



Moving in the right direction — just not fast enough

by Kirsten Bernas

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End Homelessness Winnipeg's 2024 street census confirms the concerns of community agencies working with people who are homeless.

The 2,469 people experiencing homelessness is higher than previous counts. Indigenous people are overrepresented at 79.9 per cent of this population.

People are losing their housing because they can't afford it, and because of health-related issues like substance use and mental health challenges. Housing Minister Bernadette Smith insists its plan to end chronic homelessness is "right on track."

Let's take a closer look.

In January 2025, Premier Wab Kinew's government released its Your Way Home plan to fulfil its election commitment to end chronic homelessness by 2031. The plan's immediate priority is to house the 700 people the province estimates are living in encampments. It states it "will make suitable housing available ... and provide the addictions, mental health and primary care supports people need to successfully transition into that housing."

The province says 77 people in encampments have been successfully housed since launching the plan. If we assume that number is expected to rise to 100 by the end of this year and in each subsequent year, then you could say the plan is on track to house 700 people living in encampments by 2031.

This would be a positive achievement.

But the province's commitment is not limited to encampments. It has committed more broadly to ending chronic homelessness.

A person is deemed to be chronically homeless when they have been homeless for an extended period and/or have had repeated experiences of homelessness. The street census counted 1,679 people in this category and states that this is likely an underestimate. Ending chronic homelessness will require sustainably housing all those who are chronically homeless, while preventing new people from becoming chronically homeless. Your Way Home says that "at the end of the next seven years, it is our ambition that every Manitoban has safe and secure housing..."

So, how will the province achieve this? Its long-term plan includes addressing the housing shortage and expanding mental health and addictions supports among other interventions. These actions align with priorities that local housing advocates have long promoted.

But there are two key omissions in the province's plan: a long-term target and



timeline for expanding social housing and stronger rent regulations.

Housing advocates have identified a long-term target and timeline for the number of units needed to address housing insecurity and homelessness in Manitoba. In the leadup to Budget 2024, they called on the province to increase the social housing supply by at least 1,000 rent-geared-to-income units annually for 10 years. In its first two budgets, the province committed to adding 1,020 social housing units, only half of what is needed over a two-year period.

While Your Way Home acknowledges the housing shortage, it has failed to say how many units are needed to address the shortage. The province must identify a target for the number of units it will add over the next six years of its plan. If that target differs from what advocates say is needed, the province must be transparent about how it has determined what is needed so we can track and measure progress against that.

Until new units come online, people will continue to face homelessness. Many will seek housing in the for-profit rental market, which is unaffordable to low-income renters, including minimum-wage earners. Housing is deemed affordable when it costs less than 30 per cent of income. A full-time minimum wage earner has to spend 46 per cent of their income to rent a one-bedroom. Someone on social assistance has to spend 100 per cent of their income and still falls \$359 short of the average asking rent for a one-bedroom.

Unaffordable rents don't just prevent people experiencing homelessness from securing housing.

According to the street census, high rents are also a major driver pushing people who are housed into homelessness. During the 2023 provincial election, Kinew promised to "strengthen rent controls with legislation to protect renters from big rate hikes." In the fall of 2024, the province proposed legislation to limit rent increases, but then allowed the bill to die.

The province must secure an adequate supply of affordable housing to end chronic homelessness.

This requires strengthening rent controls, and setting a long-term target and timeline to significantly expand the social housing supply. Without these measures, the number of people experiencing homelessness will continue to rise and outpace ongoing efforts to move people into housing. As of March 31, 2025, the province said it completed only 16 out of the 1,020 units it promised to add over a two-year period. If it continues to move at this rate, the province would add 64 units by 2031.

While another 155 units are said to be in progress, compared to the 8,000 called for by advocates, this is nowhere near being "on track." Increasing the social housing supply will take time, but we can move more quickly than this.

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