

Homelessness Strategy for Grande Prairie 2021-2023

Acknowledgements

Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the homeland of the many diverse First Nations and Métis people whose ancestors have walked this land since time immemorial. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Treaty 8.

Treaty 8 was signed on June 21, 1899, by the Crown and First Nations of Lesser Slave Lake area. The Treaty covers land throughout the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Northern Alberta and Northwest Saskatchewan and is the largest Treaty area in Canada.

Funders

We would like to thank Grande Prairie's key funders for work to address homelessness, the Province of Alberta and the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy.





Strategy Development



This strategy was developed by the City of Grande Prairie with participation from:

Leadership groups:

Community Advisory Board on Housing and Homelessness
Cultural Supports Committee
Voice for the Voiceless Society, and others with lived experience of homelessness

Organizational contributors:

Alberta Health Services Centerpoint Facilitation CMHA

Grande Prairie Friendship Centre

Northreach Society
Oasis Ministries

Odyssey House

Rising Above Ministries

Rotary House & the Saint Lawrence Centre

Salvation Army Suprise House

Community Safety contributors:

City Enforcement Services
Community Corrections Probation and Parole Officers
— Community Corrections Programs
Crown Prosecutor — Crown Prosecutor's Office
John Howard Society
Correctional Health Services — Peace River Correctional Centre
Police & Crisis Team (PACT)
RCMP

CIVIF

Mobile Outreach Program

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Introduction

Grande Prairie's 2021-23 Homelessness Strategy offers a set of Core Beliefs, Focus Areas and measurements for our community. The Strategy considers lessons learned, feedback from the community and ideas for the future. It also builds on our community's proven ability to adapt and coordinate for the benefit of residents.

Looking back more than a decade at homelessness in Grande Prairie you would have seen many programs helping people to meet basic needs like food, emergency shelter and clothing. However, you would not have seen the options available today that help people leave their experience of homelessness.

Around 2009, a shift occurred with the advent of *A Plan* for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in Ten Years. The Plan ensured core Provincial funding for Grande Prairie and six other large Alberta cities to offer Housing First programs. The Plan put Alberta at the forefront of Canadian work to address homelessness and followed on the heels of new research showing recovery-oriented Housing First programs to be more effective than "treatment as usual" programs. With this new direction our approach to homelessness changed to help people find housing first, with no preconditions. From a place of relative stability, work on root causes would be more effective.

Between 2009 and 2020, over 1000 people experiencing homelessness moved into housing through local Housing First programs. Despite evidence that Housing First works, it must be a part of a larger network of care in order to realize long-term positive outcomes. This may include a variety of appropriate housing options along with responsive health and justice services, improved access to other service systems, and other prevention options. Emergency services will continue to be required to fulfill basic needs as homelessness still exist.

More recently, we have seen the release of the *Government* of *Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy* and *A Place to Call Home: Canada's National Housing Strategy*, signalling commitment to a national approach to homelessness and housing. As a society we have also weathered the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting many inequalities and opportunities for change including the need to respond to homelessness more quickly and effectively.

Going forward, we are committed to healthy relationships within our community and with Provincial and Federal governments that allow for innovation. Although transition may not be easy, we are committed to working together to reduce homelessness.

Chris Manuel, Protective and Social Services Director

Learning from our last ten years

Since 2009, Grande Prairie has offered a set of recovery-oriented Housing First programs that work alongside prevention and emergency services to help people leave their experience of homelessness. Some key lessons learned so far that have informed our 2021-23 strategy include:



Although many people still experience homelessness in Grande Prairie, a suite of recovery and housing-oriented interventions have made a difference. Over 1000 people have moved into housing with support from Housing First. Many others have been supported through other housing programs offered by Serenity Place, Rising Above, Elder's Caring Shelter, Sunrise House and Rotary House.



