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PROVINCE EXPANDS HOMELESS SHELTERS, HOUSING SUPPORTS

October 12th, 2007

VANCOUVER – On the first anniversary of B.C.’s Housing Matters strategy, Premier Gordon Campbell and Housing Minister Rich Coleman today announced new and expanded measures to help break the cycle of homelessness with an added \$41 million.

“Our goal is to break the cycle of homelessness, by expanding outreach and intervention on the street,” said Campbell. “We want to build on our successes to address homelessness in the last year and to help set the stage for faster delivery of additional, affordable and supportive housing.”

As part of the provincial housing strategy, Housing Matters BC, and building on the work of the Premier’s Task Force on Homelessness, Mental Illness and Addictions, the four new and expanded measures are:

- Increase funding for emergency shelters so they can be open 24 hours a day/seven days a week to provide better services and assistance for those who are homeless;
- Expanding homeless outreach services to 27 new and existing communities to connect homeless people to housing and support services, including a new Aboriginal component;
- Provide 750 rent supplement units to assist the homeless in the private market; and,
- The Province will fund pre-development costs to ensure city-owned sites will be ready for the start of construction of new supportive housing within a year. Pre-development costs include costs for third-party work, such as architectural, geotechnical and environmental plans and studies.

“We’re going to increase the supply of affordable, supportive housing so that people have a more stable base to improve their lives,” said Coleman. “To do that, we need our municipal partners to help identify sites and fast-track approvals so we can start construction within a year.”

Statistics show the homeless outreach work in communities across the province has resulted in more than 1,600 people on the streets finding a place to live and connecting to income and support services since the outreach work started in 2006.

“Homeless outreach services demonstrate that making direct contact with people on the street to offer assistance is making a real difference,” said Vancouver Police Chief Constable Jim Chu. “Our members strongly support the expansion of this work in addressing this important social issue.”

In addition to the new and expanded measures, 39 emergency shelters across the province will receive \$2.4 million in one-time capital funding and annual operating funding increases.

“The increased funding for emergency shelters is very welcome news,” said Karen O’Shannacery, executive director of the Lookout Emergency Aid Society, which operates two emergency shelters in Vancouver. “In our experience at the Yukon Shelter, being open 24/7 provides people with much better opportunities to find a more stable housing situation, so this expansion of the shelter program will help many people improve their lives.”

Today’s announcement is a further achievement of the provincial housing strategy, Housing Matters BC, which was released one year ago this month. Through Housing Matters BC, the Province is investing \$328 million in shelters and affordable housing this year, nearly three times as much as in 2001. Today’s \$41-million announcement is in addition to this year’s \$328-million budget.

-30-

BACKGROUNDER

Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness

The Province will provide \$41 million in annual funding to fully implement new and expanded measures to help break the cycle of homelessness. They include:

24/7 Emergency Shelters – \$25 million

- At least 500 shelter beds now closed during the day will switch to 24/7 in the next few weeks.
- These beds will be at shelters in the major urban areas of the province (e.g. Metro Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna, Prince George).
- The majority of the other shelters that will be switching to 24/7 will do so by April 1.
- Most emergency shelters are closed during the day. This means homeless people are sent back onto the street each morning, and shelter staff is unable to provide support to link people to existing community services, including more permanent types of stable housing.
- Some shelters will not have the physical space or service capacity to be open 24/7, but will continue operating during their existing hours, with provincial funding.

Expanding Homeless Outreach – \$3.9 million

- More than 1,600 people on the street in about 30 communities across the province have found stable housing as a result of homeless outreach services.
- Based on this success, new outreach services will be established in seven communities: Campbell River, Comox, Courtenay, Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Nelson and Vernon.
- Existing outreach services will be expanded in 20 communities: Abbotsford, Burnaby, Chilliwack, Cowichan Valley, Duncan, Hope, Kamloops, Kelowna, Langley, Maple Ridge, Nanaimo, Port Coquitlam, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Surrey, Sea-to-Sky Corridor, Tofino, West Island area, Vancouver and Victoria.

Aboriginal Outreach – \$500,000

- Surveys and homeless counts have found that Aboriginal people represent about one-third or more of the homeless population.
- Homeless outreach workers have identified the need for an Aboriginal component to better connect with homeless Aboriginal people and link them to appropriate supports and services.
- The Province will work with the homeless outreach teams to identify communities where this will be implemented.

Homeless Rent Supplements – \$1.1 million

- A pilot program with the homeless outreach teams has provided rent supplements in the private market for 315 units. This has proven effective in providing more options for affordable, stable housing.
- The pilot program will be made permanent, with an additional 750 rent supplements made available.

Fast-track Approvals - \$10 million

- The Province has had discussions with the City of Vancouver on the development of supportive housing on city-owned sites.
- Work will continue on expediting municipal approvals, and the Province will fund pre-development costs for the sites to ensure they will be ready for construction within a year.
- The Province has also held preliminary discussions with Surrey, Victoria and Kelowna, to identify sites where the same can occur.
- In addition, the Province would welcome similar discussions with any other municipalities.

Emergency Shelter Program Capital and Operating Funding

The above expanded services are in addition to new, one-time capital funding and additional, ongoing operating funding for Emergency Shelter Program providers, totalling \$2.4 million, which will be distributed to 39 shelters in 19 communities. A breakdown of this funding is available at www.bchousing.org/programs/ESP online.

Recent Achievements

Over the past year, a number of achievements were made toward breaking the cycle of homelessness:

- Over 1,600 homeless people were assisted off the street and into stable housing in 30 communities, through homeless outreach services, including 315 homeless individuals assisted through a rent supplement pilot program in the private rental market.
- Through the Emergency Shelter Program, about 300 seasonal, cold/wet weather beds were converted to year-round beds, raising the number of year-round beds to about 1,300 across the province.
- Through the Provincial Homelessness Initiative, more than 2,300 housing units with supports for the homeless have been committed to help people move beyond temporary emergency shelter so they can re-establish their independence.
- Eleven Single Room Occupancy hotels were purchased in Vancouver and Victoria to help preserve this important source of affordable housing.
- People found new homes in 225 housing units at seven new supportive housing developments that completed construction this year.
- 292 new housing units were committed to under the Aboriginal Housing Initiative.

-30-

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