

--- CMHA Kamloops Public Statement ---

Our Response to Temporary Winter Shelters & Commitment to Robust Housing Care

CMHA Kamloops has operated in our community for over 40 years and we have witnessed the growing complexity of housing in Kamloops. Supporting people is at the heart of what we do; we help navigate community members through complex systems and support mental health for all.

Year after year, we have seen an increase in the opening of new shelters and these facilities quickly reaching their capacity. CMHA Kamloops has been committed to mobilizing and operating shelter beds when needed. When we commit to opening a temporary shelter, our goal is to ensure all members of the community who walk through our doors successfully receive the support they need with dignity and care, and most importantly are moved into various housing options.

Just last year we increased our capacity to add 50 additional shelter spaces – currently, we operate 3 emergency shelter sites with a combined occupancy of 131 beds serving 200 people per night. In fact, in 2021-2022 90% of winter shelter users (Stuart Wood Shelter) transitioned into a variety of housing programs including market, subsidized, and supportive housing. It has become evident that we would not be able to continue to achieve this goal given the current systems in place.

Temporary shelters are not permanent solutions. We are faced with the tension of keeping people alive and safe, the moral and financial obligation to provide a standard of care with our services, and the ethical need to advocate for better, more dignified long-term solutions to addressing housing needs in our community. Additionally, the current housing market coupled with rising inflation has presented further challenges for our clients.

People need to be able to go from the street to shelter, from shelter to housing, but right now, shelters seem to be the last stop on that continuum. This must change for our community!

This conversation is not new; we continue to stay connected with our partners in this space such as BC Housing, City of Kamloops elected officials, and community organizations to discuss the challenges that led to our decision. We cannot tackle different parts of housing in isolation; and at CMHA Kamloops we are bearing witness to the lack of movement in investment, planning, supports, and physical space to adequately address suitable housing needs for the individuals we serve.

We did not accept any funds to open additional shelters for Winter 2022. **Our decision to not operate more temporary shelters was grounded in our obligation to the people we serve to provide the highest quality services, with a goal of moving individuals out of the vicious cycle of homelessness that temporary shelters can perpetuate. This decision was further influenced by sector challenges we are facing related to labour shortages, staff health and safety, and available community resources.** While shelters are not ideal, we

acknowledge they are still an important part of the continuum of services to get people out of extreme weather and support those living on the streets. Although CMHA Kamloops will not open more temporary shelters, we will support other community organizations that have the capacity to do so, working closely with them to help those individuals served navigate the supports they need, and commit to supporting dialogue on longer-term systemic solutions.

Supporting people is at the heart of what we do! We exist to ensure all community members accessing supports are not stuck, but are navigating through a system of care. We are not abandoning our commitment to community members, instead we are recognizing the systemic barriers that prevent us from meaningfully supporting the people and community we serve. We are committing ourselves to providing the dignified services people deserve.

CMHA has a partnership with Phoenix Centre to provide 16 bachelor apartment housing for individuals in recovery. In addition, we currently have 70 units for supportive housing operating across Kamloops, with some potential increases to occur in the next year, and operate transition housing, where many of the clients come from our existing shelters. Our programs focus on ensuring community members are stabilized, have connected supports, and are ready to focus on wellness, life skills, and independence. This framework of support is designed to build capacity and connect individuals with relevant resources that offer support for psychosocial rehabilitation, focusing on areas such as home management, budgeting, meal planning, cooking, gardening, physical, emotional, and mental wellness.

Our vision is to deliver quality services in communities where safety, community integration, wrap-around services, transparency, and accountability are fostered.

Our commitment:

- We are committed to continuing to provide quality service with care to community members at our current temporary shelters and housing programs.
- We are committed to supporting the dialogue amongst stakeholders locally and provincially (government, health authority, service operators, and community partners) to support a better road map to a robust and diverse housing continuum.
- We are committed to working closely with and supporting current and future service operators on best practices, including providing tools, resources, and advice needed to support community members in Kamloops.
- We remain committed to working with people with lived and living experience to uplift and share their stories for the purpose of change to shape a mentally healthy society.

To view our program outcomes, please visit: <https://kamloops.cmha.bc.ca/program-outcomes/>