People experiencing homelessness in Grande Prairie are reporting increasing rates of co-occurring substance use, health and mental health issues affecting daily life. Shelters and other emergency services are responding to these increased complexities. This trend also affects the general community, as highlighted by Grande Prairie's high opiate/opioid overdose fatality rate since 2016.



Our limited supply of affordable, supportive and transitional housing, and reliance on the regular rental market, has hampered our progress. The cost of market rental housing outmatches the income of many people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The increasing presence of co-occurring issues further points toward need for supportive and transitional housing paired with quality services.

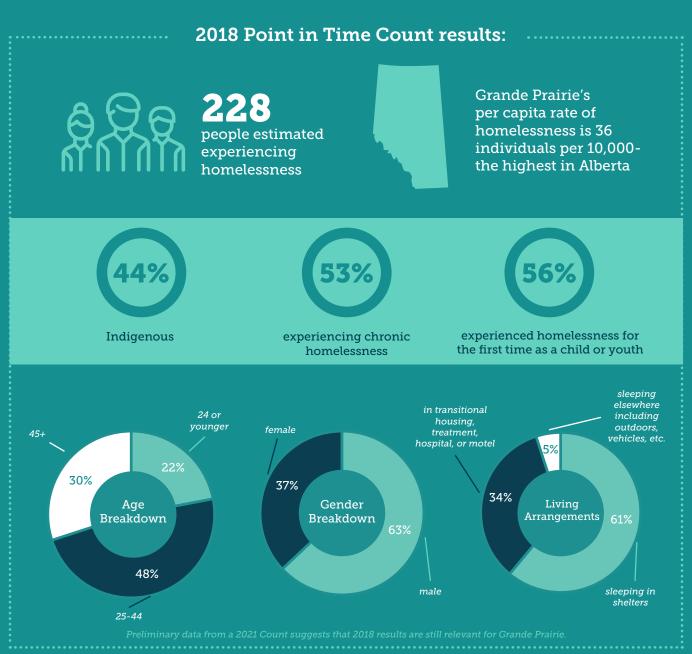


Indigenous homelessness requires more attention and progress on reconciliation is essential. At least 40% of housing participants have identified as Indigenous over time, compared to only 10% of the general population. Many Indigenous participants report life experiences that reflect issues highlighted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.



Prevention and intervention are important across the lifecycle to address new inflow to homelessness and chronic homelessness. Over 600 children and youth participated in Housing First over ten years and many more have been supported through Odyssey House and Sunrise House. In addition, 56% of 2018 Point in Time Count respondents reported experiencing homelessness for the first time as a child or youth. At the same time, many people experiencing chronic homelessness in Grande Prairie today are adults with chronic and disabling conditions.

Current State: Homelessness in Grande Prairie





Estimated current need for 188 supportive housing units. In ten years, this need could grow to 209 units.

Current State: Homelessness in Grande Prairie

Permanent Emergency Shelter Programs:

Sunrise House

100+ youth intakes in 2020, with 60% reporting a mental health concern, 23% high risk for exploitation, 50% with substance use, 29% experiencing family violence and 42% experiencing neglect or abandonment.

Odyssey House

114 women and 110 children stayed in 2020-21 for an average of 15 days. 102 highly vulnerable single women were turned away due to needs that could not be met at Odyssey House.

Rotary House

460 unique individuals stayed in emergency beds and 147 were provided with onsite housing services during 2020.

COVID-19 effect on available permanent shelter space

Loss of 38 bed spaces. The Saint Lawrence Centre and Oasis offer 34 temporary beds to offset loss and meet demand.



