless inflow and outflow at a system level. The information supports triage for services, system performance evaluation, and advocacy for policy changes and resources.

Since the beginning of the CAS, 15 Community Access Points have been established to act as points of intake and assessment for housing purposes. With the creation of the CAS, the community:

- Has the ability to track data consistently from Access Point to Access Point.
- Has implemented a common assessment tool for housing across the community.
- Has the ability to assess and triage faster than previously able to at the Access Point the individual is most comfortable in.



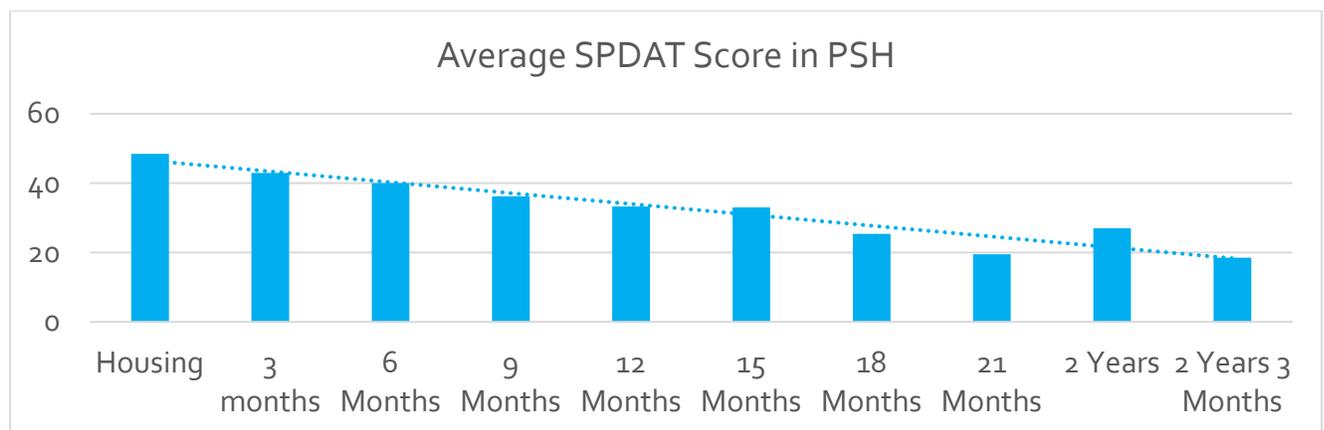
- Can ensure the most in need are prioritized by current housing needs and remove any biases for housing.
- Can prioritize per program in order to ensure everyone is receiving the right amount of supports in an appropriate program.
- Has created a widespread level of education, awareness, and partnerships in the homeless serving system.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is the most suitable option for chronically homeless individuals who typically suffer from serious mental health and substance abuse issues, as well as significant physical disabilities. Many of the chronically homeless who remain on the streets of Fort McMurray have been in the **Housing First** program at least once – and many on numerous occasions. The **recidivism** of the program by these high-needs clients highlighted the complex needs that often presented beyond the capabilities of the agencies and the resources that were available with Housing First in the community.

In 2017, a PSH program was created in partnership with the Centre of Hope and offered housing supports to three women and four men. During the 2018/19 year, the PSH project grew from a seven-bed facility to an 11-bed facility and was able to house four chronically homeless women and seven chronically homeless men in three duplexes.

PSH has seen significant positive outcomes in the community. Individuals living within the facility have accessed individualized support including various medical treatments and services, alcohol consumption monitoring, and social wellness development activities.



Note: the increases are often due to one individual's SPDAT score in that timeframe.



Discoveries and Directions

System Planning and Evidence-Based Decision-Making

In 2018, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo began working with Built for Zero – Canada (BFZ – C) which is a national campaign change movement focused on ending **chronic** homelessness in communities across the country.

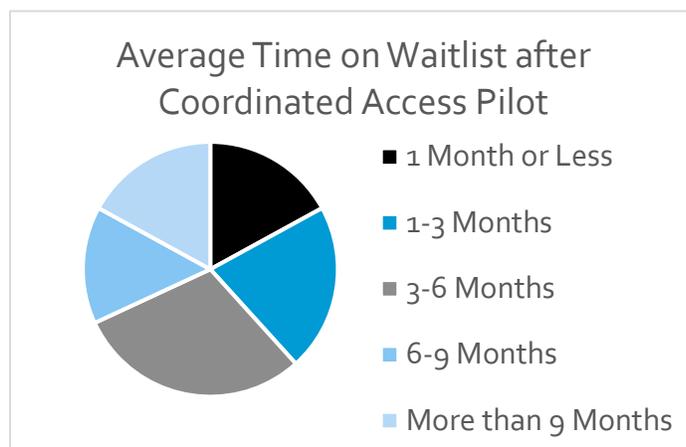
Shortly after beginning the national campaign work, various discoveries were identified through analyzing data collected for the campaign. Trends in the local homeless-serving system emerged and areas of improvement were identified to better support vulnerable members of the community. While the **Housing First** philosophy that was implemented in 2009 showed success for many **participants**, it also showed that that format did not work for everyone, with 20% of program **participants** repeating the program more than once. Using the best practices from across the nation and evidence-based decision-making method, the community worked together with the Community Based Organization (CBO) to shift from the managing homelessness format in existence to an ending homelessness plan using a **Coordinated Access System**.

