



2022

Annual Report



Comox Valley Coalition
TO END HOMELESSNESS

2022: A Year in Review

Rising living costs are making more and more people feel financially insecure. The median price for a single-family home in the Comox Valley in September 2022 was \$864,300 compared to \$539,800 in 2019. Many people and families are forced to relocate, live in unsuitable housing conditions, or are experiencing homelessness. There are limited vacancy rental homes in the Comox Valley. Rooms are renting for well over \$800 per month, and 3- and 4-bedroom units are renting for \$2600-\$4000, which is unattainable for many families and not affordable for most. Additionally, the relentless opioid crisis and toxic drug supply continue to take the lives of our most vulnerable as social conditions and social inequities continue to create disparities between those that have and those that have not.

These challenging times create more of a need to come together, determine strengths, and assist each other. Coalition membership increased from 36 to 39 agencies this year, all working tirelessly to create opportunities to maintain the health and resilience of our community.

In 2021, The Coalition and Municipal and Regional partners applied to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities Strengthening Communities funding stream; \$1.093 million was awarded to the community. The grant was used in 2022 to provide funding for new and expanded services to support our unhoused community members and to increase the resilience of our community as we recover from the pandemic.

The Coalition continued supporting member agencies, the people they serve, and our collective needs throughout the year. As the coordinators for the homelessness outreach team, the Coalition built strong relationships with bylaw and worked together to find solutions to encampment challenges and offered support in creating awareness. Further, the Coalition worked with the Comox Valley Regional District emergency planning and supporting agencies to deliver winter shelter space and warming centres. Detailed information on our responses to homelessness is located throughout the report.

The costs of living went up, but so did the costs to buy, develop and build. These costs and supply chain issues have added much strain to all housing providers. Still, our dedicated teams are pushing through and finding additional resources. We were thankful to hear that Habitat for Humanity could continue the Piercy Avenue 12-unit townhouse development. Further, Darry's Place, a modular 40- unit transitional home for women and children, quickly took its place on the top of Mission Road.

A highlight of the housing announcements in 2022 was that from North Island College. North Island College will develop over 200 housing units for students, including family residences. Further, Cypress Gardens, a 52-unit apartment for seniors and those with disabilities, has the walls up and windows in and is set for an early 2024 opening.

Dawn to Dawn continues to inspire discussing all projects through a social justice lens and incorporating Indigenous Culture into all programs. We look forward to Rainbow House, a first-of-its-kind, supported residence for youth in the LGBTQ2S+ community.

Eviction support was also on the radar this year, and we are thankful that the Affordable Housing Society coordinated the start-up and operations of a Regional Rent Bank.

2023 brings promise for community collaborations, partnerships, and positive change. Thank you to all our member agencies, advisors, municipal leaders, donors, funders, and caring citizens for all your efforts to end homelessness in the Comox Valley.

COMOX VALLEY COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS

WHO WE ARE:



The Coalition to End Homelessness is a collective of 39 member agencies that plan, coordinate, recommend, advocate for, and implement community responses to homelessness and increasing affordable housing.

HOW WE DO IT:



We work within a wheelhouse of housing options to address homelessness.

A wheelhouse includes a safety net (emergency shelter, short-term supportive housing), housing with supports (long-term supportive housing, subsidized rental housing), and affordable market housing (rental and homeownership).



We believe in the power of collaboration and partnerships

A collaborative systems approach is used to provide the most effective support strategies while securing adequate resources.



We use a preventative, client-based approach

Supports are delivered with unconditional positive regard, emphasizing outreach, frequent contact with clients, relationship building, and individualized services. Ending homelessness requires prevention strategies to ensure more people do not become homeless.



We use our platform to educate, increase public awareness, and build community

A coordinated public awareness program builds community understanding of homelessness.



We make funding recommendations for the Comox Valley Regional District

Homelessness Supports Service Fund

In 2015 the CVRD held a referendum asking if voters would pay at least \$5 on their annual property tax 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% favored creating the Homelessness Supports Service, allowing the CVRD to fund local affordable housing initiatives based on the Coalition's Housing Plan. The CVRD board approves decisions on an annual basis.

Comox has found another way to support the Coalition's recommendations in the Housing Plan.

