



Making a difference...together

**Reaching Home Program  
COVID-19 Funding Strategy**

**April 28, 2020**

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant disruption in the social and economic systems and presents a real threat to the health and lives of people around the world. People who are homeless share common vulnerabilities to contagion and are likely to suffer more acute impacts if they contract the virus due to pre-existing health conditions. In order to support efforts to address the needs of people who are homeless during this crisis, the Government of Canada is providing \$1.312 million in funding to the capital region through a special Reaching Home Program (RHP) COVID-19 Response.

To support this initiative, the CRD has signed an agreement with the Government of Canada and, as Community Entity (CE), has been asked to work with the Greater Victoria Community Advisory Board and other stakeholders to identify ways to enhance the Reaching Home investment strategy and Community Plan to incorporate measures that address the emergent needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Goal**

Provide clarity and direction in the leveraging of RHP COVID-19 funding into coordinated actions with government agencies, health and social services, housing providers and community initiatives that support the strategy's priorities.

## **Objectives**

1. Provide guidance and support to the Reaching Home Community Advisory Board (CAB) in recommending processes for allocating RHP COVID-19 funding.
2. Provide a strategic framework that allows flexibility and responsiveness in assessing and allocating funding requests for services and goods eligible under the RHP COVID-19 Directives.
3. Support an equitable distribution of funding geographically to meet differential levels of need throughout the region.
4. Provide for transparency and accountability to organizations seeking RHP COVID-19 funding.
5. Ensure that a proportional level of funding is allocated to initiatives to address the needs of Indigenous people, who are overrepresented among homeless populations.
6. Meet Government of Canada requirements related to the RHP COVID-19 funding being allocated according to the RHP COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan.

## **Priority Areas**

1. Support the establishment of short-term sheltering, support services and provision of goods that ensure people who are unsheltered in the region can meet their basic needs and are adequately protected against contracting and the spread of COVID-19 during the provincial and national emergency.
2. Protect against increasing the number of people who are unsheltered in the region by providing short-term supports that ensure stable and continuous access to housing and shelter for individuals and households who are determined to be in need during the period of the provincial and national COVID-19 emergency.
3. For the period of the COVID-19 emergency, provide people who are at risk of losing access to housing or shelter due to financial hardship with short-term access to goods and/or services that

address basic and/or personal needs and for which access has been disrupted or threatened due to job/financial losses or emergency measures related to the COVID-19 crisis.

## Strategy

### *Jurisdictional Approach*

The \$1.312 million in funding is provided in two envelopes, Designated Communities and Indigenous Homelessness. After removing the \$48,000 required to administer the funding agreement, there is \$1.264 million available to support the community response to COVID-19. According to new Government of Canada policy, by First Nations can access Designated Communities funding to support programs delivered on-reserve and Indigenous Homelessness funding to support programs delivered off-reserve.

According to the 2018 Point in Time Count, approximately 30% of the current population of homeless people in the region identify as Indigenous. The proportion of RHP funding allocated to the CRD under the Indigenous Homelessness stream is approximately \$380,000, which aligns with the proportion of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in the region.

The Strategy also aims to allocate the \$884,000 Designated Communities funding equitably on a geographic basis, taking into consideration the proportion of people identified as unsheltered in four key areas throughout the region. A summary of the needs and estimated proportion of RHP COVID-19 funding available to address needs in each of these geographic areas is summarized in Appendix 1. These total allocations may fluctuate on the basis of identified need and capacity to leverage other funding within the different jurisdictions. It should also be noted that funding allocations may fluctuate with changing needs due to the economic and social impacts of a potentially prolonged emergency time period.