Coordinated Access System

The development of the **Coordinated Access System** (CAS) in 2019 clearly identified who the programs were serving, as well as those needing additional support and potential community gaps. Evaluating the system provided the ability to see what the system looked like as a whole and provided opportunities for change, building and strengthening relationships between agencies and supporting groups on a deeper level gaining additional insight on how to help those who were most vulnerable.

Using the BNL as a starting point, we were able to effectively triage for services, evaluate the performance of the system, and advocate for policy change and community resources. Each of

these have contributed to the ultimate goal of ending **chronic** homelessness in the region.



Prior to the pilot of the CAS in 2019, the average time on the housing waitlist was 78 days from triage to transfer. Though the wait time for housing did lengthen in 2018, the difference in triaging changed,



adding wait time for those with lower barriers and needs, but speeding up the process for those with higher needs.

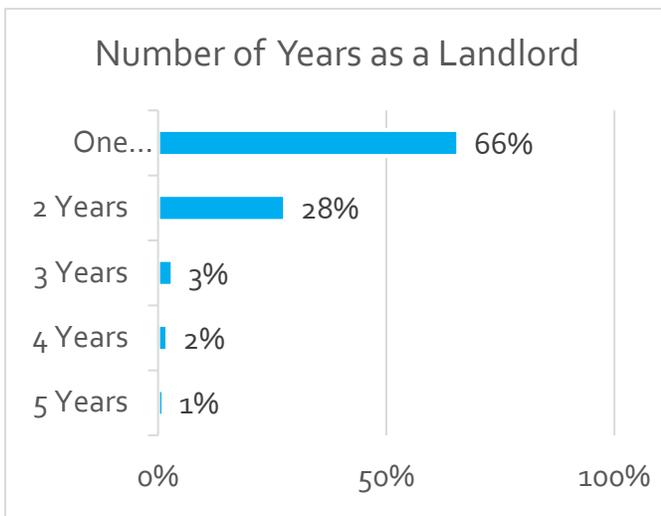
Person-Centered Approach

While approaches used over the last ten years have shifted periodically, the most success for the region has been realized through using the person-centered approach combined with the **Housing First** philosophy. A person-centered approach aims to understand the person first so they can build supports around their unique needs. Following a program with strict paths and steps can limit the outcomes reached by an individual whose needs do not match current community systems. Using this approach in all programs allows individuals to work with case workers on creating their own path, creating ownership, and increasing accountability for them to meet their personal goals. This approach includes using realistic budgeting, focusing on choice and current needs at the time of housing, housing in sustainable housing units, and organizing support specifically relating to their needs, etc.

Landlord Relationships

Landlords play a critical role in ending homelessness in the community and landlord recruitment and retention continue to be a priority.

It is important to acknowledge that landlords work from a profit-based business model. If a residency is not profitable, there is a risk the landlord will not participate in the program. While **Housing First** landlords receive rent directly from agencies, in some instances the cost of damages left behind exceed rental income. To address this challenge a Social Program Advisor was assigned to address **Housing First** landlord and tenant issues. The addition of this position



enabled CPH to create and strengthen relationships with landlords, mediate partnerships with tenants, and focus on recruiting and retaining landlords for the program.

Since the 2017/2018 fiscal year, the program has had a landlord **retention rate** of 51%. Over the past five years, 28% of landlords were retained 2+ years and 66% were landlords for one year. Over 10% of those who were landlords for one year were recruited in the last year of the 10 Year Plan.



Outcomes and Action Highlights

Goal 1: Education

Build support to end homelessness using Housing First approach

When the 10 year plan was established, the goal of education was set with the outcomes of:

- Increased community awareness
- Increased support for ending homelessness

In order to do that, the following were indicated as potential actions to be completed to achieve it:

- Promote best practices such as conferences, meetings, training, and learning sessions. As well as best practices related to policies and decision making.
- Engage and educate community and encourage homelessness service provider to get involved.
- Secure commitment and engagement from community stakeholders.
- Identify and engage local champions.

Coordinated Access System (CAS) awareness and training sessions began in February 2019 for community stakeholders and CPH funded service providers, including those that were potential Access Points.

Since piloting the CAS and incorporating community Access Points in September 2019, over 50 staff have been trained, within 15 community programs, spanning across six agencies.

The Municipality joined the Built for Zero – Canada Campaign, in 2018, then called the 20,000 Homes Campaign. In joining the Campaign, the Municipality gained opportunities for shared learning, observing, and implementing best practices used across the country.

Annual community events were held each year to increase public awareness of homelessness, provide support and awareness for individuals experiencing homelessness and build relationships between service providers. Homeless Connects, appreciation events, and community BBQs all started in 2011 and have continued annually since then.

