



Mayor's Task Force Calls for Change to Current System

Date: Friday, October 19, 2007

For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — A report prepared over the last 120 days by the Mayor's Task Force on Mental Illness, Addictions and Homelessness calls for a supported *Housing First* approach with assertive engagement and treatment, coordinated funding and integrated service delivery model. An action plan outlines aggressive targets for 1,550 net new units over the next five years.

"Homelessness didn't happen over night and it won't be solved overnight, but it can end if we all commit to this evidence-based model and plan for action," noted Mayor Alan Lowe. "The Victoria model recommended by this task force is a paradigm shift that will help us end homelessness, not just manage it."

The task force acknowledges the challenge is three-fold and recommends:

- 1) Immediately start to house the high-risk, high-needs population concentrate downtown in Victoria and support them with Assertive Community Teams
- 2) Followed by a second, prevention focused strategy to reduce new cases of homelessness; and
- 3) Establish a community-based governance structure to integrate planning, policy, funding and drive the integration of our fragmented programs and services.

Key report recommendations include:

- A supported *Housing First* strategy
- Targets of 1,550 net new supported housing units over the next five years, with 350 new units targeted for the first year
- Assertive Community Teams (ACT) to more effectively meet the needs of the addicted and mentally ill homeless population
- Immediate rental subsidies
- Consideration of harm reduction strategies such as substitution therapy and supervised consumption
- Fast-tracked development of "Safe Downtown" strategy
- The need for a regional governance model to drive change
- Bring all sectors of the community -business, health, three levels of governments, social service providers, faith- together to determine governance model

The action plan outlines a five year timeline to fully implement recommended changes. The following are the immediate next steps, to take place over the next 120 days:

- Partner with the provincial government to approve rent subsidies for the 350 people who will be housed in the first year
- Establish an assertive community treatment (ACT) team with existing resources

- Identify and engage 50 homeless residents located in the downtown “hot spots” with the highest health care needs for immediate support and housing
- Host community information sessions to engage the community in creating actionable solutions at a community level
- Establish an inter-agency team to identify additional housing units and integrate housing registries
- Conduct a one-day summit in November to establish what type of regional governance structure will work best for this Victoria model

Mayor Lowe added, “the City of Victoria can not address this issue alone and it will take political will, commitment and hard work. We are committed to continuing to work in partnership with business, the Province, social service agencies, the faith community, the Aboriginal community, and our neighbouring municipalities, to implement these recommendations. The partnerships built during the past 120 days will serve us well as we tackle the hard work ahead.”

The Mayor’s Task Force on Breaking the Cycle of Mental Illness, Addictions and Homelessness: A Victoria Model report is available on the City of Victoria website at www.victoria.ca, by clicking on Mayor and Council, and then Task Force.

— 30 —

For More Information:

Katie Josephson
Manager, Corporate Communications
(250) 361-0210
(250) 217-8343