

## **Updated Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy Directives in the Context of COVID-19**

### **Context**

Homelessness presents significant risks of contracting COVID-19 for a variety of reasons. People living unsheltered have limited ability to prevent infection. If they become ill, transience makes sustained contact for medical monitoring difficult. In addition, many people experiencing homelessness have pre-existing health issues that create compromised immunity, and they may not seek or have access to health care.

The public health guidance to mitigate risks of infection, such as self-isolation and social distancing, assumes access to a private home. Inability to follow these guidelines represents a significant risk of community transmission.

In addition, overcrowded drop-ins and shelter sites, congregate housing environments, and inadequate resources to maintain proper hygiene and infection control practices exacerbate vulnerability for people who work, volunteer, and reside in these settings.

These risk factors underscore the need for communities to take active measures to limit the risk of contracting COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness, and the staff and volunteers who work with this population.

Through the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, decisive action is being taken to help communities address the impacts of the COVID-19 among people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, and to provide additional support to the homeless-serving sector during this period.

Responding effectively to COVID-19 requires not only access to safe and adequate housing, but also a high degree of coordination across funders, community organizations, and individuals. In particular, recognizing the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples among those experiencing homelessness, meaningful collaboration between local Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations is necessary in each community and region.

In determining their COVID-19 response, Reaching Home funding recipients are encouraged to engage widely with other partners to support a coordinated response at the community level. These partners should include local public health authorities, municipal emergency management officials. Reaching Home funding recipients are also strongly encouraged to coordinate efforts with shelters and other service providers for women fleeing violence. Violence against women's shelters are eligible to receive Reaching Home funding and need support as they develop their response to COVID-19.

Building on existing program directives, the purpose of this document is to provide guidance to funding recipients regarding the eligibility and use of Reaching Home funds, highlighting where adjustments have been made to existing program parameters, as well as to illustrate how existing eligible activities can be employed to reduce and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

Also outlined below are modifications (e.g., increased flexibilities) that have been made to a number of program requirements and expectations during the COVID-19 outbreak.

These directives apply to base funding already allocated to recipients under Reaching Home and to incremental investments provided through the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. As such, unless otherwise noted (e.g., requirements related to results reporting and local governance), the term *Reaching Home funding* refers to base funding and incremental investments from the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan.

The updated directive will remain in place until such time as the Government of Canada deems it no longer necessary.

### ***New Flexibilities in the COVID-19 Context***

To enable timely and effective community responses to COVID-19 outbreak, the following flexibilities are being introduced under this directive:

- **Eligible activities and expenses:** To support communities in developing and implementing effective COVID-19 responses, modifications have been made to the directives concerning the provision of basic needs services and health and medical services.
- **Community contributions:** To meet the community contribution requirement, Designated Communities stream recipients must normally identify a minimum of \$1 for every dollar of the Reaching Home allocation to the Designated Community. This requirement is being waived for funds received as part of the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. All recipients are still encouraged to continue to seek other sources of funding to support their efforts COVID-19 responses.
- **Geographic restrictions:** Given the transient nature of the homeless population, and to prevent transmission between nearby communities, Designated Communities and Indigenous Homelessness stream recipients may now fund sub-projects that are located outside of their traditional service boundaries. Investments under the Indigenous Homelessness stream are still intended to meet the specific needs of the off-reserve Indigenous population.
- To support a coordinated response, recipients of funding under these streams are encouraged to engage with those responsible for funding provided under the Rural and Remote Homelessness stream.

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## **Introduction**

Reaching Home is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness by providing direct support and funding to Designated Communities (urban centers), Indigenous communities, territorial communities and rural and remote communities across Canada.

The Reaching Home directives provide guidance, details and expectations related to the program requirements to assist communities in preventing and reducing homelessness. This includes a description of eligible activities and expenses. A number of examples have been provided within the directives to illustrate eligible activities; however, these are not necessarily exhaustive. Any distinctly prohibited activities are identified as such.

Reaching Home recognizes that Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them, and, as far as possible, to administer such programs through their own institutions. Accordingly, these directives include provisions to facilitate delivery of culturally competent homelessness programming, in keeping with the Indigenous homelessness definition in the document.

The directives begin by setting out definitions related to homelessness that are intended to help communities 1) develop a framework for understanding and describing homelessness, 2) identify goals, strategies and interventions, and 3) measure outcomes and progress. The definitions provided have no impact on program eligibility.

The program directives also provide communities with additional guidance to implement many of the program requirements, including: coordinated access; planning and public reporting; Community Advisory Boards; requirements related to capital projects; and official language minority communities.

## Definitions

### *Homelessness:*<sup>1</sup>

Homelessness is the situation of an individual or family who does not have a permanent address or residence; the living situation of an individual or family who does not have stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.

It is often the result of what are known as systemic or societal barriers, including a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination.

### *Chronic homeless:*<sup>2</sup>

Refers to individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness AND who meet at least 1 of the following criteria:

- They have a total of at least 6 months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year; OR
- They have recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past 3 years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days).

Chronic homelessness includes time spent in the following contexts:

1. Staying in **unsheltered locations**, that is public or private spaces without consent or contract, or places not intended for permanent human habitation (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) Typology: 1.1 and 1.2).
2. Staying in **emergency shelters**, including overnight shelters for people experiencing homelessness (including those for specific populations, such as youth, families, and newcomers), shelters for people impacted by family violence, and emergency shelters for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation (COH Typology: 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3).
3. Staying **temporarily with others** without guarantee of continued residency or the immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing, or **short-term rental accommodations** (e.g. motels) without security of tenure (COH typology: 3.2 and 3.3).

It does not include situations where individuals have access to **secure, permanent housing**, whether subsidized or not. The definition also does not include time spent in **transitional**

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<sup>1</sup> From the National Housing Strategy – adapted from the Canadian Definition of Homelessness developed by the Canadian Observatory of Homelessness

<sup>2</sup> Developed in consultation with the Homelessness Data Advisory Committee

**housing** or in **public institutions** (e.g. health and corrections), although individuals who are discharged into homelessness from transitional housing or public institutions can be considered chronically homeless if they were experiencing chronic homelessness upon entry to transitional housing or the public institution.

***Indigenous homelessness:***<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing the diversity of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and that Indigenous peoples may choose to refer to themselves in their own languages, the following definition of Indigenous homelessness is inclusive of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, status and non-status persons, regardless of residency or membership status.

For the purposes of Reaching Home, and subject to revision based on ongoing engagement and consultation with Indigenous Peoples<sup>4</sup>, Indigenous homelessness refers to “Indigenous Peoples who are in the state of having no home due to colonization, trauma and/or whose social, cultural, economic, and political conditions place them in poverty. Having no home includes: those who alternate between shelter and unsheltered, living on the street, couch surfing, using emergency shelters, living in unaffordable, inadequate, substandard and unsafe accommodations or living without the security of tenure; anyone regardless of age, released from public facilities (such as hospitals, mental health and addiction treatment centers, prisons, transition houses), fleeing unsafe homes as a result of abuse in all its definitions, and any youth transitioning from all forms of care”.

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<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee definition, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Changes would be included in periodic update(s) of the Directives.

## Directives

### 1. Eligible activities and expenses<sup>5</sup>

#### ***COVID-19 Context***

All activities previously identified as eligible under Directive 1 continue to be eligible. While the majority of ineligible activities under Directive 1 are maintained, modifications have been made to broaden eligible activities related to basic needs services and health and medical services to enable communities implement comprehensive responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

Illustrative examples of how funding can be employed to reduce and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 are included under each category of eligible activities. Reference to Reaching Home funding in the examples below includes base funding and investments from the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. The list of illustrative examples is not exhaustive as any activities that would improve the ability of the community and service providers to respond to the risks posed by COVID-19 to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness warrants consideration.

The eligible activities and expenses under Reaching Home are broadly defined in the program Terms and Conditions. The information below is intended to help clarify and expand upon the information provided in the Terms and Conditions.

Reaching Home will fund activities that contribute to the objectives of the program while reflecting local realities and community needs and opportunities. The eligible activities and expenses are grouped into categories of activities directed at achieving the program objective of preventing and reducing homelessness. These eligible activities and expenditures apply to all funding streams, with a small number of clearly identified exceptions. Note that the eligible activities and expenses identified below can include culturally appropriate activities for Indigenous individuals and families that have similar objectives.

Examples of eligible activities and expenses are provided below. Each of the activities may be supported through case management – a comprehensive and strategic form of service provision, either short- or long-term, whereby a case worker assesses the needs of individuals and families and, where appropriate, arranges, coordinates and advocates for delivery and access to a range of programs and services designed to meet the individual's needs.

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that there may be cases where activities eligible under Reaching Home may also be funded by the provincial or territorial government or the municipality. If these activities are already being supported through another source of funding, Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards should direct Reaching Home funds to complement these investments and avoid duplication of existing programming to the extent possible.

