

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday, September 17, 2013

Dr. John Rook
President and CEO

Thank you very much Alan. The theme of this year's annual report is Head and Heart. The reason this theme was chosen is because you need both to implement Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. To reach our goals requires solid data, innovative research, in-depth analysis, strategic decision making and focused investment of resources. Clear thinking. The head. Achieving our goals also requires connecting with people who are struggling and helping them to heal, to have hope and to trust. Compassion and persistence. The heart.

We are now in year six of the 10 Year Plan. From an intellectual perspective, we've made significant progress and learned a lot. At the start, we brought on rapid rehousing programs to provide Housing First programs for many people. As we've learned more, we've directed limited resources to the most vulnerable. Our priority is people who have been homeless a long time or go in and out of homelessness frequently. We also prioritize Aboriginal people, families, youth and women. Research on housing and support for these sub-populations helps us build better Housing First programs.

We also knew the overall system was disconnected. As a community, we defined each of the services and agreed to outcomes for the programs and for the whole system. And to track this system, an IT infrastructure was built called the Homeless Management Information System. It has grown to serve 30 agencies and 90 programs with 700 users – from our knowledge the most comprehensive system in North America. What this means is we know more about homelessness in Calgary than ever before.

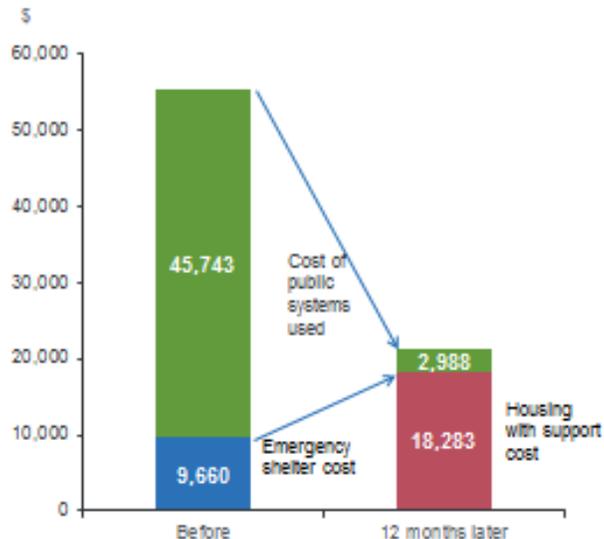
When I think of ending homelessness, I actually think of system flow.

- a system that effectively helps those most in need
- a system that is easy to navigate
- a system that is coordinated
- a system where we can prove the return on investment
- a system where we constantly course correct

Last year, we provided housing with support to 759 individuals. These individuals were in permanent supportive housing and housing with intense supports, so they were complex people. One of the promises of Housing First is that these individuals when stably housed and supported would use public systems less. Overall the data showed that with this group there was:

- a 45% reduction in police interactions
- a 95% reduction in incarcerations
- a 62% reduction in hospital stays
- a 47% reduction in EMS use
- and a 33% reduction in ER visits.

Housing First cost savings



Proving cost savings is critical to both our public and private funders, all of whom expect a return on investment, so we dug deeper. We took a sample of 72 high acuity clients. While this group of people have complex needs, they are not necessarily the Million Dollar Murrays who cost upwards of \$100,000 per year in emergency and system use.

Before we provided housing with support these individuals were in emergency shelters full time, which costs just under \$10,000 a year. Their average use of public systems (such as hospital stays, ambulances, emergency rooms, jails, police and courts) cost nearly \$46,000 per year.

Two interesting points here. First, this is self-reported, so we know from research that most likely their use of public systems is under-reported. The costs are probably higher. Second, the main cost driver in the \$46,000 was hospitalization, making up about \$41,000 or 90% of the total.

We then took the same sample of individuals and provided them with some of our most expensive Housing First programs from five different agencies. Each was housed for a 12-month period. These programs cost on average just over \$18,000 a year – not quite double the cost of these individuals staying in emergency shelter. But the results, as you can see were overwhelming. Average system use went down to just under \$3,000 per year.

So what does this mean? It means Housing First delivers a return on investment – in this case over \$34,000 per year for each of these people. These are our tax dollars saved! It also means our emergency services can work for emergencies! Fewer people wait to get into emergency rooms and ambulances arrive sooner. There is less pressure on our health care system, particularly hospitals. It also means police interact with these people less and we don't see them in jails as much. The burden on our courts is reduced. Calgary is a safer place because of Housing First programs in your community.

