



Affordable Housing and Homelessness in the Comox Valley Briefing Note

Produced by: The Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness - a collective of local agencies, advisors and friends to plan, coordinate, recommend and implement responses to homelessness – www.cvhousing.ca

Prepared for: Federal candidates in North Island – Powell River and Courtenay-Alberni ridings

Purpose: To inform candidates about the issues related to housing and homelessness in the Comox Valley including how federal government policy can contribute to alleviating the housing crisis.

Background: In 2015, concerned local community agencies and individuals formed a coalition to create action to address the lack of supportive and affordable housing in the Comox Valley. The same year, the CVRD held a binding referendum asking if voters would pay at least \$5 on their taxes to support local initiatives to help address homelessness. Courtenay, Cumberland and the three electoral areas of the CVRD voted. Comox, Hornby and Denman Islands were not included. 53% were in favour of the Homelessness Supports Service tax allowing the CVRD to fund local affordable housing initiatives based on the Coalition's 5 Year Plan. Decisions are approved by the CVRD board on an annual basis. Comox has found another way to support the Coalition's recommendations to address homelessness through their 5 Year Plan. Since 2015, 131 units of affordable housing have been built and funded in part through this fund.

www.cvhousing.ca/the-5-year-plan

Rental housing is considered affordable when rent costs and utility fees are 30% or less than a household's pre-tax income.¹ Since 2015, despite some successes on part of the Coalition, housing options have been reduced and homelessness has increased. Right now, in the Comox Valley homelessness affects *all* populations so there is a need for housing across the continuum, from supportive housing to affordable rentals.

In 2017, the provincial government announced investments in supportive housing and the federal government announced a National Housing Strategy with some future funding for housing. In 2018, the provincial government included further investments recognizing the housing crisis in all areas of BC and providing an opportunity for all levels of governments to partner with communities to secure much need housing. In 2018, the Coalition engaged residents of the Comox Valley in discussions about their affordable housing needs. www.cvhousing.ca/affordable-housing-benefits-everyone-project/

Current Situation in the Comox Valley²

- 117 homeless (68 absolute and 49 hidden)
- 32% of homeless are Indigenous
- 6% of homeless are youth (0-24 years), 65% are 25-64 years and 29% are seniors 55+ yrs (*up 12% since 2016*)
- 40 emergency shelter beds, 59 supportive housing units, 76 transitional housing units, 730 subsidized housing units and 185 low cost rentals in Comox Valley³
- 45.4% of renter households spend 35% or more on housing costs⁴
- 2017 rental vacancy rate was 2.7%⁵ with a 0% vacancy rate on 3 bedroom apartments
- There was a 13% overall increase in 2 bedroom rental rates and a 15% increase in single family home prices from 2011-2016⁶ while there was a 4% increase in family income over the same period

¹ CMHC www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/developing-and-renovating/develop-new-affordable-housing/programs-and-information/about-affordable-housing-in-canada

² 2016 & 2018 Comox Valley Point in Time Reports – Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness www.cvhousing.ca/2018-point-in-time-count-report/

³ Coalition to End Homelessness 5 Year Plan www.cvhousing.ca/the-5-year-plan/

⁴ http://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#comp_cd

⁵ <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/data-and-research/data-tables/rental-market>

⁶ Vancouver Island Real Estate Board Market Statistics www.vireb.com/index.php?

Recommendations (adapted from Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the CHRA Indigenous Housing Caucus, the Cooperative Housing Federation of Canada)

1. **Provide federal leadership to support collaboration** on housing between federal, provincial, municipal, Indigenous governments while maintaining current housing and homelessness programs and policies (*including those designed to keep housing affordable for vulnerable and low-income people*).
 - This includes the right to housing legislation; the “National Housing Strategy Act”, and the accountability measures that protect this right.
2. **Recognize homelessness as a violation of human rights and committing to addressing it as such**, eliminating it in the shortest possible time.
 - An estimated 235,000 Canadians will experience homelessness this year at an estimated cost of \$7 billion. In the National Housing Strategy Act, the government has committed to the progressive realization of the right to housing which means priority in housing policy must be given to vulnerable groups and those in greatest need of housing.
3. **Increase support and funding for programs aimed towards individuals with complex needs**, such as those who require supports to remain housed and live independently, or those transitioning from homelessness.
4. **Increase the supply of housing for all populations** (*families, women, people with disabilities, seniors, single adults etc.*) through;
 - increased social housing using innovative models (such as co-operative housing)
 - an expanded toolkit of programs and policy options designed to increase access to capital
 - changed mandate of the Federal Lands Initiative so that greater amounts of surplus land and buildings can be made available for community housing purposes.
5. **Protect the existing supply of affordable community housing** by providing;
 - funding for renewal and rehabilitation of existing housing
 - long-term renewal of rental assistance
 - increased subsidies for low-income households
6. **Develop a distinct housing strategy for Indigenous peoples living in urban and rural centres** as 87% of Indigenous people live in these settings.
 - dedicate funding for Indigenous housing
 - involvement of urban, rural, and northern Indigenous people in planning and governance of their housing issues that reflects the spirit and intent of Truth and Reconciliation
7. **Develop a distinctive strategy for Rural & Remote communities** on the importance of preventing, reducing and ending homelessness. Rural & Remote communities represent a third of the Canadian population.
 - increase federal investments in rural and remote specific research
 - funding for programs and policies promoting solutions to tackling rural and remote homelessness
 - addressing and defining hidden homelessness in rural and remote communities

Questions

If elected, how will you:

- Provide leadership to end homelessness and address the housing crisis?
- Commit to legislation that enshrines housing as a human right?
- Increase the supply of housing for all populations and protect our existing supply of affordable housing?
- Address the housing needs of Indigenous peoples living in urban and rural settings?
- Address the housing needs of rural and remote communities?

Contact: Andrea Cupelli, Coordinator, CVCEH - comoxvalleyhousing@gmail.com

Endorsed By: Comox Valley Community Health Network