Examples of Indigenous-specific activities are intended to help illustrate and inform, especially with regard to a broader audience of administrators, auditors, and other users who may not be familiar with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultural practices and ways of supporting well-being. For the most part, the activities themselves would be determined through community-based decision making by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

#### ***a. Housing services***

Housing services are those that lead to an individual or family transitioning into more stable housing that has been deemed appropriate and safe.

##### ***COVID-19 Context***

Reaching Home funding can be used to increase the physical distance between people, particularly those residing in shelters, to reduce the risk of viral spread and support social distancing. Communities could for example:

- Place individuals in temporary, transitional, or permanent housing accommodations including for the purposes of self-isolation.
- Communities are encouraged to think broadly about what constitutes temporary accommodations (e.g., motels, hotels, rooming houses, community buildings, schools, tents in sports arenas, RVs etc.).

Housing could include:

- **Transitional housing<sup>6</sup>:** Housing intended to offer a supportive living environment for its residents, including offering them the experience, tools, knowledge and opportunities for social and skill development to become more independent. It is considered an intermediate step between emergency shelter and supportive housing, and has limits on how long an individual or family can stay. Stays are typically between 3 months and 3 years.<sup>7</sup>
- **Permanent supportive housing:** Housing that combines rental or housing assistance with individualized, and flexible support services for people with high needs related to physical or mental health, developmental disabilities or substance use. Permanent supportive housing may be:
  - **Placed-based:** Congregate or independent permanent supportive housing units situated in 1 building or location.
  - **Scattered-site:** The provision of permanent supportive housing services in the community, delivered through home visits or community-based agencies.

<sup>6</sup> Transitional housing may be an appropriate option for those in need of structure, support and skill development to move from homelessness to housing stability.

<sup>7</sup> In Ontario, regulation allows for 4-year transitional housing tenancies. Indigenous communities do not enforce a time limit for stays in transitional housing. Will be at the discretion of the community to establish parameters around time limits on transitional housing.



- **Housing:** Housing that is not supportive housing and that can be long-term. Includes a house, apartment or room (including social housing) that a family or individual rents or owns. Housing may include living arrangements with friends or family members that are expected to be long-term.

**Indigenous housing options** that reflect Indigenous values, beliefs and practices (e.g., community/family living environment) and are delivered by Indigenous organizations.

Eligible activities include:

#### Housing placement<sup>8</sup>

- Determining an individual's or family's preferences and needs for housing and type of supports.
- Securing housing for individuals and families by working with private and public local real estate, landlord associations, home communities e.g., First Nation band, Inuit community, Métis settlement), to identify available housing units.
- Time-limited rental assistance in the context of a rapid rehousing project. While at the discretion of the community to establish parameters for the rental assistance, rapid rehousing usually consists of 3 to 6 months of support.
- Providing landlord-tenant services for an individual or family that was placed into housing, which includes providing landlord mediation and training on roles and responsibilities of tenants and landlords.
- Re-housing (if required).

#### Emergency Housing Funding

- Within parameters that are established by the community, funding to help cover housing costs in the short term while awaiting access to longer-term housing supports, including the Canadian Housing Benefit or benefits from provincial, territorial or municipal programs.

#### Housing set-up

- Activities which cover costs associated with setting up a housing unit, including: insurance, damage deposit, first and last months' rent, maintenance (e.g., painting), moving, furniture, kitchen, basic groceries and supplies at move-in, etc. Available to all individuals and families, not just those in receipt of rental assistance or Emergency Housing Funding.
  - If a provincial social assistance or other program offers first and last month's rent or damage deposits, this funding should be exhausted first before Reaching Home funding is used for these purposes.

Ineligible activities include:

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<sup>8</sup> Approaches to housing placement can include Housing First and Rapid Rehousing (targeted and time-limited financial assistance, system navigation, and support services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness in order to facilitate their quick exit from shelter).

- Emergency Housing funding while the individual or family is supported by the provincial, territorial or municipal welfare and rent supplement programs.
- Level of funding provided for Emergency Housing Funding must not exceed amount of financial assistance provided by provincial, territorial or municipal rent supplement programs.

***b. Prevention and shelter diversion***

Prevention includes activities aimed at preventing homelessness by supporting individuals and families at imminent risk of homelessness before a crisis occurs. This includes supporting individuals and families who are currently housed but at-risk of losing their housing, and preventing individuals who are being discharged from public systems (e.g., health, corrections, and child welfare) from becoming homeless.

Populations at imminent risk of homelessness are defined as individuals or families whose current housing situation will end in the near future (e.g., within 2 months) and for whom no subsequent residence has been established.

Shelter diversion is a tool used to prevent the use of emergency shelters by providing individualized supports when families and individuals are seeking to enter the emergency shelter system. Shelter diversion programs help individuals and families seeking shelter to explore safe and appropriate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connect them with services and financial assistance to help them find secure housing.

Shelter diversion is different from other permanent housing-targeted interventions because of the point in time in which the intervention occurs. Shelter diversion focuses on people as they are seeking entry into shelters, while prevention focuses on people at risk of homelessness. However, many of the same initiatives may be employed with shelter diversion as with prevention.

### **COVID-19 Context**

Keeping people housed is a key way to limit the spread of COVID-19 as people need to have a secure place to self-isolate. To help people who are at imminent risk of homelessness maintain their housing, communities may wish to use Reaching Home funds to, for example:

- Provide short-term financial assistance (e.g., rent arrears and utility deposits);
- Deliver in-kind support (e.g., grocery cards, personal hygiene products, gift cards); and,
- Utilize non-financial tools such as landlord-tenant mediation, problem solving with neighbours, and helping individuals or families with budgeting.

Individuals being discharged from public institutions (e.g., corrections, hospitals), where conditions may be crowded, may present an elevated risk of spreading COVID-19. In these instances, Reaching Home funds could be used to, for example:

- Help individuals exiting institutions transition directly to housing and support them in maintaining housing so that they do not need to access a shelter.

When it is safe and appropriate to do so, diverting individuals and families requesting shelter to other forms of accommodation is an important tool for communities to reduce overcrowding in shelters. Shelter diversion programs help individuals and families seeking shelter to explore safe and appropriate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connect them with services and financial assistance to help them find secure housing.

Reaching Home funds can be used to, for example:

- Set up new access points to services, such as working with an existing crisis line to offer help over the phone or virtually through a website;
- Fund staff at points of shelter inquiry to explore options for individuals and families through problem-solving and leveraging strengths, existing informal and natural supports and community resources; and,
- Utilize tools and resources such as short-term financial support, landlord-tenant mediation, and in-kind support (e.g., groceries, gifts) to offset the costs to individuals and families of moving to alternative accommodations.

Eligible activities include:

- Discharge planning services<sup>9</sup> for individuals being released from public systems (e.g., health, corrections, and child welfare).

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<sup>9</sup> As outlined on the COH's Homeless Hub, discharge planning includes preparing someone to live independently or with certain supports in a non-institutional setting. For someone who has become 'institutionalized' after a long period of residential living they may be unprepared to cope with the independence they now face. They also need supports to develop their post-institutional plan including housing options, medical/psychiatric supports, counselling, identification, financial assistance/employment, education, etc.

- Help obtaining or retaining housing, including shared housing.
- Landlord liaison and intervention to prevent eviction and preserve tenancy.
- Advice on budgeting, credit counseling and debt consolidation.
- Legal advice, advocacy and legal representation in order to avert eviction.
- Emergency assistance to help avert eviction (e.g., food, clothing, transportation vouchers, cleaning/repair of damage to a rental unit).
- Moving costs.
- Short-term<sup>10</sup> financial assistance to help avert eviction or loss of housing with rent, rental arrears, and utility deposits or payments.

Ineligible activities include:

- Provision or payment for student housing for students who are not at imminent risk of homelessness.
- Supports for low-income individuals or families who are not at imminent risk of homelessness.

### ***COVID-19 Context***

#### ***c. Health and medical services***

To enable communities to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, Reaching Home has added a new **temporary** category of eligible activities and expenses.

Communities are still encouraged to continue connecting individuals to clinical, health and treatment services (includes mental health and addictions support) through case management, and deliver harm reduction services.

Eligible activities include:

- Providing general health and medical services, mental health (including counselling) and addictions support services that are already provided by provinces and territories.
- Direct hiring of health care professionals (e.g., nurses, doctors) to provide services directly to clients.

Given this a new eligible expense, communities will be asked to specifically identify amounts spent on health and medical services.

#### ***d. Client support services***

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<sup>10</sup> Will be at the discretion of the community to establish parameters around time limits. A scan of existing homelessness prevention initiatives found that the length of time for financial benefits ranged from 3 to 24 months. As well, while some financial benefits were provided monthly others were provided as a one-time payment.