A combination of factors can lead to and reinforce a person's experience of homelessness:

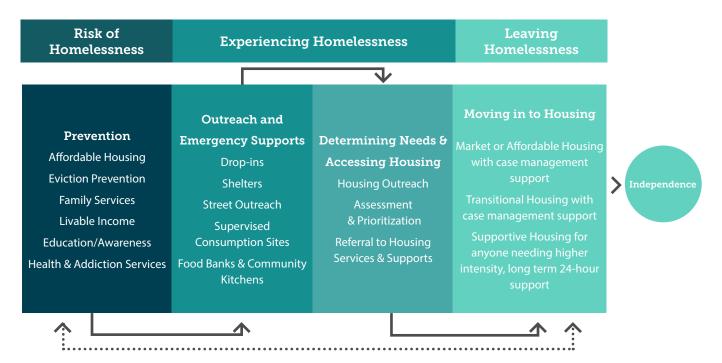
Economic and societal factors that affect people's opportunities, such as lack of adequate income, discrimination, access to affordable housing, or access to health services.

System failures that force vulnerable people to turn to the emergency or homeless sector when other services could have prevented this need. For example, inadequate discharge planning or support for newcomers.

Personal circumstances like trauma, family breakup or violence, poor mental health, brain injury or FASD, or extreme poverty, all of which can result from and contribute to homelessness. (adapted from the Homeless Hub, 2021)

Housing and Homeless Sector Service Continuums

Grande Prairie's homeless-serving sector provides care options that meet people where they are at. Our goal is to work together to move people out of homelessness quickly, and into housing with appropriate supports.



A community with a healthy housing mix has options that can meet the needs of all of its residents. A major part of this strategy is ensuring the right housing options are in place for people who have experienced chronic homelessness.



Future State: 2021-2023 Focus Areas

Core Beliefs

As a community, we believe the following will be essential to success in our next phase of addressing homelessness together:



Common Agenda and Action

We will continue to invest effort and funding into coordination and collaboration between governments, organizations and sectors.



Efficiency and Effectiveness

Responsible and innovative use of Federal, Provincial, Municipal and community funding is essential for future success.



Treating People as Individuals

Person-centred, recovery-oriented practices are needed to help people move forward in their lives.



Establishing the Right Housing Options

We will do what it takes to create the right mix of housing options in our community, since this will be essential to addressing homelessness.



Indigenous Representation and Reconciliation

We cannot make progress on homelessness without meaningful progress on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.



Voices of Lived and Living Experience

We need and value the input of people with lived and living experience of homelessness.

Person-centred thinking

Person-centred thinking puts a person at the centre of the care approach and focuses on their strengths.

We need to understand and respect every person we connect with in order to help them use their strengths to succeed.

This means listening to people carefully and hearing a complete story. It also means expecting our programs to be flexible and responsive to people, rather than expecting people to respond to what our programs need.

System Planning & Collaboration

Why is this a focus area?

- We want a social safety net that is understandable and helpful to people who need it.
- Through improved funding, coordination and measurement we can increase impact and efficiency through changes that make sense in Grande Prairie.

Our Workplan:

Accomplished to Date

Starting in 2019, we began development of a new community-based process called Coordinated Access that could transform our social safety net.

During 2020 our community activated the Coordinated Access model to create positive changes in the Housing First access process:

- Reduced program costs by over \$300,000 annually
- Reduced referral wait-time from over two months to 7 days or less
- Increased inclusion of people experiencing domestic violence or chronic homelessness, youth and Indigenous people
- Improved transparency through a consensus-based
 "Hub Table" with members from all Housing First and
 shelter programs. Hub Table members are the first point
 of contact for Housing First participants, and the ones
 making housing referral decisions
- Anyone can call 780-518-4833 to ask for Housing First assistance

Next Steps

- In summer 2021 a regional campaign led by the City, County and Community Foundation will **promote** Coordinated Access tools like Helpseeker to the public and social sector services
- Starting in fall 2021 staff in schools, health and community services will be offered training, registration and networking to increase their prevention impact
- Starting in 2021 we will improve Hub Table support for youth. The Hub Table will also partner with health and justice initiatives
- A Social Impact Audit of social sector funding in Grande Prairie will be completed in 2021. Local funders will be invited to increase impact through aligned priorities, funding practices and shared measurements in late 2021 or early 2022
- The City will take a lead role to establish community data-sharing relationships to enable high quality reporting on community-level progress by 2022

System Planning & Collaboration

What is Coordinated Access?