### *Coordinating Funding*

The Reaching Home Funding will be allocated in ways that align with other funding and resources available to individuals and organizations under a variety of provincial and federal initiatives. CE staff will collaborate with provincial and federal partners as well as non-profits to ensure individuals are able to access the supports they need and will work to align RHP investments with other programs, including:

#### Province

- [COVID-19: Joint Provincial Program Framework for Emergency Response Centres](#)
- [BC Emergency Benefit for Workers](#)
- [COVID-19 Support for Income & Disability Assistance](#)
- [Temporary Rental Supports](#)

#### Government of Canada

- [Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan](#)
- [Indigenous Community Support Fund](#)
- [Supporting women's shelters and sexual assault centres during COVID-19](#)
- [Canada Emergency Response Benefit](#)
- Temporary Emergency Wage Subsidy

The estimated costs presented in Appendix 2 to address Priority 1 needs are based on preliminary engagement and discussions with other government agencies, most notably, BC Housing and Island Health. Every effort will be made to ensure the Reaching Home funds are used to complement funding available from other government agencies and to fill resource gaps and not to replace funding that should be delivered through other provincial or federal programs.

CE staff are also working closely with Victoria Foundation and the United Way of Greater Victoria staff to identify ways that charitable contributions can help augment and leverage the Reaching Home funds to most effectively and efficiently meet community need.

### *Indigenous Homelessness*

The CRD has worked with the Homelessness Service Providers Network that was assembled by the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness to provide information on the services and goods that could be funded through this initiative and to identify possible areas for funding. A draft of this Strategy as well as the requests for Indigenous Homelessness funding were reviewed by the CE's Indigenous Review Panel.

The CRD has reached out to First Nations located within the region informing them of the opportunity to access funding through Reaching Home. At this early point, the CRD has already received interest from three of nine First Nations expressing an interest in supporting both on and off reserve initiatives. The CRD will be following up with all interested Nations to explore their needs and determine potential allocations to help address their populations during the emergency period.

### *Current RHP Funded Programs*

In early March, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) indicated that CEs were able to work with their existing funded programs to repurpose Designated Communities and Indigenous Homelessness funding in 2020-2021 to help address issues facing individuals due to the COVID-19 crisis. Shortly after, ESDC announced the additional COVID-19 funding stream and have since provided Directives to support the delivery of this funding to organizations supporting people who may face threats to their housing stability due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In early April, the CE asked RHP funded agencies to submit requests for support. The CRD received three requests which will be assessed and considered for funding. These requests predominantly focus on Priority 2 and 3 areas of this Strategy and will be considered once the needs within the Priority 1 area are assessed and funding allocated accordingly.

### *Contingency Measures in a Prolonged Emergency*

Preliminary estimates suggest that there is likely sufficient funding to effectively respond to Priority 1 needs for a three month period and support some Priority 2 and 3 needs that have been identified by currently funded agencies. However, First Nations needs have yet to be fully determined, which could will likely increase the draw on both Designated and Indigenous funding streams. Should this emergency situation be prolonged, there is not likely enough capacity to sustain the current estimated level of support required to meet all three priority areas beyond an additional 30-45 days.

### *Administration*

Considering the substantial level of mobilization underway in the four geographic areas and within First Nation communities, the CRD, as CE, is working with local EOCs, BC Housing, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (GVCEH), First Nations and non-profits to assess need. The Government of Canada does not require a RFP process, hence the CRD is taking a contracting approach in order to expedite funding to already identified needs. This aligns with CRD procurement policies and provides appropriate cost control and accountability measures in disbursement of the funding. An Administrative Coordinator will be hired for a six month period to manage, track and report on the use of the RHP COVID-19 funding and a small amount will be used to support program expenses and a required audit of the file. Total administration costs will be approximately \$48,196, requiring only 3.7% of the overall funding available.

## **Conclusion**

The provision of additional funding by the Government of Canada through Reaching Home to assist people experiencing or at risk of homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic is greatly needed and will augment funding commitments from other levels of government as well as funding available through local charitable institutions. A great deal of information on need and the resources required to assist this population has already been gathered and has informed the development of this Strategy. At the same time, conditions and circumstances are changing rapidly in the community, and a flexible, time-sensitive processes is required to leverage this funding into the community.