Client support services include individualized services to help improve integration and connectedness to support structures, such as the provision of basic needs and treatment services. They may also include services to support the economic, social and cultural integration of individuals and families.

### *Basic needs services*

#### **COVID-19 Context**

The requirement that the delivery of basic needs services (e.g., essential services related to the provision of emergency shelter beds, food and shelter) needs to be tied to demonstrated outreach or intervention to improve housing stability as part of the project activities is waived.

To reduce the potential for infection and transmission among people experiencing homelessness and those who work with them, communities may wish to use Reaching Home funds to, for example:

- Increase the frequency of cleaning with disinfectants in, for example, shelter facilities and high traffic areas;
- Acquiring and/or providing shelter beds and physical barriers to be placed between beds;
- Provide individuals moved off-site from a shelter with access to food and transportation; and,
- Purchase personal hygiene products (e.g., soaps), personal protection equipment (e.g., gloves, masks, gowns, shoe covers), cleaning equipment and cleaning/disinfectant supplies.

Funding for basic needs services support outcomes that contribute to a reduction in homelessness. For example, short-term food and emergency shelter assistance are eligible activities as a means to assist homeless individuals to obtain placement in more stable housing. Longer-term food programs can also be funded if they are part of another intervention that is considered an eligible activity. For Indigenous individuals and families, funding could support culturally appropriate services and connection with community (e.g., local and/or home community, including First Nation band, Métis settlement, etc.).

Eligible activities include:

- Essential services related to the provision of emergency shelter beds, food and shelter, including shower and laundry facilities, food banks, soup kitchens, community kitchens and drop-in centres.
- Life skills development (e.g., budgeting cooking).
- Longer-term food programs that are part of another eligible activity (e.g., activities that assist with community reintegration).

- Culturally relevant supports for Indigenous people (e.g., cultural ceremonies, traditional supports and activities with the goal of increasing cultural connections and an individual's sense of belonging in a community).
- Groceries, personal hygiene and supplies.
- Clothing, footwear and blankets.
- Storage for belongings (up to 3 months).
- Access to traditional foods and medicines.
- Repair or replacement of eyeglasses (if not otherwise covered through medical services).
- Disability supports (e.g., mobility and other assistive devices if not otherwise covered through medical services).
- Personal identification.
- Access to technology (e.g., phones, community voice mail, safe apps, computers, etc.) in a community setting (e.g., in a resource or drop-in centre).
- Bus or public transit tickets related to integration activities (e.g., job search/interviews, appointments/reconnecting to family).
- Transportation to home community (mileage eligibility to be determined by community).
- Access to oral care programs (if not covered by a provincial/territorial government).

### *Clinical and treatment services*

Clinical and treatment services are activities that seek to improve the physical, emotional and psychological health and well-being of individuals and families who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Eligible activities include:

- Brokering and navigating access to clinical, health and treatment services (includes mental health and addictions support) through case management, including through an Intensive Case Management team.
- Partnership development, liaison and integration to bring together services to support the needs of individuals or families or to establish case management teams where none exists.
- Delivery of harm reduction activities that seek to reduce risk and connect individuals and families with key health and social services.
  - These activities may include, for instance, storage, distribution and provision of materials and/or supplies (e.g., needles), prevention interventions (e.g., targeted programming to prevent substance abuse in homeless youth and/or youth at-risk of homelessness; managed alcohol programs, connecting individuals to harm reduction services).
- Professional fees for services provided in support of Indigenous individuals and families (e.g., services provided by Indigenous Elders or traditional healers). The value of professional fees, gifts or honoraria must be proportional to the service rendered and should not exceed the reasonable and customary amount for each service.
- Supports to access traditional or culturally sensitive healing services (e.g. healing circles, sweat lodges ceremonies, access to traditional medicines) that are not offered through

provincial programming. Eligibility is not based on service location (e.g., may be local or require travel to a non-local Indigenous community).

### *Economic integration services*

Eligible activities include:

- Income assistance – services directed towards individuals and families to help them access income benefits (e.g., provincial/territorial social assistance, child benefits, disability benefits, veterans allowance, old age security, or employment insurance).
- Employment assistance – pre- and post-employment services (e.g., job search assistance, interview preparation) that bridge individuals and families to the labour market and assist them to maintain employment and build self-sufficiency.
- Education and Training assistance – services to support essential skills development (e.g. reading, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, thinking, computer use and continuous learning), services to connect individuals and families to education and training programs and services to support the successful participation in these programs (e.g., bus passes, clothing or equipment, food and non-alcoholic beverages, internet access for the duration of the program).

Ineligible activities include:

- Employment activities normally delivered by other federal, provincial or territorial labour market programs.
- Job wages for individuals participating in an education, training, or pre-employment program.
- Salary for a full-time teacher to provide an alternative to provincial or territorial education;
- Tuition.
- Workplace skills development.
- Apprenticeship grants.

### *Social and community integration services*

Eligible activities include:

- Supports to improve social integration, for example, costs of participation or provision of recreational/sports activities.
- Indigenous Elder consultation, gathering and preparation of traditional foods. Establishing and maintaining culturally relevant responses and supports to help Indigenous individuals and families (e.g., navigation of urban services including to help establish and maintain culturally relevant support networks within an urban environment; Indigenous language and culture classes).

Ineligible activities include:

- Purchase of alcoholic beverages.

### ***e. Capital investments<sup>11</sup>***

Capital investments are intended to increase the capacity or improve the quality of facilities that address the needs of individuals and families who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness, including those that support culturally appropriate programming for Indigenous individuals and families.

#### ***COVID-19 Context***

To reduce overcrowding in shelters and limit the spread of COVID-19 transmission, communities may wish to use Reaching Home funds to, for example:

- Purchase or repurpose existing properties to create new temporary housing (e.g., motel and hotel spaces, community spaces); and,
- Renovate existing facilities (e.g., shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, or non-residential facilities) to, for example, improve ventilation or increase the distance between residents.

Eligible activities include

- Renovation of emergency shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, or non-residential facilities, including:
  - Renovating an existing facility for upgrades and to meet building standards.
  - Removing asbestos, mold, rodents.
  - Repurposing an existing property to create transitional housing or permanent supportive housing, and expanding an existing facility.
- Repairs of damages resulting from housing placements (includes private market housing).
- New construction of transitional or permanent supportive housing, or non-residential facilities (e.g., community hubs to include furniture banks, drop-in centres, resource centres, outreach worker spaces, counselling spaces, laundry facilities, food banks), including if applicable tearing down an existing facility to build a new one.
- Purchase of transitional housing, or permanent supportive housing, and non-residential facilities to create new space or units.
- Eligible costs related to professional fees, such as consultants, audit, technical expertise, facilitation, legal, and construction contractors, and capital costs of the purchase of a land or building.
- Purchase or construction of new emergency shelters using funding from Indigenous, Territorial and Rural and Remote streams.
- Purchase of furniture, appliances, machinery (e.g., lawnmower, woodworking tools), electronic equipment and vehicles (e.g., to be used for outreach, transportation for furniture banks).

Ineligible activities include:

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<sup>11</sup> See pages 18-19 for information on requirements related to capital projects.



- Construction and renovation of housing units funded through the bilateral Housing Partnership Framework agreement<sup>12</sup> with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and most provinces/territories.<sup>13</sup>
- Investments in social housing, including:
  - Repairs to social housing units.
  - Renovation of social housing units.
  - Creation of social housing units.

***f. Coordination of resources and data collection<sup>14</sup>***

Coordination of resources refers to activities that: (1) enable communities to organize and deliver diverse services in a coordinated manner<sup>15</sup> and/or (2) support the implementation of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) or the alignment of an existing Homeless Management Information System with federal coordinated access requirements.

***COVID-19 Context***

In determining their COVID-19 response, Reaching Home funding recipients are encouraged to engage widely with other partners to support a coordinated response at the community level.

In this context, Reaching Home funding could be used to, for example:

- Develop partnerships with other sectors, as well as gather, share and disseminate information to key partners and stakeholders; and,
- Inform the public, and solicit support or feedback on the community's response (e.g., communication activities such as issuing press releases to solicit volunteers).

Eligible activities include:

- Mapping of the housing and homeless-serving system to identify existing programs and services and assess current capacity, program funders, and program requirements.
- Developing and implementing coordinated access, including:
  - Developing partnerships with service providers and other community organizations as necessary.

<sup>12</sup> Replaced the Investments in Affordable Housing Initiative

<sup>13</sup> Exclusions on capital do not apply as modern treaty holders eligible for Reaching Home funding may also have authority for housing under agreements defining nation-to-nation or Inuit to Crown relationships.

<sup>14</sup> The eligible and ineligible activities and costs outlined under "Coordination of Services and Data Collection" apply to sub-projects under the regional funding streams as well as to funding provided under the nationally delivered Community Capacity and Innovation stream.