Our social safety net is complex, leaving people frustrated when navigating themselves or others to help, if they find help at all. Starting in 2019 we began to address this issue through community partnerships. As a result, skilled people from many sectors are uniting to transform our social safety net into a system that truly supports the people who need it.

Three parts of Coordinated Access:

- **1.** Ensuring the right services are in place and easy to access (system planning).
- **2.** Aligning funders and measurements to increase efficiency and impact.
- **3.** Providing various navigation options for different levels of need:
- Level 1: anyone who is aware of and able to use tools like Helpseeker or 211 can direct themselves or friends/family to services

To visit Helpseeker see:

https://helpseeker.org/alberta/grande-prairie

- **Level 2:** registered community members, health, education and social sector staff have standard training and tools to identify needs and help people find services.
- Level 3: registered social sector staff have in-depth training, an online network and experience to create custom responses and provide direct access to programs for people with complex service needs.

Working Together as a Community

Transforming our system and moving forward will not be easy. There will be difficult decisions to make about services and funding, about priorities and core beliefs. We will debate on which direction to take at crossroads. We will need to work hard to compliment each other and not complete. In order to succeed in creating a coordinated local system of care we will need:

- A governance structure built to be accountable, with key views represented
- A united vision and set of strategic priorities based on evidence
- Leaders who can contribute to community buy-in and collaboration long-term
- Ongoing engagement and input to ensure we adapt and operate as a collective

The City is ready to play a key role as a leader in this process going forward, as well as committing funding to allow for innovation.

Programming & Supports

Why is this a focus area?

 Fixing gaps and broken services will help people move forward and ensure accountability

Our Workplan:

Accomplished to Date

Introduced Adaptive Case Management to improve Housing First participant success and prevent returns to homelessness.

Provided funding to shelter service providers for housing services.

Worked with community services, shelters, health services and outreach during the pandemic to offer Bridge Housing that allowed people to leave shelters and receive medical services while waiting for access to housing or treatment. Supported Isolation units were also provided.

Community investment from the Rotary Club of Grande Prairie allowed the City to establish the new Street Outreach Centre daytime service location.

Next Steps

- Establish youth-focused Housing First service options starting in 2021.
- Include peer mentorship in upcoming funding opportunities
- Include shelters in community-level capacity-building and data sharing partnerships in 2021.
- Establish a community-level Housing Inventory and listing of people seeking housing to ensure effective prioritization of people for open units, starting in 2021.
- Allocate provincial and federal funding to continue pandemic Supported Isolation and Bridge Housing in 2022-23.
- Develop an agreement for motel or housing units to be used for Bridge Housing in 2022.

 Place additional services, including Coordinated Access, at the Centre by 2022.

What is Adaptive Case Management?

Grande Prairie has historically offered three types of Housing First programs:

- 1. Rapid Rehousing: people with lower-moderate need receive help for 3-6 months.
- 2. Intensive Case Management: people with higher need receive help
- **3.** Permanent Supportive Housing: people with long-term needs receive help with no end date.

Starting in 2019 we removed the separation between programs to respond better to participant needs. For example, a person who originally needed short-term housing assistance, can now receive longer term assistance if their situation changes without having to start over with a new organization.