RentSmart Basics classes began in 2018 and were offered to program participants in order to learn about the rights responsibilities of landlords and tenants. Since the training was first offered 37 program participants attended ten RentSmart Basic classes and there were 16 engagement sessions with tenants of Marshall House Marshall House tenants. Marshall House is a three-story building that offered an emergency shelter on the first floor and low rental units on the second and third floor. The programing and building was ran and is owed by Wood Buffalo Housing. In 2020, the shelter closed, and Centre of Hope moved their operations into the building.

Over the years, multiple community engagement sessions were held to both educate the public and learn from them. Engagement sessions were held each year during the funding application process to learn about the funded agencies. Community sessions were held to educate the public and the service providers about changes in the system (i.e., coordinated access shift), and focus groups were held with program participants.

HISC was established before the 10 year Plan began, and works together as community champions to advocate locally, Provincially, and Nationally. In 2018, HISC went through a strategic planning phase, where they identified public awareness, permanent supportive housing, data management, and institutional collaboration as their four main priorities moving forward.



Goal 2: Change Management

Successfully transition local system to Housing First

When the 10 year plan was established, the goal of change management was set with the outcomes of:

- Improved coordination of services and systems.
- Improved data management systems.
- Improved relationships with service providers and landlords.

In order to do that, the following were indicated as potential actions to be completed to achieve it:

- Plan for shifting from “managing” to “ending” homelessness.
- Task a lead group to mobilize a coordinated, collaborative service system response.
- Articulate and clarify the Housing First coordination processes.
- Identify and increase the community resources, support services and referral systems.
- Identify individuals within homeless-serving agencies to implement coordinated data collection.
- Identify and access resources for data collection.
- Develop and enhance relationships with mainstream service providers and private sector landlords.

Outcomes and Action Highlights

From the beginning of the plan, eight different agencies have been funded to run various forms of the Housing First program, with over 60% of program participants graduating successfully over the 10 year span.

An individual was hired in 2017 to work with the CPH data to highlight the progress and status of homelessness within the community. During that initial phase of data review, it was discovered that a shift needed to be made in the system in order push the move from “managing” to “ending” homelessness.

Following the shift in systems and programs in 2017 to a CAS model, a common triage tool was adopted (VI-SPDAT). This helped standardize housing prioritization and better evaluate individual’s needs for housing supports. With a structured assessment, the risk of prioritizing people inappropriately was lowered, ensuring better outcomes for participants and programs. Since moving to the common triage tool, 215 have been assessed using the VI-SPDAT.

Process guides for the CAS and standards of practices for housing programs have been developed and improved upon using best practices.

*A **Coordinated Access System Team (CAST)** is a group developed to build, mobilize, and manage with the **Coordinated Access System**. CAST was created in 2019 and is made up of front-line service providers working in the homelessness services sector field.*

Referrals were made most commonly to Alberta Works, the Wood Buffalo Food Bank, the Salvation Army, Wood Buffalo Housing and Development, and the Choices Association of Fort McMurray, followed by dentists, family doctors, and private landlords.

Data collection methods have improved since the initial collection in 2010, making it complicated to track consistent data dating back prior to 2017. The development of the BNL and the bi-annual PiT Count have created data stability in recent years.

The Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee (HISC), which is a community advisory board that was formed in 2000, works as advocates to support the CPH Team with reaching goals and creating a homeless serving system.

The 7 Cities on Housing and Homelessness is a committee made up of lead organizations from Alberta’s 7 Cities that was formed in 2001 and is responsible for implementing local plans to end homelessness.



Goal 3: Prevention

Develop a service system to prevent homelessness

When the 10-Year plan was established, the goal of prevention was set with the outcomes of:

- Homelessness is prevented for those individuals at risk.
- Service system is coordinated to prevent homelessness.
- Adequate supply of permanent supportive housing.
- Housing First initiatives and support services are sustainably funded.

In order to do that, the following were indicated as potential actions to be completed to achieve it:

- Advocate for the establishment of financial assistance programs for the homeless and low-income individuals and identify resources to intervene when housing security is threatened.
- Advocate for existing **emergency shelter** systems to support prevention and Housing First outcomes.
- Advocate for improved coordination of services so persons are not released into homelessness.
- Work to ensure at risk persons are promptly assessed and given housing assistance.
- Advocate and build new partnerships to provide permanent supportive housing programs.

Outcomes and Action Highlights

The Eviction Prevention Program was created in 2017 when the need was identified after the 2016 Horse River Wildfire and economic downturn. The program has provided financial assistance to 306 individuals since its inception, with over \$300,000 in rental arrears paid in order to prevent evictions. Alberta Works was the most completed referral from the Eviction Prevention Program.

***Emergency shelter** is the most common location for the point of intake, sitting at a 44% since 2010. With Marshall House closing in early 2020, increased pressure was placed on the Salvation Army Shelter to divert individuals into permanent housing. The CBO supported the individuals using Marshall through the transition with housing resources and shelter diversion.*

*With the creation of **Coordinated Access Points**, community programs and services such as the hospital discharge department or Bylaw Services, were able to be trained on how to triage and intake individuals experiencing homelessness. These shifts and partnerships lessen the number of individuals released from community systems into homelessness.*

The Outreach program began in 2015 and has since received over 350 referrals and housed over 157 individuals. The most common supports provided under the program include financial resources, help with securing housing, and dealing with landlord/tenant relations.