<sup>15</sup> A separate directive on coordinated access is presented below.

- Establishing governance structures and developing privacy tools (e.g., data management protocols, Data Sharing Agreement, Consent Form) for Coordinated Access and HIFIS implementation.
- Delivering Change Management activities, such as developing and implementing a communication strategy (e.g., printed or web-based communications, training, including travel to HIFIS/ Coordinated Access training).
- Designing the access model.
- Selecting an assessment tool and a referral and matching process for the Coordinated Access system.
- Implementing a By-Name List where applicable.
- Hiring a project manager for coordinated access, including for HIFIS implementation/maintenance:
  - Consultant fees or staff wages (e.g., Community Coordinator, Analyst, and information technology (IT), and the corresponding benefits and mandatory employment related costs (e.g., Canadian Pension Plan, Québec Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, etc.).
- Acquiring hardware/software IT infrastructure, such as HIFIS server and other necessary IT equipment, and related office furniture (e.g., computer):
  - Additional support as necessary, e.g., legal advice, network security, development of tailored HIFIS reports.
- Customizing an existing Homelessness Management Information System to meet the minimum requirements of coordinated access.
- Developing partnerships to support a broader systematic approach to addressing homelessness (e.g., partnerships with health services, corrections, housing providers).
- Conducting Point-in-Time Counts or surveys of homeless populations (e.g., Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator, Data Analyst, Project Supplies, Printing, Volunteer Training, Meeting Space).
- Acquiring additional support (e.g., contracts, consultants) related to project activities.
- Improving services (e.g., staff training on activities in support of a broader systematic approach to addressing homelessness).
- System support projects to strengthen the organizational capacity of networks, coalitions and other sector organized groups to develop best practices in terms of service delivery and more responsive, better-integrated services and partnerships.
- Projects that facilitate the coordination of housing and homelessness services, the development of system-wide strategic responses, and foster creative new approaches to addressing issues faced by people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.
- Informing the public and soliciting feedback on activities intended to reduce and prevent homelessness.

Ineligible activities include:

- Software and/or hardware purchase and/or development for the collection and management of homelessness data that constitutes a redundant use of funds and duplicates activities already offered through HIFIS.<sup>16</sup>
- Administrative costs incurred by Community Entities in the delivery and management of contribution funds under Reaching Home to a third party.

Communities may also undertake data collection activities, which may be unrelated to the design and development of coordinated access and a Homelessness Management Information System that enhance understanding of local homelessness issues and help support decision-making and longer-term planning.

Eligible data collection activities include:

- Collection of data to demonstrate accountability, support decision-making and develop an understanding of the homelessness situation
- Activities intended to build partnerships for data collection and analysis
- Gathering, sharing and disseminating information with the Community Advisory Board and other interest parties
- Technical support for data collection, analysis and management
- Purchase of equipment to collect and compile data

Ineligible data collection activities include:

- Local research other than the data collection activities described under “eligible activities”
- Information gathered or refocused primarily for the purpose of advocacy, public education or awareness.

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<sup>16</sup> Pending the outcomes of discussions with community organizations, exceptions may be granted if there remains an inability to address issues related to cultural appropriateness for Indigenous clients.

## 2. Administration expenditures

Eligible administrative expenditures are those supporting but not directly related to the delivery of Reaching Home programming. The maximum amount of administrative costs covered under Reaching Home is 15% of the annual allocation. No more than 15% of the Reaching Home contribution can be used for administrative costs, and these costs must be reflected in the proposed project budget.

### ***COVID-19 Context***

Eligible expenditures under the administration category remain the same under Reaching Home. In the context of the COVID-19 response, communities may use Reaching Home funds to:

- Support overhead costs, including costs that are central to the functioning of the organization in its delivery of Reaching Home-funded activities or those supported under Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan;
- Provide training to existing staff/volunteers on, for example, appropriate practices to reduce the risk of infection and transmission of COVID-19; and,
- Purchase equipment and supplies.

Eligible costs include:

- Staff Expenses
  - Mandatory Employment Related Costs (MERCs) which refer to payments an employer is required by law to make in respect of its employees such as: Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan/Québec Pension Plan premiums, workers' compensation premiums, vacation pay and Employer Health Tax; and benefits which refer to payments an employer is required to make in respect of its employees by virtue of company policy or a collective agreement.
  - Professional development and staff training.
- Administrative costs
  - General administration-type costs, normally incurred by any organization, that enable effective delivery of Reaching Home. These include costs such as: administrative staff for activities such as accounting, reporting and human resource management, and general administrative costs such as rent, phone/fax, postage/courier, office supplies, internet/website, bank charges, office moving expenses, office cleaning, security system, garbage removal/recycling, publication purchases, equipment maintenance and membership.
- Professional fees
  - Contracting for goods or services such as bookkeeping, janitorial services, information technology, equipment maintenance services, security, audit costs and legal fees.

- For services provided in support of Indigenous individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (e.g., services provided by Indigenous Elders).
- Travel
  - Travel costs set out in the National Joint Council of Canada's Travel Directive (<http://www.njc-cnm.gc.ca/directive/travel-voyage/index-eng.php>) that are incurred by project staff, volunteers and contracted professionals. Examples include flight, hotel, car rental.
  - Staff and volunteer (includes Community Advisory Board members) transportation (e.g., parking, bus fare, airfare, taxi, mileage, food, accommodation)
- Capital assets
  - Eligible costs related to other capital costs (e.g. vehicles, tools, equipment, machinery, computers, and furniture for service delivery).
  - Cost of purchasing or leasing Capital Assets over \$1,000, excluding taxes, with the exception of Facilities. Under Reaching Home, this includes: furniture, appliances, and fixtures for the facilities used to carry out administrative activities.
- Other activity-related costs
  - Direct costs explicitly related to administrative activities that are not included in any other expenditure category, such as: cultural competency training, rented space to hold meetings, hospitality for meetings (including Community Advisory Board meetings), furniture costing \$1,000 or less, before taxes, printing costs, meter charge for photocopies, translation.
  - Activities to ensure the participation of people with lived experience in the Community Advisory Board or Regional Advisory Board, which may include, for example, reimbursing participation costs of a person with lived experience at a Community Advisory Board or Regional Advisory Board meeting.
  - Activities to ensure that programs and services meet the needs of Indigenous Language Communities (e.g., providing services and supports in Indigenous languages to address local Indigenous homelessness needs).

Ineligible activities include:

- International travel costs.
- Purchase of alcoholic beverages.
- Payment to Community Advisory Board members for their time to attend Community Advisory Board meetings.
- Costs associated to traffic fines and penalties.

### 3. Planning and public reporting

#### ***COVID-19 Context***

##### ***Reporting on all sub-agreements***

The approach for reporting on sub-agreements (those delegated for delivery to another organization, and those retained for direct delivery by the recipient) will be consistent regardless of whether the funding used is part of a recipient's Reaching Home regular allocation and/or funding provided under the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan.

Specifically, in 2020-21 recipients are required to submit:

- Starting in fall 2020, a **Project Details Report**, acceptable to Canada, that sets out the detailed description of the sub-agreements. These reports will describe any new sub-agreements initiated in 2020-21 or any sub-agreements amended in 2020-21. These reports will be required to indicate which sub-agreements have been allocated funding provided under the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, and in what amount; and,
- Within 60 days following March 31, 2021, where applicable depending on the activity categories for each sub-agreement, an **Annual Results Report** detailing the outputs and outcomes achieved.

Reporting project details and annual results will need to use a results reporting system provided by Canada.

## **COVID-19 Context**

### **Final report**

Recipients of funding provided under the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan will also be required to submit a Final Report 120 days following the end of the project period (March 31, 2021).

Recipients will receive a template for this final report. Where a recipient has received this funding in its capacity as a recipient under more than one Reaching Home stream, a report containing information specific to each stream must be provided.

This report will provide the following information with respect to sub-agreements (those delegated for delivery to another organization, and those retained for direct delivery by the recipient):

- A list of all organizations that received this funding;
- The locations of the delivery of their projects; and
- The amount of funding received by each organization, or retained by the recipient for direct delivery (i.e., outside of administration costs).

The report will also provide the following information for the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan project as a whole:

- Overall amount allocated on each of the following activity categories:
  - Housing services
  - Prevention and diversion
  - Direct health and medical services
  - Client support services
  - Capital investments
  - Coordination of resources and data collection
  - Administration costs retained by the recipient;
- Qualitative description of how the investment strategy for all funding (Reaching Home and COVID-19) was changed in light of the COVID-19 crisis; and,
- Qualitative description of project outcomes, successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

**Requirement:** Communities receiving funding from the Designated Communities stream<sup>17</sup> must adopt an outcomes-based approach where they work to achieve pre-determined community-level outcomes.