Programming & Supports

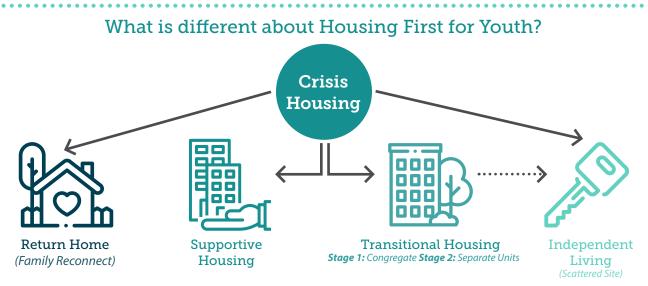
Our Workplan Continued:

Accomplished to Date

Our community has been proactive in improving local health programming and supports. Some community successes include a Police and Crisis Team, community-based healthcare navigators, opioid awareness initiatives, medical staff based at Rotary House, funding for nurses to support COVID-19 bridge housing, outreach staff focused on treatment and recovery, and a mobile supervised consumption site.

Next Steps

- Secure grant funding and Alberta Health Services staffing to provide health services in supportive housing programs by 2022.
- Ensure a discharge process is in place between community services and Alberta Health Services to reduce discharge into homelessness by 2022, including shared data to track progress.
- Embed health services in coordinated access initiatives and system planning starting in 2021.



Housing First for youth supports people age 13-24 in a successful transition to adult independence, and it can be a program model or a philosophy guiding a community's response.

The core principles of Housing First for youth are:

- Youth have a right to housing with no preconditions
- Youth have a choice, voice and self determination
- Positive youth development and wellness
- Individualized client-driven supports with no time limits
- Social inclusion and community integration

(adapted from Gaetz, Stephen, (2017). THIS is Housing First for Youth: A Program Model Guide).

Housing

Why is this a focus area?

- Grande Prairie needs to establish the right mix of housing options in order to reduce homelessness.
- The right housing could increase the effectiveness of existing prevention and intervention programs.

Our Workplan:

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Established 35-unit Parkside Supportive Housing Pilot in 2019.

Established a public-private partnership to renovate the vacant Fletcher Building into a 42-unit Supportive Housing Program.

Began exploration of a Coordinated Care Campus to permanently increase place-based supportive and transitional housing, with case management, medical services, and social enterprise opportunities.

Revised the City's Land Use Bylaw to clarify the development process for supportive housing.

Supported community-led infrastructure projects including Habitat for Humanity, the Elder's Caring Shelter and Sunrise House. Support included advocacy, loans, land and direct investments.

Piloted Designated Unit Agreements 2018-2020, including establishing a Youth Transition House operated by Sunrise House.

Next Steps

- The Parkside Pilot ends in 2021. Residents will transition to alternate housing programs
- Planning, grants and renovations will progress in 2021, with opening date to be determined. This project will offer supportive services to match identified need.
- Formalize a Coordinated Care Campus model that meets the needs of our community through collaboration with the public, service community, housing providers, funders, Indigenous people and people with lived experience. New units to open starting in summer 2021. An academic partnership will be sought to assist with evaluation.
- The City will continue to align City processes with work toward reducing homelessness.
- Continue to provide City support where possible for community-led projects that will respond to demonstrated community needs.
- Implement an improved Designated Unit Agreement and increase stock of these units for inclusion in a communitylevel Housing Inventory starting in late 2021.

Housing

What are Designated Units?

















Designated Units are apartments or houses, usually in the regular rental market, where the property manager or owner has signed an agreement with the City.

In general, the agreement establishes the following:

- The property owner will keep the unit set aside for Housing First participants.
- The rental rate for the unit will usually be less than current market value.
- The Housing First program will provide regular check-ins with a participant as well as the property owner during the course of a participant's tenure.
- The Housing First program and property owner will work collaboratively.

Grande Prairie's Affordable Housing Action Plan: 2021-22

Our Homelessness Strategy focuses on supportive housing for people with a history of homelessness. However, affordable housing also plays a key role in our community. The following action items have been identified by the City to support residents who are struggling economically due to housing cost, safety or availability:



1. \$1.3 million in municipal funding over two years to offset provincial cuts to local rental supplement programs.

Supplements create affordable housing without building new units. A National Housing Benefit should come into place after 2022 to restore or enhance available supplement funding.