*The Permanent Supportive Housing Program (PSH) provides intensive **case management** to individuals most in need of permanent housing support due to high barriers to maintain housing. Advocacy for the program is ongoing, as the program continues to expand.*

*The process to receive housing supports has changed multiple times since the beginning of the 10 year Plan. Prior to the launch of the **Centralized Intake (CI)** Program in the 2014/2015 fiscal year, agencies would determine which participants they were going to support on their own, creating duplication of services and conflicts. When it was created, CI implemented program and assessment consistency as the one place individuals were assessed, but in turn, it slowed down the process from initial connection with an individual to the time they were housed. In 2017, CI worked with the CBO to create a BNL, that was used to prioritize and assessed individuals based on an extensive look into their housing needs and health barriers. When accessing through this method, individuals were prioritized for programs that best fit the services they required to secure sustainable housing. Those who did need the extra support would be housed first, leaving those with less barriers to be supported after or through another more appropriate program.*



Outcomes and Action Highlights

Goal 4: Re-Housing

Re-house those currently experiencing homelessness

When the 10-Year plan was established, the goal of re-housing was set with the outcomes of:

- Community has adequate physical capacity to identify and rapidly re-house homeless.
- Homeless and at-risk persons are meaningfully engaged.
- Reduction in the length of time persons are homeless.
- **Chronic** homelessness is reduced.

In order to do that, the following were indicated as potential actions to be completed to achieve it:

- Housing assessment, assistance and placement.
- **Case management** support and follow up provided.
- Provide resources to support re-housing.
- Host discussion forums with the homeless populations.
- Reduce time homeless individuals are waiting to access needed supports, housing or financial assistance.
- Connect homeless individuals to critical community supports to increase their chance of success.
- Increase access to employment/training opportunities that provide adequate wages and jobs.

*The timeline for individuals to be assessed for housing supports has varied over the years, but with the creation of **Coordinated Access Points**, initial assessment and triaging happens when the individual experiencing homelessness presents at the agency.*

*Funded agencies work diligently to re-house individuals who have been evicted or left their units using their **case management** training. At a minimum, case workers complete one in-home visit per month per participant to prevent the need to re-house. In doing regular monthly home visits, the case workers are better equipped to notice potential damages in the units.*

*An important element of **case management** is referring participants to community programs and services outside of the work they do day to day. Since 2010, securing food and financial assistance were the most required supports at the point of intake. Over 3,500 referrals were sent over the ten years, with 26% of them being sent to a food securing program. The high referrals after that were sent for employment and/or training, financial assistance, and mental health/addiction supports.*

Starting in 2018, over 80 program participants have been part of focus groups, in an effort to better understand participant needs, program success, and program gaps. From those focus groups, it was identified that at the beginning of the program, the highest needs at the time was long term housing and shelter diversion support.

Since 2010, at the 12-month mark, 14% of participants were meaningfully engaged through volunteer, cultural, or social activities during their time in the program and 73% of those who answered, stated they were satisfied or very satisfied program.

*During the 2016/2017 fiscal the percentage of **chronic** program participants was 56%, which was identified as being low when looking at community priorities. Using the BNL to prioritize individuals based on need, the **chronic** homelessness percentage by the 2019/2020 year was 75%. The overall **chronic** percentage from 2010 to 2020 was 54% **chronic**.*

Since the beginning of the plan, participants have been able to access employment and educational supports. This includes skill development, training, and job searching. When looking at employment outcomes during the 10 year period, 50% of program participants stated they became employable and over 200 were supported with employment services.



Goal 5: Provision of Supports

Provide supports for housing stability

When the 10-Year plan was established, the goal of provision of supports was set with the outcomes of:

- Formerly homeless individuals demonstrate improved self-sufficiency.
- People placed in permanent housing with supports remain stably housed.
- Rates of recidivism into homelessness are reduced.

In order to do that, the following were indicated as potential actions to be completed to achieve it:

- Continue to connect previously homeless people with resources to sustain housing stability.
- Identify and collect client relevant data related to measuring improvements in self-sufficiency.
- **Case management** support and follow up are provided.
- Link individuals experiencing homelessness to ongoing support to sustain their housing stability.
- Communicate and report on housing first successes.
- Continue to track that there is a reduction in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness.

Outcomes and Action Highlights

Funded housing programs work to encourage self-sufficiency and provide services and activities to the participants such as, engagement, food security, transportation, health care resources, life skills, and work with participants on legal issues.

At the point of intake from 2010 to 2020, 16% of program participants required food security support; 14% required transportation support; and 12% required security deposits. In the ten years of the plan by the 12 month mark in the program, the average number of days participants spent in correctional facility was three days, the number of court appearances from month nine to month 12 was 39, and the number of days spent in hospitals from month nine to 12 was 92.