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<sup>17</sup> While the shift to working towards community-level outcomes is only required in Designated Communities, all regional funding streams recipients (i.e., Designated Communities, Indigenous Homelessness, Territorial

The adoption of an outcomes-based approach is not a requirement for Indigenous Homelessness stream, and the Rural and Remote Homelessness stream. However, in communities that receive funding from both the Designated Communities and Indigenous Homelessness streams, cross-stream collaboration to develop and work towards community-level outcomes is expected.

The steps to be taken to transition to an outcomes-based approach (includes work to be undertaken to implement coordinated access) must be set out in the community plan.

Communities in receipt of funding from the Territorial Homelessness stream that opt to and are supported in implementing coordinated access will be required to adopt the elements of the outcomes based approach as described below.

- Designated Communities are required to work towards the following mandatory community-level outcomes:
  - Chronic homelessness in the community is reduced.
  - Homelessness in the community is reduced overall and for specific populations
    - Communities choose as many as needed, but must include Indigenous homelessness.
  - New inflows into homelessness are reduced
  - Returns to homelessness are reduced.
- Beyond these core outcomes, communities also have the option of reporting on other community-wide outcomes that they feel would complement the core outcomes if they had the capacity to do so.
- A common set of indicators for the community-wide outcomes will be established across Designated Communities.
- With the exception of a reduction of 50% in chronic homelessness by 2027-28, communities will set their own targets for each outcome.

*Requirement:* Communities receiving funding from the Designated Communities stream must develop a community plan that includes the following components:

- An investment plan indicating the intended allocation of Reaching Home's funding towards the following activity areas:
  - Housing placement
  - Prevention and shelter diversion
  - Client support services
  - Capital investment

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Homelessness and Rural and Remote Homelessness streams) are required to report on sub-projects funded by Reaching Home.



- Coordination of resources and data collection
- The voluntary outcomes that will be reported on through the Community Homelessness Reports.
- Work that will be undertaken to design and implement coordinated access.
- Details on how the Indigenous Community Entity (where the Indigenous Homelessness and Designated Community streams co-exist) and stakeholders in the community were consulted during the development of the community plan.
- Measures to be undertaken to meet the needs of Official Language Minority Communities.
- Identification of other funding sources in the community available to address homelessness.

*Requirement:* Communities receiving funding from the Designated Communities funding stream<sup>18</sup> will be required to complete and publish annual public reports known as the Community Homelessness Reports to track their progress towards targets and outcomes. In Designated Communities where there is also an Indigenous Homelessness Community Entity, the Designated Communities Community Entity is expected to work in partnership with the Indigenous Homelessness Community Entity on the Community Homelessness Report.

#### **COVID-19 Context**

Given exceptional circumstances, communities will not have to complete a Community Homelessness Report for the period covering the 2019-20. Instead, the next scheduled report will cover both 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

- The new Community Homelessness Report will incorporate annual performance outputs, and track progress toward achieving community-wide outcomes.
- While the core components of the Community Homelessness Report will be common across communities, communities will be able to customize them to their unique needs through locally-set targets, voluntary outcomes, and qualitative narrative questions.
- A Community Homelessness Report would include 3 sections that would unlock as communities make progress in its implementation, and a By-Name List is in place long enough to measure year-over-year progress against outcomes:
  - Section 1 – Communities report on progress in implementing coordinated access through a self-assessment checklist.
  - Section 2 – Communities report on annual performance output.

<sup>18</sup> Does not include Indigenous Community Entities that may receive a portion of the Designated Community funding stream or those who receive their full funding amount under the Indigenous Homelessness funding stream.

- Section 3 – Communities report on progress towards community-wide outcomes.

#### 4. Coordinated Access

*Requirement:* All Designated Communities are required to have a coordinated access system in place by March 31, 2022.

##### **COVID-19 Context**

Recognizing communities may not be focusing their efforts on Coordinated Access implementation because of COVID-19, we encourage all communities to nonetheless take any actions they can to coordinate services.

*What is a coordinated access system?*

A coordinated access system is the process by which individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness are directed to community-level access points where trained workers use a common assessment tool to evaluate the individual or family's depth of need, prioritize them for housing support services, and then help to match them to available housing focused interventions.

Quality coordinated access systems share several features, including a centralized database that collects and displays real-time data on clients and available housing and supports; clear access points of entry; common assessment; standardized protocols; and resources (e.g., staff) focused on ensuring that people can connect with appropriate housing and housing supports in an efficient manner.

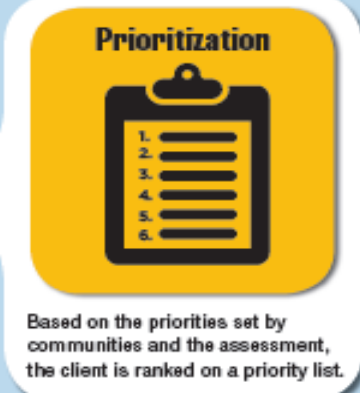
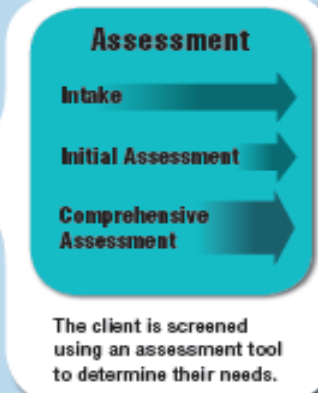
Definitions:

- *Access* – the engagement point for the individual or family experiencing a housing crisis. This may include emergency shelters, mobile outreach teams, day centres, other community-based organizations and hotlines;
- *Assessment* – the process of gathering information about an individual or family accessing the crisis system;
- *Prioritization* – the process of determining the individual's or family's priority for housing based on information gathered through the assessment; and,
- *Matching and Referral* – the process whereby the individual or family is matched to and offered housing based on project-specific eligibility, needs and preferences.

# What is Coordinated Access?

Coordinated Access (CA) is a process through which individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, are provided access to housing and support services, based on a standardized set of procedures for client intake, assessment of need, and matching and referral to housing.

## Coordinated Access Process



## Coordinated Access: Key Objectives

1. Help communities ensure fairness and prioritize people most in need of assistance.
2. Help more people move through the system faster.
3. Reduce the number of new entries into homelessness.
4. Improve data collection and quality.



## Data Collection & Management

A key function of Coordinated Access is ongoing data collection and management.



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Canada

### *Why require Designated Communities to implement a coordinated access system?*

Under a coordinated access system, service providers shift from delivering services to clients they know to clients that the community has prioritized. Through a common information management tool that provides real-time, person-specific information, and allows for the triaging of clients in need based on the community's priority populations and acuity assessments, service providers with an opening will defer to a common list of clients. For clients, this integration can result in more effective and timely access to housing and housing supports, as regardless of where someone first seeks services, access is based on vulnerability, eligibility and choice.

For the community, coordinated access is a key element in moving towards an integrated systems approach with a common decision-making process and common goals, rather than a collection of service providers making individual decisions. It helps to highlight areas where there are gaps in services, reduces service duplication, and overall allows for seamless service delivery for individuals.

Coordinated access is also the means by which communities will be able to implement an outcomes-based approach. Shifting towards coordinated access means that Designated Communities will gather more comprehensive data on their local homeless population. In time, communities will be able to establish baselines against which progress toward important outcomes—like the reduction of chronic homelessness—can be measured. This will allow Designated Communities to identify trends so they can share successes and determine where more focus is warranted.

### Roles and Responsibilities

Planning for coordinated access should take place through an inclusive community process that includes representatives from all key stakeholder groups, such as housing providers, Indigenous service providers, and people with lived experience. As major funders to homelessness-serving systems, provincial/territorial and municipal governments should also be included in the planning process to help ensure program alignment. A coordinated access planning group could be, for instance, a stand-alone body or a sub-committee of the Community Entity and/or Community Advisory Board.

When building a coordinated access system, communities will need to identify a lead to manage implementation and operationalization of the coordinated access system. This should be an organization positioned and supported by system participants to provide oversight, guidance, monitoring and evaluation and the development of the coordinated access system policies and procedures. While the Community Entity supported by the Community Advisory

Board would be well-positioned to undertake this process, it will be at the discretion of each community to identify a lead.

The implementation of coordinated access is not a one size fits all process. As such, it will be a community-led initiative where Designated Communities will have flexibility to establish a system that works best for their local needs. However, to help fully realize the benefits of coordinated access, a number of minimum requirements have been identified. Within the minimum requirements, Designated Communities will have flexibility to implement a system that responds to their unique needs.

### Minimum requirements

#### ***Coverage***

*Requirement:* Coordinated access process must be implemented throughout the geographic area covered by a Designated Community.

- For Designated Communities with very large geographic areas, referral zones or subdivisions could be established to better match program enrollment to client location. This would help avoid forcing persons to travel or move long distances to be assessed or served, unless they would prefer housing options outside their current referral zone.

