An Update on the Provincial Housing Strategy

A stable, safe and secure home is essential to a family’s good health and a productive way of life, providing a strong foundation for our children’s future. In October 2006 the province launched the provincial housing strategy, Housing Matters BC in response to a changing housing environment. It commits to existing programs that have proven successful, and to new approaches to meet the range of housing needs of British Columbians.

Through Housing Matters BC, the province will be investing nearly $330 million this year in housing and shelter programs to ensure British Columbians have affordable and appropriate housing. Over the past 12 months, the province has helped more than 80,000 households in this province.

Housing Matters BC is producing impressive results. Currently, more than 3,600 low-income families are receiving help with their monthly rent in the private sector through the Rental Assistance Program, helping to ease financial pressures and bringing them peace of mind. More than 2,300 housing units have been committed through the Provincial Homelessness Initiative, through the on-going work of the Premier’s Task Force on Homelessness, Mental Illness, and Addictions. We are investing more than $50 million to create nearly 300 housing units under the Aboriginal Housing Initiative. The Emergency Shelter Program continues to expand, providing temporary accommodation and links to services for those in greatest need. And about 20,000 seniors benefit from a variety of housing programs, allowing them to live comfortably in their own communities.

We are helping our neighbours, our communities and our future. We will continue developing housing solutions that improve people’s lives. All British Columbians and every level of government will play a role in shaping affordable housing in this province.
Building on the foundation of *Housing Matters BC* and the work of the Premier’s Task Force on Homelessness, Mental Illness and Addictions, four new and expanded measures are being introduced to break the cycle of homelessness.

These measures focus on breaking the cycle of homelessness through outreach and intervention on the street and providing more permanent housing with supports to help people regain their independence.

They include:

- Increasing funding for emergency shelters so they can be open 24/7 to provide better services and assistance for those who are homeless;
- Expanding homeless outreach services to 27 new and existing communities;
- Providing 750 rent supplement units to assist the homeless in the private market; and
- Working with municipalities to fast-track approvals for more supportive housing. The Province will fund all pre-development costs of approximately $10 million.

Over the past year, the province has brought about the following programs to help homeless people across the province to leave the streets.

**Outreach Services**
Outreach workers directly engage with street homeless. Outreach teams assist the homeless to navigate their way between different services so they can make the connections they need.

*Related successes over the past year:*
- Over 1,600 homeless assisted off the street and into stable housing in 30 communities.

**Emergency Shelters**
As the “entry point” to the housing continuum, shelters serve as a link to more stable and permanent housing and supports.

*Related successes over the past year:*
- 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.
Supportive Housing
More than 2,300 housing units with supports for the homeless have been committed to help people move beyond temporary emergency shelter so people can re-establish their independence, effectively breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Related successes over the past year:
• Purchase of 11 Single Room Occupancy hotels 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.
• 315 homeless individuals assisted through a rent supplement pilot program in communities with limited appropriate social housing.

Aboriginal Housing Initiative
A new Aboriginal housing program launched in 2007 will create homes to address the disproportionate number of Aboriginal households who are in core housing need and who are homeless.

Related successes over the past year:
• 292 new homes will be built under the Aboriginal Housing Initiative.
In addition to the work done over the past year to get people off the street and into stable housing linked with supports, there have been other successes across the province.

**B.C.’s most vulnerable citizens receive priority for assistance**

- An additional 550 supported and assisted living units were allocated this year, bringing the total to more than 4,000 units that will be created by 2008. These new units are being created through Independent Living BC, a housing-for-health partnership designed to meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities who require some personal assistance, but do not need 24-hour care.
- More than 900 units of social housing will be converted to supportive living for seniors, providing safe, stable and comfortable environments for our low-income seniors to age in place. Work began this year on 500 units in 11 developments across the province.
- Aging provincially-owned subsidized housing is being renovated or redeveloped to better meet the needs of low-income households with special housing needs. The first site that began redevelopment is Little Mountain in Vancouver, a 224 unit public housing development that will be replaced with at least an equal number of subsidized units, plus market housing and community amenities.

**Low-income households have improved access to affordable rental housing**

- A new $250 million invested in a Housing Endowment Fund will provide an estimated $10 million a year for innovative housing developments.
- Many low-income families and seniors simply do not have enough income to pay rent in the private market. Cash assistance is an effective way to assist these low-income households afford their rent. This year:
  - More than 3,600 low-income working families are receiving cash assistance through the new Rental Assistance Program. The program helps working families to bridge the gap between their rent and what they can afford to pay.
  - Over 15,300 seniors are now receiving assistance through the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program (SAFER).

**For more information:**

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