3. Provide up to \$150,000 in seed funding for a continuing care project to offset a deficit of over 150 beds.



Complete land studies to fully develop Smith lands and share with the Grande Spirit Foundation to permit completion of development plans and business cases.



4. Transfer 19 social housing units from the City to Grande Spirit Foundation so that they can be leveraged to fund new accommodations.



5. The City will share internal knowledge and expertise with businesses and NGOs to promote affordable housing developments.

Community Safety

Why is this a focus area?

- We need to reduce victimization and other forms of harm affecting many people experiencing homelessness.
- We want to offer alternatives to enforcement for day-to-day interventions.
- We want to reduce discharge into homelessness from justice systems and provide options for people who are relying on emergency services.

Our Workplan:

Accomplished to Date

Provided new municipal funding for a Mobile Outreach Program that offers immediate intervention and reduces use of emergency services.

Enhanced relationship between RCMP, outreach and enforcement services to assist with transitions into the justice system.

Next Steps

- Increase coverage up to 7 days per week with capability for short-term case management by 2022.
- Increase coordination among community outreach teams to establish complimentary focus areas and processes.
- Formalize relationships with justice and health to maintain community connection with clients if incarceration or hospitalization occurs starting in 2021.
- Begin work in 2021 to establish committed partnerships among key community, city, health, safety and justice stakeholders for an effective "heavy users of service" or similar model to offer an alternative to heavy reliance on emergency services, and back and forth between health, justice and community systems.

Community Safety

Our Workplan Continued:

Accomplished to Date

Maintained adult intervention program relationships with institutions, including Peace River Correctional Centre, to give clients the option to connect with community services prior to discharge.

Implemented a day-to-day rough sleeping response strategy that includes outreach, enforcement, shelter and RCMP staff.

Next Steps

- Ensure a discharge process is in place between community services and corrections institutions to reduce discharge into homelessness by 2022, including shared data to track progress.
- Build partnership with probation that allows Mobile Outreach to assist shared clients with probation orders starting in 2021.

 As soon as additional Mobile Outreach coverage is in place, provide proactive services to people who are sleeping rough, including short-term support and connection to housing options.

Why do people sleep rough?







Rough sleeping refers to the situation of people who are living outdoors, in vehicles, tents, etc. Rough sleeping results from many factors that could include fear or trauma related to available services, mental health issues, a desire for independence, and more. Each person's situation is unique and that is why the City is approaching rough sleeping with a combination of outreach and enforcement services. A long-term solution to rough sleeping is ensuring adequate housing and service options for people experiencing chronic homelessness.

Prevention

Why is this a focus area?

- Reducing inflow is essential to reducing overall homelessness
- Prevention initiatives that focus on families, children and youth and Indigenous people are of particular importance.

Our Workplan:

Accomplished to Date

Eviction prevention programs have helped many individuals and families to avoid homelessness.

A Cultural Support Committee formed in 2021 is actively involved in ensuring new supportive housing services and infrastructure are culturally appropriate, safe and meaningful.

The City has established an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee to deliver training for City staff and improve and alter City practices. The scope of this Committee includes Indigenous awareness initiatives.

Supported start-up of a Youth Transition House and a youth navigator, both operated by Sunrise House.

Next Steps

- Use Coordinated Access as an opportunity to increase collaboration between eviction prevention services.
- More regular engagement of Indigenous organizations, Elders and practitioners in decision-making processes starting in 2021.
- Use Federal funding to support Indigenous-focused program initiatives starting in 2022.
- Council will consider an Indigenous Advisor position with leadership responsibilities in fall 2021.
- Through the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, City staff will be educated in Indigenous culture, the legacy of residential schools, reconciliation and current Indigenous initiatives.
- Include requirements in future funding contracts to provide culturally appropriate services and staff training.
- Continue to support youth-focused organizations to pilot evidence-based or innovative services and housing options.
- Participate in alignment discussions between community services and Child & Family Services.