From 2014 to 2019, Wood Buffalo Food Bank had 385 program enrollments and 210 program graduates in their Basic Shelf and Financial Literacy Program.

Though there are many reasons a housing placement may not be stable, one of the important pieces in the equation is the landlords. The CPH program has seen over 340 landlords since 2015, with over 30% renting as a landlord for more than one year and 6% for three years or more.

The rate of recidivism over the ten-year span is 20%. In looking at that, it can be identified that 80% either graduated or exited the program and did not return to the housing support programs in the community. The retention rate for the ten years is 82%, which has remained consistent over the last five years of programing and that 82% of program participants remained housed.

The average length of time someone is in the Housing First Program is 309 days, with the longest timeframe being just over five years. This can be attested to the complications in finding sustainable and affordable housing in the community when looking at graduation plans. 25% graduated into supported or subsidized housing, 30% graduated into private market, and 20% left the program and moved back in with family or friends and/or left the community.



Unforeseen Events

Economy and Oil Prices

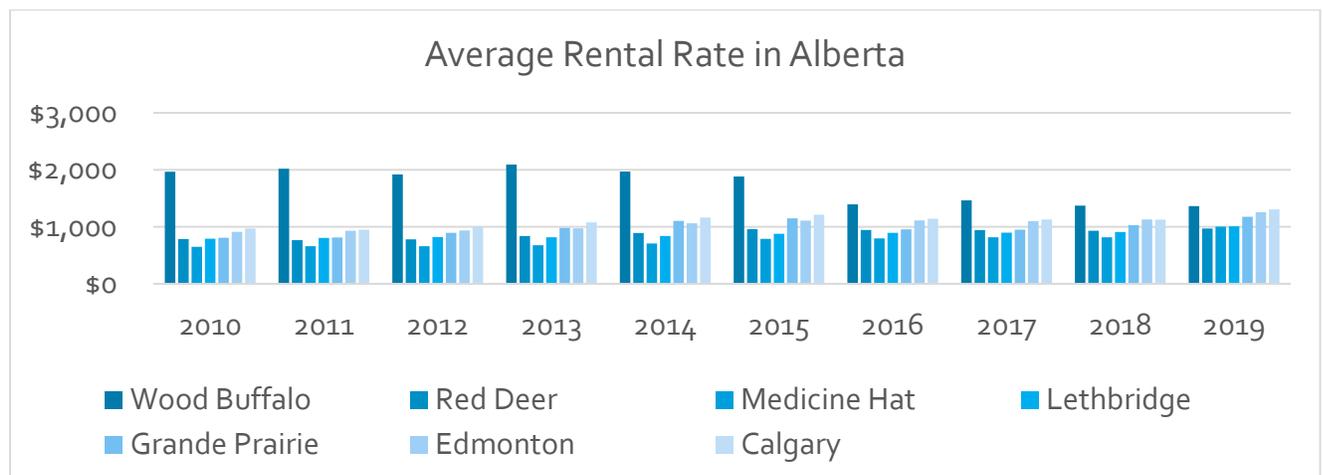
For many years, employment prospects have attracted people from across Alberta, Canada, and the world. However, an economic downturn in 2015 resulted in a drop in oil prices which continues to have a major impact on the region.

Demographic changes noted between the 2015 and 2018 Municipal Census reports were at least partially attributed to economic downturn. As stated in the Census 2018: You Made it Count executive summary report, "The 2015 - 2018 period was a noteworthy period for the Municipality, as it experienced a population decline (negative growth) for the first time in the last two decades. Further, the total number of dwellings also decreased over this period. These decreases can largely be attributed to the downturn in the region's economy and the 2016 Horse River Wildfire."¹

In a region where unemployment is particularly challenging and competition for work is more intense, more people are being forced to seek out social assistance - including use of the one overnight adult shelter in the region, the daytime drop-in center and **Housing First** programs.

Housing and Market Rent

Wood Buffalo's rental rates remain significantly higher than other communities on average throughout the past ten years. Two of the most difficult challenges still facing the **Housing First** initiative in the region are a lack of social supplements and continuing high rents. Despite improvements in the provincial economy the Municipality continues to have higher rents than other cities in Alberta.



¹ Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Census 2018 Executive Summary Report.



As a provincially designated management body, Wood Buffalo Housing (WBH) manages all social housing in the Municipality on behalf of the Government of Alberta. WBH maintains a social housing waitlist to determine eligibility when social housing designations become available. Social housing is often required in order to **graduate participants** from the **Housing First** program as they are unable to afford market rent and/or WBH affordable housing. However, obtaining social housing for these **participants** is a barrier.

The lack of social and affordable housing continues to be a challenge. There have been numerous attempts to engage landlords and developers and inform them about the benefits of providing accommodation to **Housing First**, but recruitment and retention remain a challenge. Without a social housing designate, many program **participants** continue to remain in **Housing First** to avoid graduating them into an unsustainable housing situation that will end in their returning to homelessness. Over 100 individuals have successfully graduated into subsidized housing, affordable housing, or supported housing. However, on average 20% of program **participants** remain on caseload at any given time, awaiting a social housing designation.