*Requirement:* In communities that receive funding from both the Designated Communities and Indigenous Homelessness streams, cross-stream engagement on the design and use of the coordinated access approach is expected.

- Where one Community Entity is responsible for delivering both streams, the Community Entity will be responsible to engage with the Community Advisory Board(s) and Indigenous service providers as they are critical partners in a community's efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness, and their participation in coordinated access is essential to its success.
- Where the streams are delivered by distinct Community Entities, it is expected that the Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards of both streams will engage in the planning and implementation of coordinated access in order to support active participation of all service providers. In addition, co-planning with the streams will also help facilitate appropriate and culturally sensitive referrals to the Community Entities administering the Indigenous Homelessness streams.

*Requirement:* Reaching Home requires all projects receiving funding from the Designated Communities stream to participate in the coordinated access system. This includes, but is not

limited to, emergency shelters, transitional housing providers, outreach teams, and supportive housing providers.

- Any partner or community agency within the homeless serving system not in receipt of Reaching Home funding should be encouraged to participate in coordinated access.

*Requirement:* Reaching Home funded projects providing housing placement (e.g., rapid rehousing, transitional housing, supportive housing) and associated supports (e.g., case management) must receive referrals and fill vacancies through the coordinated access process.

- Projects which have multiple funding sources may have program requirements imposed on them by other funders, and as such, are encouraged but will not be required to assign all housing vacancies to the clients assessed through the coordinated access process.

### ***Governance operating model***

*Requirement:* Communities are required to build an appropriate governance operating model to exercise proper leadership for the planning, implementation and ongoing management of the coordinated access system. This includes identifying a lead organization to manage implementation and operationalization of the coordinated access system

- The determination of a governance model can involve consultations between the Community Entity and the Community Advisory Board. It may also involve, for instance, the establishment of working groups composed of various stakeholders focused on identifying the governance model that would work best for the community.

*Requirement:* Communities must develop policies and procedures outlining how the coordinated access process operates (e.g. the process for evaluating individuals' eligibility for assistance). The purpose of the policies and procedures is to help govern the operation of coordinated access and should be made publicly available, if requested.

At a minimum, the following policies and procedures must be developed:

1. Standard assessment procedures, including documentation of a set of criteria to support uniform decision-making across access points.
2. List of prioritization factors and assessment procedures (e.g., acuity assessment form, functional impairments including physical disabilities) with which prioritization decisions are made.
3. Referral procedures, including standardized criteria by which a participating project may justify rejecting a referral; and

4. Protocols for obtaining participant consent to retain and share information for purposes of assessing and referring participants.

### **Access**

*Requirement:* There must be an established and agreed upon intake procedure for the entry of individuals and families into the system.

- This is accomplished by establishing clear access points, i.e., the places – either virtual or physical – where an individual or family in need of assistance engages with coordinated access services.

*Requirement:* Access points must be easily accessed by individuals and families seeking homeless or homelessness prevention services.

- Access points can be centralized or decentralized – or a combination thereof. The choice of approach is up to the community, with recognition that it is common that the approach may change or evolve over time. Various factors would be considered when choosing which method is best for a community.
  - Centralized model: uses one entry location where people at risk of or experiencing homelessness are assessed to determine the best resources for their specific needs. This entry can be by telephone or physical location. The location may serve all populations or there may be separate locations for each subpopulation (e.g., youth). Two examples of a centralized approach are: (1) a service hub that people who are homeless physically need to go to in order to complete an intake and assessment of current needs, and this is commonly where the referral and matching to housing programs occurs; and, (2) a dedicated phone number that anyone seeking assistance needs to call to be assessed during initial remote intake.
  - Decentralized model: uses multiple coordinated locations (physical, virtual or both) throughout the community that offer assessments and referrals. Sites can be operated by one agency or by different agencies. Each site has equal access to the same set of resources. Two examples of a decentralized approach are: (1) mobile outreach where the outreach worker can complete intake and assessment in the field; (2) a “no wrong door” approach where a person or family experiencing homelessness can go to any homeless serving organization to be assessed and complete initial intake.
  - Hybrid model: uses elements of both the centralized and decentralized model. An example of a hybrid model is the use of dedicated phone number as the first point of entry to screen calls from individuals and/or families experiencing or at risk of homelessness and then to refer them to a lead agency for further assessments and referrals.

*Requirement:* All people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness must have equitable access to coordinated access sites, regardless of the way that sites are organized in the community. This includes, but is not limited to, people experiencing chronic homelessness, youth, Indigenous peoples, veterans and families.

- While there will be equitable access for anyone who may be experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness, specialized access points may exist for subpopulations including youth, Indigenous peoples and survivors of domestic violence.

*Requirement:* Individuals may not be denied access to the coordinated access process because of perceived barriers to housing or services (e.g., income, drug or alcohol use).

- Wherever possible, individuals and families should be diverted from homelessness.
  - Diversion is a tool used to prevent the use of emergency shelters by providing individualized supports before families and individuals enter the shelter system. As described in an Alliance to End Homelessness best practice brief, diversion programs help people seeking shelter, “to identify immediate alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connect them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing”.<sup>19</sup>
  - Diversion is not saying ‘no’ to sheltering people that have exhausted alternative housing options. Rather, diversion works to prevent people from accessing an emergency shelter where other housing options can be explored and ensures shelters beds are used as a resource only when absolutely necessary.

## **Assessment**

*Requirement:* All coordinated access locations and methods (e.g., phone, in-person) must offer the same assessment approach using uniform decision making processes.

- The assessment component of coordinated access can be completed at a single interview, or it may be completed in phases, where partial information is collected on an as-needed basis as participants navigate the process. For example, the initial triage could be used to gather information on the individual’s immediate needs. This could be followed by an initial assessment to identify a participant’s housing and support needs. The final step could be a comprehensive assessment, which will be used to gather the information necessary to refine, clarify, and verify a participant’s housing and homeless history, barriers, goals, and preferences.

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<sup>19</sup> Taken from, National Alliance to End Homelessness. *Closing the Front Door: Creating a Successful Diversion Program for Homeless Families*. 2011. <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/closing-the-front-door-creating-a-successful-diversion-program-for-homeless> (accessed October 2012).



*Requirement:* Communities must use a common assessment tool for all population groups (e.g. youth, women fleeing violence, Indigenous Peoples) so that there is a shared approach to understanding of people's depth of need. However, the questions and approaches used to conduct the assessment can be adjusted for specific populations (e.g., a conversational approach rather than an interview-like approach may be more appropriate for Indigenous clients).

- Acuity assessment tools can be used to understand the level of need among those experiencing homelessness.
- Communities are responsible for selecting the assessment tool that works best for them, based on local needs and priorities as well as their approach to coordinated access. Any tool used for coordinated access should have, to the greatest extent possible, the following qualities:<sup>20</sup>
  1. Tested, valid, and appropriate
  2. Reliable (provide consistent results)
  3. Person-centered (focused on resolving the person's needs, instead of filling project vacancies)
  4. User-friendly for both the person being assessed and the assessor
  5. Strengths-based (focused on the person's barriers to and strengths for obtaining sustainable housing)
  6. Housing First-oriented (focused on rapidly housing participants without preconditions)
  7. Sensitive to lived experiences (culturally and situationally sensitive, focused on reducing trauma and harm)
  8. Transparent in the relationship between the questions being asked and the potential options for housing and support services
- Assessment tools may not produce the entire body of information necessary to determine an individual or family's needs and prioritization, either because of the nature of self-reporting, or circumstances outside the scope of assessment (e.g., manner in which an individual responds to challenges, circumstances of their lived experience). For this reason, it may be beneficial to collect additional information as needed (e.g., demographic, background, current situation, preferences) and/or review the approach being used for the assessment. For example: assessments conducted with clients could lead to greater information sharing and experiences if the assessor assigned to the client is part of the same population group (e.g. visible minorities, Indigenous people). Engagement with key

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<sup>20</sup> Taken from, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, [Backgrounder: Information on Common Assessment Tools](http://caeh.ca/wp-content/uploads/BACKGROUNDER-Information-on-common-assessment-tools.pdf), <http://caeh.ca/wp-content/uploads/BACKGROUNDER-Information-on-common-assessment-tools.pdf>.

stakeholder groups to help inform the assessment questions and approach for the different local population groups is encouraged.

### **Prioritization**

*Requirement:* Prioritization is established through a series of triaging factors, including but not limited to an acuity assessment score from the common assessment tool. It is also important to note, that only information relevant to factors listed in the coordinated access written policies and procedures may be used to make prioritization decisions.