Because of the data we now collect, we can begin to run the numbers on all our Housing First programs. So far there are system cost savings for all client types, but it ranges depending on the population and the kind of program they are in. For sure, these high acuity singles represent some of the highest savings. Further analysis needs to be done, but what's important is we now have data (not guesses and opinions) on what works and what doesn't.

Another important exercise is to identify both the amount and kind of housing needed to meet the 10 Year Plan goals. It is no surprise to anyone living in this city that there isn't nearly enough affordable housing for the current demand. It's the same story Tim Richter told all of you at last year's annual general meeting. Instead of the situation getting better, I'm afraid it has gotten worse. This is because many more people have moved to Calgary for work. You may have read the story that 27,000 moved to Alberta last year for work. Well guess what? About 20,000 came to Calgary alone. And with the flood, we lost rental stock and the demand for rental housing rose.

From a positive perspective (yes there is one!), the province provided capital grants for nearly 3,000 units of affordable and homeless housing here in Calgary. Our research indicates that by early next year about half of these units will be on-stream – so about 1,500 units. Planning and construction of the remaining units are in different stages of development. While construction takes longer, the good news is it is additional stock and it can be purpose built for less money than renovating an existing building. We are asking for our provincial partners to be patient as we build these new properties.

In order to know exactly how much more housing is needed and how close we are to our 10 Year Plan goals, we are in the process of working with the last two emergency shelters to link to the Homeless Management Information System. This is the last piece in our puzzle and it will show us some critical pieces of data. For example, what is the average length of stay in all of Calgary's emergency shelters? What is the profile of the people and what kind of housing and support would help them? Where do they come from and what are their pathways into homelessness?

These are critical questions which will guide our update of the next 10 Year Plan, which we intend to publish next summer. Like the last version, the Plan will see extensive consultation with the community, so there will be no surprises.

While there are some who may doubt the 10 Year Plan is achievable, I am not – for two reasons.

First, our goal is about developing an effective and efficient homeless-serving system, where people do not stay in emergency shelters for weeks, months or years but move into housing with support to meet their own individual needs quickly.

We hear from shelter operators that there is a real mix of people staying for a short time measured in days or for a very long time measured in years. This fits with our thinking right now that some very long time emergency shelter stayers may be skewing the data. If this proves out, then we have a smaller group of individuals (likely well under 1,000) that if housed make our 10 Year Plan goal of one week achievable. It won't be the question of 'how many people' we provide with housing and support, but the 'who.'

Another important note is that we have been bang on with many of our estimates. We said last year we would provide housing and support to between 700 and 800 chronically and episodically homeless individuals. We came in at exactly 759. And we are open to adapt. When we have a complete data set, we will strategically analyze our goals to see that they will get us to that efficient and effective homeless-serving system and that our goals are clearly actionable.

But make no mistake; the work will be done by January 29, 2018. We will not lose momentum. We will keep our sense of urgency. And that urgency isn't driven by data or the head alone. It is also driven by the heart.

As we sit here today, there is someone sleeping in a camp by the river – hiding so their temporary home doesn't get taken down. There is a young girl who will do her homework this afternoon at an emergency shelter. There is a woman fleeing a violent partner with her children. There is a man leaving addictions treatment without a place to go to continue his recovery. They are broken people in need of hope and healing.

But here is the good news. For some, there will be a front-line worker that will reach out and offer them a tangible action plan for housing and support. Many will not get this housing and support right away, they will have to wait. But nevertheless, there is hope – in the form of a place to call home and in the form of counsellors, doctors, employment and education specialists, mental health workers and addictions counsellors.

I have been very lucky to work with these front-line agency staff and they are amazing individuals. They can see some of the toughest street scenes and then embrace someone who is hurting so they feel safe and protected for the first time. They can be fiercely determined and persistent with their clients and then show compassion and forgiveness. They are the healers. And they have heart.

We thank all of you here who are the head and heart of the 10 Year Plan. You are clients, board members, volunteers, agency staff, employees, government representatives and donors. Because of you 4,500 formerly homeless people were housed with support over the first half of the 10 Year Plan and we will keep the momentum to get this job done.

Thank you.