Rural Funding and Programming

There are several rural hamlets in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, each facing unique challenges with homelessness. In March of 2018, the RMWB Mayor and Council voted to conduct the first ever rural homelessness count with the intent of better understanding the housing needs of the region's rural hamlets. The results were presented at Council in early 2020, however there were challenges and limitations to the overall findings. Council also passed a resolution that a Rural Homelessness Strategy to be developed, should the results show there is a need to support more programs in the rural areas. The CPH team continues to work to build relationships and identify the barriers and needs of each community.

The CBO remains limited in the funding that can be utilized in the rural areas. In recent years, the Federal funds were predominately allocated to operating **Centralized Intake** (a Federal mandate) and the remaining was not sufficient to support housing programs in rural areas. The funding received from the Provincial government is designated to the urban service area. If funding were available, there is little to no housing units available in rural areas to secure as part of HF or RRH, as referenced in the Wood Buffalo Housing Needs Assessments².

To begin understanding the need for housing supports in the rural communities, the CBO worked collaboratively to host Poverty Connect events beginning in early 2020. These events

² Wood Buffalo Housing Needs Assessment: Wood Buffalo Regional Report, May 2019

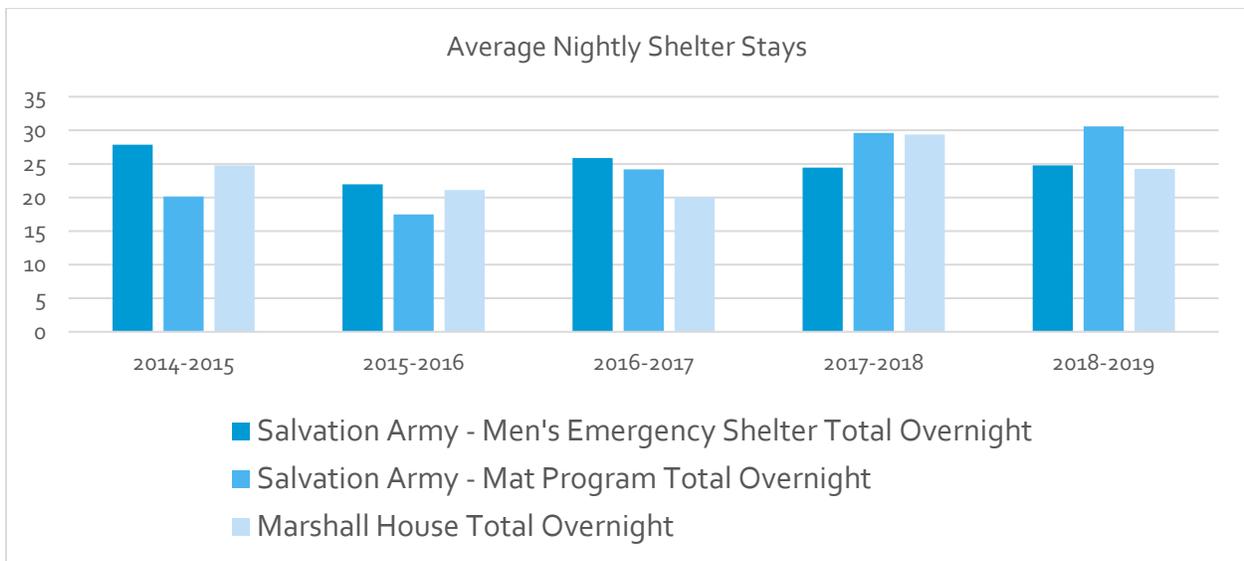


were hosted in multiple communities, however COVID-19 restrictions prevented Poverty Connects from being hosted in all communities.

Program and Service Changes

Over the years, there have been several changes to various programs, agencies, staff, and services within the region, making it difficult to ensure consistency and often creating gaps. CPH funded program consistency is an ongoing challenge with a high staff turnover rate within the program of 90% since the 2015-2016 year. Ongoing staff turnover requires regular training and the creation of documents to ensure program consistency and fidelity.

A recent example of a major service change was the closure of the Marshall House **emergency shelter** on January 31st, 2020. It quickly became high priority and required collaboration and coordination between individuals and agencies to secure alternate housing to ensure that the individuals who were living on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the building would not enter into homelessness. There was also an impromptu Diversion drive to ensure the regular Marshall House overnight sleepers had a plan for when the doors closed. **Emergency Shelter** usage has remained consistent, but the shelter closure was a significant change for a number of Marshall House users who had to make the transition when the program ended. Below is the shelter stay data from 2014 to 2019.



Information from Open Data – Funded Emergency Shelters Daily Occupancy AB



Horse River Wildfire

The 2016 Horse River Wildfire had devastating impacts on the Municipality and the 88,000 residents who evacuated the community. The fire caused significant damage to residential areas in many communities, though damage to critical infrastructure was limited. The fire impacted nearly 6,000 square kilometers of land in northeastern Alberta.