Advocacy

Why is this a focus area?

- Community recovery from COVID-19 and success in major focus areas requires involvement from community and all levels of government.
- System planning through Coordinated Access has shown that we can enhance efficiency without hurting our social safety net. Quality local decision-making is key to this process.

Our Workplan:

Advocacy and Planning Goals

Council Priority

Restoration of recently reduced Grande Spirit Foundation rental supplements.

Council Priority

Coordination between provincial capital, social and health program funding streams for supportive housing.

Council Priority

A full and adequate range of health services in Grande Prairie to support all Grande Prairie residents and in particular residents who are facing issues related to the effects of chronic homelessness.

Aligned technology for shelter, outreach and housing services that is supported by the Province.

Provincial funding changes that allow shelters to seize the opportunity to divert people from homelessness through recovery and housing focused services

Further Details

- Affordable housing was already available to only 31% of residents who need it. City Council has approved 2021 and 2022 funding to restore lost supplements.
- Provincial capital, social and health funding are administered by separate areas of government. Lack of alignment leads to difficulty in establishing supportive housing units with support services attached.
- Health services could improve in many areas including addiction and mental health. The community will advocate for direct Alberta Health Services programs, as well as alternatives.
- Shelters, outreach and housing services use multiple databases to track work. Adopting aligned technology could lead to a new level of collaboration and efficiency, and allow for a more complete understanding of progress.
- Shelter funding is focused on number of people in beds each night. However, modern shelters are more than a place to sleep – we want support for shelters to enhance their work in prevention, recovery and housing.

Advocacy Our Workplan:

Advocacy and Planning Goals

Commitment from provincial and federal governments to increase Grande Prairie's funding for housing interventions.

Further Details

 We need a suite of interventions to address chronic homelessness and reduce inflow. Increased funding would allow us to offer place-based supportive housing services without having to limit other options.

Well-managed and innovative programs.

This includes:

- Monitoring, evaluating and guiding changes in funded programs
- Openness to new methods and ideas
- Ensuring sector staff are skilled and trained
- · Leadership on standards of practice

Community awareness, understanding and support for initiatives underway to address homelessness.

- Support from services, public, businesses, funders and people with lived experience can increase effectiveness of interventions.
- Neighbourhood acceptance of supportive housing programs and the people who live in them is needed for success and creating an inclusive community.

Clear community direction and expectations.

- The City will nurture healthy inter-governmental relationships, provide strategic direction and model accountability.
- Decisions will be underpinned by evidence, evaluation and community expertise.
- Indigenous, youth, gender and lived experience lenses will be applied.
- City processes will align across multiple strategies and initiatives.

Measuring Progress

Many of the following goals are based on the *Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy's* core outcomes for Canadian communities. Some goals are specific to Grande Prairie. Measurement will be accomplished through government, community and academic partnerships.

Goal	Measure
Reduce homelessness	 Per capita rate of homelessness and number of people estimated to be experiencing homelessness
Reduce Indigenous homelessness	 Proportion of people experiencing homelessness who identify as Indigenous including Status, Non-Status, Metis, Inuit and Indigenous ancestry.
Reduce Chronic Homelessness	 Proportion of people experiencing homelessness who are experiencing chronic homelessness
Reduce Returns to Homelessness	 Proportion of people experiencing homelessness who are returning to homelessness from housing
Reduce New Inflow to Homelessness	 Proportion of people experiencing homelessness, who have not experienced homelessness in the past.
Increase the supply of appropriate housing options for people with a history of homelessness.	 Number of supportive, transitional and designated units available.
Enhance system-level relationships with Health and Justice to track and reduce discharges into homelessness	 Number of supported and unsupported discharges from health and justice facilities.
Continue to enhance and grow the Coordinated Access Initiative	 Scope of navigator network, including Level 1-3. Community evaluation of process.