- Beyond the acuity assessment score, other prioritizing factors taken into consideration include, but are not limited to: length and history of homelessness, current sleeping arrangements, health status, vulnerability to victimization, household type, number of children and/or pregnancy, youth and seniors, and veteran and Indigenous status.
- For example, priority populations could include:
  - People with greater depth of need who are experiencing chronic homelessness.
  - People who are highly vulnerable and have multiple disabilities (mental health, substance abuse issues), and people who have exhausted most of their sheltering options.
- The priorities established for one population group (e.g., singles) will likely be different than the priorities established for any other population group (e.g., families, youth).
- There are three main approaches to operationalizing the prioritization of individuals and families. Communities have the flexibility to select which of the three approaches works best for their local needs.
  - Frequent service user approach: participants are prioritized based upon the volume of service (emergency and/or homeless response) they currently use.
  - Descending acuity approach: prioritization relies solely on an acuity (depth of need) score.
  - Universal service management approach: a number of co-occurring variables can be considered at the same time to customize a prioritization approach that matches housing and support resources to those experiencing homelessness.

*Requirement:* In order to manage prioritization for referral and placement in a housing program, communities must maintain a priority list.

- A priority list generally provides persons by name or identification code, and it serves as the reference for the referral process. Those identified on the priority list have gone through

the assessment process. Communities can choose between maintaining a single priority list with all known homeless persons, or having separate lists by sub-population (e.g., youth, Indigenous peoples, families).

*Requirement:* As part of the planning process, communities must establish a set of prioritization criteria for each project type (e.g., rapid rehousing, supportive housing).

- For example, a community may determine that the highest priority for permanent supportive housing could be given to those who meet the definition of chronically homeless and have the highest service needs.

### ***Matching and referral***

*Requirement:* Referral to housing services must be made based on prioritization guidelines, project-specific eligibility requirements (e.g., age restrictions, geographic location) and the specific needs and preferences of the client.

- The referral process is essentially a match that coordinated access makes between the needs and prioritization of the individual or family experiencing homelessness and available housing services. In referral, the individual with the highest priority is offered housing and support services first.
- Communities will determine which matching process works best for them. Primarily they need to decide between a case conferencing model, or a short-list model.

*Requirement:* Referral must remain person-centred allowing participants self-determination and choice without repercussions or consequences, other than the natural consequences that occur with choice (e.g., clients who refuse a housing placement would maintain their spot on the priority list).

- Referral to a receiving program does not signify admission to that program. Rather, the receiving program may carry out its own intake process, including but not limited to an application, verification process, and admission decision. This would not impact positioning on a priority list.

*Requirement:* Methods of dealing with referral challenges, concerns or disagreements such as refusal of various referrals must be in place.

### ***Homelessness Management Information System***

*Requirement:* The use of HIFIS will be mandatory in all Designated Communities where an equivalent Homelessness Management Information System is not already being used.

- An equivalent Homelessness Management Information System must meet the following requirements:
  - Allow service providers to participate in the coordinated access system;
  - The ability to support communities to undertake the intake of clients, the prioritization of clients based on pre-established criteria, and the triaging and referring of clients to housing and housing-related supports; and,
  - The capacity to export the same mandatory anonymized data fields to ESDC as required with HIFIS.

*Requirement:* In all Designated Communities, Community Entities must develop a set of local agreements to manage privacy, data sharing, and client consent in compliance to municipal, provincial and federal laws. This may include the following:

- A Data Sharing Agreement, signed by each participating service provider that outlines a common understanding of what information is to be shared and why, detailing privacy and security protocol decisions, the quality of data to be provided, data entry protocols and relevant data management practices; and,
- A consent form, an agreement between the client and the service provider that provides consent on retaining and sharing of the individual's data.

*Requirement:* Community Entities that operate with HIFIS are required to sign a Data Provision Agreement and an End-user License Agreement with ESDC. Community Entities that operate with an equivalent Homelessness Management Information System other than HIFIS are required to sign a Data Sharing Agreement with ESDC.

- The Data Provision Agreement and Data Sharing Agreement are agreements between ESDC and Community Entities that authorizes ESDC's quarterly collection of certain non-identifiable data fields in return for the use of HIFIS.
- The End-user Licence Agreement is a legal agreement between the End-User, and the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada who owns all right, title and interest in HIFIS and all corresponding intellectual property associated with the software and the Program.

*Requirement:* In all Designated Communities, Community Entities must setup a governance structure to oversee decisions related to implementing and maintaining HIFIS and the data collected. This may include the following:

- Identify participating service providers;
- Create a terms of references;
- Develop policies and protocols; and,
- Address data-related issues regarding legal, privacy, and the integrity of data collection.

*Requirement:* All Community Entities must access a server and establish corresponding security and safeguards to secure the data collected. This may include the following:

- Securing an IT professional to establish and oversee server and security infrastructure; and,
- Establishing policies and protocols regarding data management and access rights.

## **5. Local Governance and Community Advisory Boards**

The Community Advisory Board (Designated Communities or Indigenous Homelessness Funding stream) or Regional Advisory Board is the local organizing committee responsible for setting direction for addressing homelessness in the community or region. The Community Advisory Board is expected to coordinate efforts to address homelessness in a community, and is

### **COVID-19 Context**

#### ***Local Governance of Reaching Home in the COVID-19 Context***

While communication between Community Entities and Community/Regional Advisory Boards is expected to continue during the COVID-19, the form of this engagement may vary between communities given that the outbreak demands decisive and rapid action. Using email, or holding virtual or teleconference meetings, may be the most appropriate form of communication.

#### ***Guidance specific to incremental funding provided under the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan***

Note that, with respect to the incremental funding provided as part of the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, the regular requirement that a fair and accountable process when procuring goods and services, involving soliciting a minimum of three bids or proposals, is not required where it is determined that this would inhibit the rapid investment of funding to meet urgent needs. The Community Entity should keep a written rationale of this decision.

Ideally, even where such a process is waived, the Community/Regional Advisory Board would endorse the Community Entity's proposed approach regarding the use of these funds and specific allocations for sub-agreements. This can include providing a blanket approval of an approach to address emerging and urgent needs related to COVID-19, or could include agreeing on specific sub-agreements.

That said, recognizing that funding may need to be invested on an urgent basis, the regular requirement that a Community Entity approve and enter into sub-agreements based on the recommendations of the Community/Regional Advisory Board is waived. Where this occurs, however, the Community Entity at minimum must keep the Community/Regional Advisory Board Chair(s) updated on a regular basis of decisions that have been taken such as through regular emails.

***Guidance specific to the reallocation of base Reaching Home funding to COVID-19 responses***

Recipients may wish to reallocate a portion their base Reaching Home funding to support their COVID-19 response. These investments responded to previously identified priorities included in the Community Plan (where applicable), and Community/Regional Advisory Boards played a significant role in selecting projects. As a result, Community Entities are required to seek endorsement from their Community/Regional Advisory Boards to reallocate funds across projects, reallocate funds to a new project, or to make amendments that would significantly change an existing project's objectives.

The form that this endorsement takes is to be determined at the community/regional level, such as email concurrence from a sufficient number of members to meet the quorum requirements, or from the Community/Regional Advisory Board chair(s).

***Guidance specific to new Designated Communities introduced in 2020-21***

Recognizing the urgency of the COVID-19 outbreak and that formal Community Advisory Boards may not yet be established, the community planning process can be deferred in new Designated Communities until 2021-22.

If the development of a Community Plan is deferred until 2021-22, Community Entities can fund sub-agreements for up to one-year in duration. A Community Plan will be required to support investments from 2021-22 to 2023-24. Communities are encouraged to begin their planning process in 2020-21 to avoid the potential for a disruption in services in 2021-22.

Community Entities are encouraged to leverage existing local governance tables and relevant stakeholders by, for example, using email, or holding virtual or teleconference meetings, to ensure they are engaging relevant community organizations before funding specific sub-agreements.

**Roles and responsibilities**

The Community Advisory Board is responsible for the following key areas:

- Helping to guide the development of the Community Plan and provide official approval.
  - To this effect, the Community Advisory Board is responsible for engaging with key community organizations and individuals, including Indigenous, in the community beyond the homeless serving sector and gather all available information related to the community's local homelessness priorities, and develop a coordinated approach to addressing homelessness in their community.

- Assess and recommend projects for funding to the Community Entity.
  - The Community Advisory Board is expected to undergo this process with a comprehensive understanding of the local homelessness priorities in their community.
  - Members must recuse themselves in situations where they have ties to proposed projects.
- Being representative of the community.
  - The Community Advisory Board is responsible for recruiting members, and is expected to ensure that its composition has broad and inclusive representation.
- Supporting Community Entities in the planning and implementation of coordinated access.
- Approving the Community Homelessness Report.

### Composition

The composition of the Community Advisory Board is expected to be reflective of the homeless population groups within the local community (e.g., youth, Indigenous peoples and survivors of domestic violence) including those with lived experience of homelessness. Depending on the local homeless population, it may be appropriate to have separate Indigenous Community Advisory Board representation for Inuit, First Nations and Métis people.