As the re-entry phase began on June 1, 2016, it quickly became evident that the impacts from the fire would continue to be felt for years to follow. This has continued to impact community needs, gaps and obstacles throughout the community, organizations, businesses, and residents.

During the evacuation and re-entry of program **participants**, agencies and staff worked diligently to track individuals through various methods, and then supported them upon returning to the community. In the first three months post-wildfire, 20% of **participants** left the program without completing it or being referred to another program and the post wildfire staffing turnover within the funded agencies within the months following was 66%.

COVID-19 Global Pandemic

In March 2020, the Province of Alberta, along with the rest of Canada began implementing restrictive social distancing measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many businesses in the region were forced to close either temporarily or permanently, contributing to increased unemployment rates.

The CBO worked diligently during the first few months of the outbreak to house individuals with health concerns who may develop further complications if they were to contract the virus. i.e., COPD or lung conditions, seniors, etc. For those who were unable to be housed right away and were experiencing COVID-19-like symptoms, an isolation centre, in partnership with the Salvation Army shelter and various community partners, was available starting in March 2020.

Though after the 10 Year Plan was over, by April 2020, many funded housing programs and other community supports were running in different capacities, but there were still multiple gaps that COVID-19 created in the community. Fortunately, the CBO funded agencies were still able to work with program **participants** using extra caution and appropriate personal protective equipment, and funding could be allocated to purchase client needs to support virtual communication.



Next Steps and Conclusion

Prevention, Diversion and Support Programs

Using existing funded programs, creating new programs, and relying on long standing community programs, services and partnerships there will be a focus moving forward to support prevention of individuals becoming homeless and assist to divert those already experiencing homelessness to housing situations.

This method of support has been identified to fill the gaps and support individuals that may fall through the cracks in resourcing and sustaining housing. Programs such as shelter diversion and an increase in both Outreach and **Rapid Re-Housing** were initiated within the first year after the 10 Year Plan came to an end. The CBO will continue to advocate for funding for the continuation and expansion of programs to support individuals through the prevention and diversion phases of their homelessness chronicity.

Program Consistency

A main priority for the future is to ensure agencies maintain a housing focused approach during the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure alternate ways of renting units are explored and that agencies can quickly house individuals. With the unknown of the pandemic looming over the community, the programs and potential new tactics to deal with arising situations may have to be adapted.

From the growth in partnerships across the region, province, and country, various best practices are being researched and implemented. The CBO is looking at contract management and fidelity to ensure **participants** are receiving the necessary wrap around services to become stably housed and maintain long term housing. Providing new trainings and capacity building opportunities to funded agencies based on community trends, as well as training previously offered as refresher training will be a focus in the coming years.

Graduation Support

Advocating for social housing numbers and financial housing supports, being creative and thinking outside of the box, and supporting agencies with alternatives to graduating **participants** are all important steps in ending **chronic** homelessness in the community. The current build of program **participants** who are unable to graduate from the program is partly attributed to being unable to house in sustainable units.

Working together with community programs and advocating for different forms of funding and housing will continue to be a focus moving into the future.



Collaboration and Partnerships

There has been a heavy focus on developing and continuing relationships with community partners, service providers, systems organizations and landlords, as they continue to play a major role in ending homelessness.

Increased and ongoing collaboration between service providers and systems organizations (i.e., health system, justice system, etc.) will fill the gaps currently present within the homeless serving system. Increasing Access Points will improve not only the time it takes it be triaged for housing, but it will increase consistency on data and information sharing and community development.

Building on and creating new relationships with community advocates, service provider committees and growing HISC's membership will enhance the awareness, education, and reach to help those experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness Serving System

The system planning approach helps identify gaps in services as well as solutions to correct those gaps. With the growth of **Coordinated Access** on the horizon, it is expected that the community awareness of the homeless status, partnerships, and services will grow with it. The focus on the expansion of **Coordinated Access** is also a priority, as the waitlist only continues to grow with very little room to graduate **participants** already in **Housing First** programs.

Increased partnerships with other community agencies will help refer people off the By-Name-List to other appropriate supports. The CBO will continue to work with other communities, **Centralized Intake**, and rural and Indigenous communities in Wood Buffalo on developing an Indigenous Framework for **Coordinated Access**.

Conclusion

Even though the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness concluded on March 31, 2020, the Homelessness System, the Municipality, and funded agencies continue to work with the same commitment, passion and drive to end **chronic** homelessness in the region. Continuation of work to support individuals who need it the most will be the priority and focus. As advocates, the CBO will remain active in the region, within the province, and across the country for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and its people.