This Strategy provides a foundation for transparency and accountability in the disbursement of this funding, and provides clarity to other funders in understanding the priorities and targets for the use of Reaching Home funds. Changing needs will be monitored over time and the CAB will be provided with regular reports on the ongoing allocation of funding, capacity of the fund to meet emerging future needs as well as progress made toward protecting this vulnerable population as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves.

**Appendix 1 – Potential Allocation by Jurisdiction – Designated Communities\* (Based on Proportion of Estimated Number of People Unsheltered in each Jurisdiction)**

Jurisdiction	Summary of Needs	People Unsheltered	Proportion of Need
<b>City of Victoria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approximately 300 people are sheltering outdoors in several locations with supports being provided by various providers. GVCEH is managing outdoor sheltering space at Topaz Park.</li> <li>BC Housing and the City of Victoria have secured 200 hotel rooms of which 120 have been allocated. The remainder are being held for potential health needs in the case of contagion.</li> <li>Island Health is establishing a triage station to support testing of individuals.</li> <li>Island Health and BC Housing are coordinating staffing through their own organizations and contracting to provide supervision, support and harm reduction.</li> <li>A search for an indoor sheltering site by BC Housing continues, however no viable opportunity has materialized as of yet.</li> </ul>	420	81%
<b>District of Sooke/ Juan de Fuca EA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approximately 45 individuals have been identified as being in need in the area.</li> <li>SEAPARC has been approved by Emergency Management BC (EMBC) as an indoor shelter and the CRD has established a licensing agreement with BC Housing to use the site.</li> <li>BC Housing is entering into an agreement with Sooke Region Communities Health Network to operate the shelter.</li> <li>Aids Vancouver Island has been approached to provide harm reduction services.</li> </ul>	45	9%
<b>Town of Sidney</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Town has opened an EOC and a shower facility has been opened in Iroquois Park and public washrooms are open and being cleaned daily and approximately 6-10 people are using the showers on a daily basis.</li> <li>Tenting has started to take place near Iroquois and Tulista Parks.</li> <li>RCMP estimate up to 20 individuals in need in the peninsula area.</li> <li>BC Housing and Social Development and Poverty Reduction staff attended to the cohort on Friday, April 20.</li> </ul>	20	4%
<b>Salt Spring Island</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The seasonal shelter operated by SSI Community Services (SSICS) had to reduce capacity to meet COVID-19 distancing requirements and has allowed outdoor tent sheltering on the property they own on Drake Road.</li> <li>BC Housing is working with local authorities to look at different options for sheltering.</li> <li>SSICS has asked CRD to consider outdoor tent sheltering on its Drake Road property.</li> <li>Regional Housing staff have recently joined the EOC meetings and was recently asked to facilitate a task force that would report to the SSI EOC group on progress toward achieving indoor shelter on the Island.</li> </ul>	30	6%*
<b>Total</b>		<b>515</b>	<b>100%**</b>

\* According to ESDC policy, this amount is only available after opportunities to access Reaching Home funding have been exhausted through the Rural and Remote program.

\*\* According to recently announced changes to ESDC policy, First Nations can also access Designated Communities funding for on-reserve programs. As requests are received, they will need to be evaluated.

## **Appendix 2 – Estimated Needs by Strategy Priority Area**

The CRD has been working with GVCEH partners, government agencies, health providers, non-profits and other stakeholders to identify key services and goods needed to support people experiencing and at risk of homelessness during the COVID-19 crisis. Some of the types of services and goods for which contracts may be entered into are listed below.

### **Priority 1 - Unsheltered:**

- **Staffing – outreach, shelter personnel**
- **Contracted services**
  - **Food service prep and delivery**
  - **Site cleaning and maintenance**
  - **Laundry**
  - **Harm reduction (supervised and managed substance use)**
- **Food**
- **Supplies and equipment – bedding, tents, linens, personal protective equipment**
- **Safety and security**

### **Priorities 2 and 3 – Remain Sheltered and Basic Needs:**

- **Outreach staffing**
- **Shelter cost supplements**
- **Moving expenses**
- **Food, supplies and delivery**
- **Administration**