- Participation on the Community Advisory Board is especially encouraged from:
  - Individuals with lived experience of homelessness;
  - Indigenous people and organizations, Friendship Centres; Indigenous housing organizations;
  - Youth and youth serving organizations, including Child Welfare agencies;
  - Organizations serving women/families fleeing violence;
  - Organizations serving seniors;
  - Newcomer serving organizations;
  - The private sector;
  - Police and correctional services;
  - Landlord associations and/or the housing sector;
  - Health organizations, including hospitals and other public institutions, and organizations focused on mental health and addictions; and,
  - Veteran Affairs Canada or Veterans-serving organizations.
- Community Advisory Boards ex-officio representation to include Service Canada and the Community Entity who will advise on program eligibility requirements, and guide the Community Advisory Board where significant changes to the program are introduced.



- Provincial/territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments who will 1) act as a resource for information on existing policies and programs, 2) provide guidance to ensure complementarity between federal and existing investments and 3) keep the their respective organization apprised of developments at the community-level (i.e. re Call for Proposals, list of projects to be funded, etc.). The voting status of these members should be agreed to at the community-level.
- Where 2 different Community Advisory Boards are within the same community, it is expected that at least 1 Community Advisory Board seat is available for the alternate Community Entity or Community Advisory Board member to promote collaboration and alignment among priorities. The voting status of these members should be agreed to at the community-level.

### Governance

The Community Advisory Board is responsible for developing terms of reference and other policies and procedures central to the functions of the Community Advisory Board, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Formalized procedures for addressing, real and/or perceived Conflicts of Interests, including the membership of any elected municipal officials;
- Formalized procedures for assessing, and recommending project proposals for federal funding under the Reaching Home;
- Identification of exclusive and shared responsibilities among Community Advisory Boards and Community Entities;
- A formalized engagement strategy on how the Community Advisory Board intends to have broad representation, and coordinate partnerships with key community organizations and individuals; and,
- Membership terms and conditions, including recruitment processes, length of tenure, attendance requirements, and/or any delegated tasks.

## 6. Requirements related to capital projects

### **COVID-19 Context**

There are no modifications to this directive.

*Requirement:* If a community is going to invest in a capital project, the community and project sponsor must demonstrate they have done the following:

- *Linking with the Province or Territory:* Efforts should be made to link with provincial, territorial or municipal funding. It is important to provide evidence of the need to purchase, construct, or renovate facilities and to ensure that the community is best placed to undertake the capital project.<sup>21</sup> This should be demonstrated through the *Reaching Home Sustainability Checklist for Applicants of Capital Investment Projects*<sup>22</sup>. Reaching Home funds can be used to complement other capital investments made by a province, territory or municipality. However, Reaching Home funding must not duplicate or displace funding from other programs (should be used to fill a gap in these instances).
- *Encouraging leveraging:* Where possible, communities are encouraged to ensure that Reaching Home is not the sole funder in capital projects. For capital projects consisting of new construction or purchase of facilities, the community is required to record the in-kind and financial contributions of each capital investment sub-project funded under Reaching Home.
- *Ensuring sustainability:* Capital projects require a sustainability plan in which organizations must demonstrate their capacity to operate the facility for its intended purpose for a minimum period of up to 5 years after project completion. Applicants must identify all relevant funding sources for the operation of the facility and/or new services through their application documents. As capital projects funded under Reaching Home should lead to new or improved services after their completion, an exit strategy is unacceptable for capital projects.
- In their sustainability plan, organizations must:
  - describe their partnerships;

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<sup>21</sup> Exclusions on capital do not apply as modern treaty holders eligible for Reaching Home funding may also have authority for housing under agreements defining nation-to-nation or Inuit to Crown relationships.

<sup>22</sup> The *Reaching Home Sustainability Checklist and Guide for Applicants of Capital Investment Projects* and the accompanying *Reaching Home Tool to Assist in Developing a Capital Project* have been developed to assist applicants. Both are available through your Service Canada representative.

- confirm their funding sources for ongoing operations;
- report if the project will increase the level of services or if they will remain stable; and
- include a timeline for the completion of their activities.

*Requirement:* As part of the application process for a sub-project, capital project applicants must follow the Sustainability Checklist in order to demonstrate that the minimum project sustainability standards have been addressed.

- Applicants seeking capital funding under the regionally delivered funding streams (Designated Communities; Rural and Remote Homelessness; Territorial Stream and Indigenous Homelessness Stream) are required to complete the checklist as part of any proposal to create or expand a facility which could result in increased annual operational costs. The sustainability checklist can also be used to assess sustainability in capital projects that do not incur increased annual operational costs (e.g. equipment purchase or renovations in a facility where no space, beds or units are added or no service is created or expanded).
- Communities are responsible to review the checklist completed by applicants through the solicitation or proposals, as part of the assessment process.

*Requirement:* As Reaching Home allocations are annual, multi-year projects must be managed (expensed) on a fiscal year basis.

*Requirement:* Applicable to organizations which own a property or have a long-term lease, capital renovation projects may be subject to monitoring for up to 5 years after the project end-date to ensure recipients are compliant with the terms of their funding agreement with Employment and Social Development Canada.

- Service Canada monitors capital investments for emerging issues and may ask for course correction as needed.

## 7. Official Language Minority Communities

### **COVID-19 Context**

There are no modifications to this directive.

The Government of Canada has a responsibility under the Official Languages Act to ensure that programs and services meet the needs of Official Language Minority Communities.<sup>23</sup>

*Requirement:* Community Advisory Boards and Community Entities are expected to identify OLMCs within their community and ensure that appropriate services and supports are available in both official languages where there is significant demand<sup>24</sup>.

- The Official Language Minority Communities should be considered in the development and implementation of the Community Plan to ensure the needs of these populations are assessed and that appropriate measures are put in place to address those needs.

*Requirement:* The role of the Community Advisory Board and Community Entity includes the following steps:

- Identify the Official Language Minority Community in the community within the homeless population targeted by Reaching Home (supported by data, where available);
- Engage the Official Language Minority Community to ensure they are involved in the planning and implementation of the community's overall approach to homelessness;
- Assess the specific needs of the Official Language Minority Community to determine the nature of homelessness services required to address those needs

*Requirement:* When an Official Language Minority Community is identified and the assessment indicates additional and specific needs for that group, the community (Community Advisory Board and Community Entity) must have a plan in place to ensure these needs are appropriately addressed. The following principles will guide the development of a plan to address the Official Language Minority Community needs and ensure a minimum of substantive equality:

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<sup>23</sup> While there is no official definition for an Official Language Minority Community, it is commonly recognized as a term that designates a population group of varying sizes that live and express themselves in an official language other than that which is of primary use in the province.

<sup>24</sup> The definition of "significant demand" is found in *Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations* (<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-92-48/page-1.html>). It is commonly defined as a situation where the OLMC represents 5% of the population in the community.

- **Formal Equality:** is achieved when members of the official language minority community and those of the majority community are treated the same way by providing identical services in English and French;
- **Substantive Equality:** is achieved by taking into consideration the specific needs of the minority community by providing activities or services with different content or using a different delivery method to ensure that the minority receives services of the same quality as the majority

*Requirement:* In accordance with the Community Entity funding agreement, the Community Entity is responsible for the following activities related to support for official languages (Schedule C, section 6, 6.1):

- 6.1 The Recipient shall:
  - a. make Project-related documentation and announcements available (for the public and prospective Project participants, if any) in both official languages;
  - b. actively offer Project-related services in both official languages;
  - c. encourage members of both official language communities to participate in the Project; and
  - d. provide its services, where appropriate, in such a manner as to address the needs of both official language communities

**Note:** The Community Entity (i.e. the Recipient) must ensure these criteria are considered in the planning and selection of sub-projects where Official Language Minority Communities have been identified.

Communities must have a plan in place to ensure that the mix of sub-projects they fund enables the community to provide service to the Official Language Minority Community that is of substantively equal quality to the service provided to the majority Official Language population.

The Community Entities should be able to demonstrate how the needs of both Official Language communities were considered in the development of the Community Plan (or annual Community Plan update) and the assessment and selection of projects funded under Reaching Home.

In the event where the Community Entities initial plan to meet the Official Language Minority Community requirements is not achieved, the Community Entity must have an alternate plan to demonstrate how the needs of the Official Language Minority Community will be met.

This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, for example:

- in advance of a solicitation of proposals process, the Community Advisory Board/Community Entity can decide how the Official Language Minority Community needs will be incorporated into the project selection and/or assessment of proposals process;
- through a partnership agreement between/amongst organizations; and
- through coordination of existing project-related services in the community that are already well-established and readily accessible

The Community Advisory Board and Community Entity are encouraged to work with local Service Canada representatives in the application of this directive.