Funded Programs 2010 to 2020

2010 to 2011

- Rent Shortfall Fund: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association
- Housing First: The Fort McMurray HIV/AIDS Society

2011 to 2012

- Extended Hours Program: Centre of Hope
- Employment: Choices Association of Wood Buffalo
- Cecile's Place: Centre of Hope
- Basic Shelf: Wood Buffalo Food Bank
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Housing First: McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Chronic Home: McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association
- Young Adult Home: McMan Youth Family and Community Services Association

2012 to 2013

- Extended Hours: Centre of Hope
- Employment: Choices Association of Wood Buffalo
- Cecile's Place: Centre of Hope
- Basic Shelf: Wood Buffalo Food Bank
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Housing First: McMan Youth, Family & Community Services

2013 to 2014

- Extended Hours: Centre of Hope
- Employment: Choices Association of Wood Buffalo
- Cecile's Place: Centre of Hope
- Basic Shelf: Wood Buffalo Food Bank
- Outreach Youth Prevent: Woods Homes
- Aboriginal/Social Support Worker: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Housing First: McMan Youth, Family & Community Services

2014 to 2015

- Centralized Intake: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Employment: Choices Association of Wood Buffalo
- Basic Shelf and Financial Literacy: Wood Buffalo Food Bank
- Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative: Centre of Hope
- Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative: YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta



- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Housing First: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing First: McMan Youth, Family & Community Services
- Youth Shelter: Woods Homes

2015 to 2016

- Centralized Intake: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Outreach: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing Locator: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Employment: Choices Association of Wood Buffalo
- Basic Shelf and Financial Literacy: Wood Buffalo Food Bank
- Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative: Centre of Hope
- Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Graduate Rental Assistance Initiative: YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Rapid Re-Housing: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Housing First: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing First: Rehoboth Alliance
- Housing First: Woods Homes
- Youth Shelter: Woods Homes

2016 to 2017

- Centralized Intake: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Outreach: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Employment: Choices Association of Wood Buffalo
- Basic Shelf and Financial Literacy: Wood Buffalo Food Bank
- Health and Justice Liaison: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Rapid Re-Housing: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Housing First: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing First: Rehoboth Alliance
- Youth Shelter: Woods Homes

2017 to 2018

- Centralized Intake: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Outreach: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Eviction Prevention Program: Centre of Hope
- Employment: Choices Association of Wood Buffalo
- Basic Shelf and Financial Literacy: Wood Buffalo Food Bank
- Weekend Operation: Centre of Hope
- Health and Justice Liaison: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Rapid Re-Housing: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Rapid Re-Housing: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Housing First: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society



- Youth Shelter: Woods Homes
- Permanent Supportive Housing: Centre of Hope

2018 to 2019

- Centralized Intake: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Outreach: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Eviction Prevention Program: Centre of Hope
- ID Program: Choices Association of Wood Buffalo
- Basic Shelf and Financial Literacy: Wood Buffalo Food Bank
- Rapid Re-Housing: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Youth Shelter: Woods Homes
- Permanent Supportive Housing: Centre of Hope

2019 to 2020

- Centralized Intake: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Outreach: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Eviction Prevention Program: Centre of Hope
- Rapid Re-Housing: Wood Buffalo Wellness Society
- Housing First: Centre of Hope
- Housing First: The YMCA of Northern Alberta
- Housing First: The Salvation Army of Canada
- Youth Shelter: Woods Homes
- Permanent Supportive Housing: Centre of Hope



Glossary

Acuity: Measure of the intensity of support a participant requires.

By-Name List (BNL): Real time list of individuals or families experiencing homelessness who are looking for housing placement in the community. The BNL includes a robust set of data points that support coordinated access and service prioritization at a household level and an understanding of homeless inflow and outflow at a system level.

Case Management: Participant-driven approach that provides people experiencing homelessness with supports that help them move forward. 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 needs.

Centralized Intake (CI): Single point of access for participants to enter programs; Wood Buffalo Wellness Society.

Chronic: Continuously homeless for a year or longer or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years; sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., on the street) and/or in an **emergency shelter**.

Coordinated Access (CAS): A community-wide system that streamlines the process for people experiencing homelessness to access housing and supports. There is an established, standardized intake procedure with clearly identified access points and a centralized database that collects and displays real-time data on participants and available housing and supports, and common assessment and prioritization protocols.

Emergency shelter: A facility intended to provide overnight accommodation for homeless individuals; may include access to food and clothing.

Episodic: Homeless for less than a year; has had fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Graduate: Is referring to an individual or participant of the Housing First or Rapid Re-Housing who has achieved housing stability and is able to live self-sufficient without evictions or loss of housing.



Housing First (HF): Participant-centered 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 safe and stable housing and then other issues can be addressed.

Participant: Individual (or family) who requests support in finding and/or maintaining housing.

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH): Supports people who are currently homeless and have a low- to mid-acuity score based on SPADT; they are experiencing homelessness but are at lower risk than HF participants and do not require as much support.

Recidivism: When individuals experiencing homelessness enter HF and RRH programs but leave for various reasons and later return to the program.

Retention Rate: The number of participants who continue steadily in a program, maintaining stable housing.

Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT): Assessment tool used to guide frontline workers and team leads who are using an ICM approach to HF/RRH; helps prioritize which clients should receive assistance first.

Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT): A pre-assessment used to determine risk and prioritization.

Warm Transfer: Meeting between two organizations and the participant during which a file transfer is conducted and the case is discussed.