In 2020, a consultant reviewed the service and made specific recommendations. The Regional district staff and the Coalition have implemented some recommendations. Other Proposed recommendations will be discussed in 2023 and assessed for viability and potential impact.

The Coalition to End Homelessness has 4 strategic directions that guide the work we do:



Strategic Priority #1: Create Additional Housing & Supports

Strategic Priority #2: Community Collaboration, Prevention & Education

Strategic Priority #3: Coalition Capacity Building

Strategic Priority #4: Funding & Fundraising

An annual update of Strategic Priority #1 accomplishments can be found in the Coalition's Housing plan, including survey findings, housing built since 2016, 2020 Homeless Count results, housing funded through the CVRD Homelessness Supports Service, and other affordable housing projects and supports. Strategic Priorities 2-4 can be found within the Coalition's Action Plan. Highlights of activities and progress are featured in this report.

Current versions of the plan are on our [website](#).



Homelessness Response Team

The Coalition to End Homelessness created the homelessness response team (HRT) in 2019 in response to the visible increase in homelessness and encampments. The HRT consists of frontline outreach workers from a wide range of nonprofit agencies and partnerships with Island Health, the City of Courtenay, RCMP, and the Ministry of Poverty and Social Development.



The HRT meets biweekly to identify gaps in the care system supporting unsheltered individuals. Some of the goals of the HRT are:

- 1.) Function as a single point of contact when assistance and interventions are required.
- 2.) To increase collaboration and create partnerships between groups to best support the community.
- 3.) To identify gaps in the community and systems.
- 4.) To advocate for the needs of unhoused individuals as expressed by those experiencing homelessness.
- 5.) To develop key shared messages and to provide information and education that raises awareness and brings a greater understanding of homelessness.

During outreach, HRT members engage with and support homeless persons on the street, in parks, encampments, and motels- wherever they may be.

Additionally, outreach workers are at the Warming Centres, Shelters, and the Travelodge motel. The HRT provides agency referrals, income

assistance support, hygiene supplies, and living supports. The HRT also identifies and prioritizes homeless persons who are medically fragile or otherwise highly vulnerable and connects them to health services and physicians.

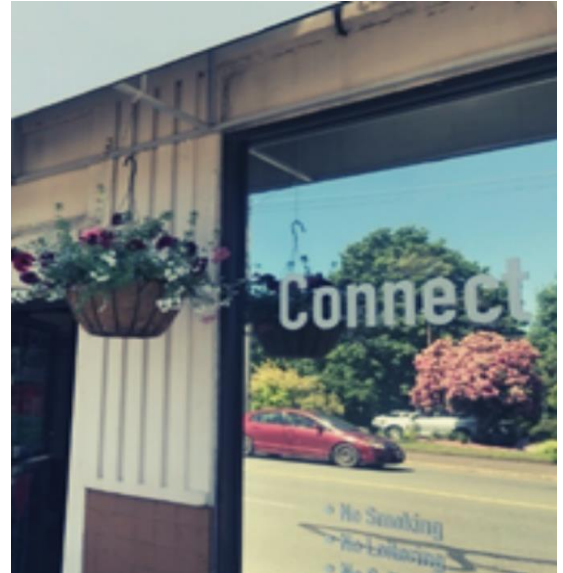
Since the pandemic, constant requirements have been to pivot and shift to meet new needs and demands. As conditions are so grand, we see more service providers join in conversations. With this new community of members, we see new partnerships forming and smaller organizations supporting each other to build organizational capacity.



Connect- Community Access Hub

Connect provides a safe, welcoming space for vulnerable individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. People can escape inclement weather, temporarily store or dry out belongings, access a washroom and refreshments, receive first aid, and pick up survival supplies.

Connect is a Coalition initiative that started in the library as a 2-hour program to support those experiencing homelessness. With operational support from the Transition Society, in January 2020, Connect opened its doors in a dedicated space at 685 Cliffe Avenue. The service started as a 3-day per week program and now holds a daytime service 6 days per week and operates as a 10-bed shelter, 7 days per week. Connect shelter is currently being renovated to fit 33 beds.



In 2022, Connect secured funding through the Strengthening Communities Grant until June 2023. The Coalition has significantly contributed to finding financing for Connect; however, Connect is now entirely operated by the Comox Valley Transition Society and its staff.

Without permanent housing, providing a space for people to go during the day continuously significantly impacts people's well-being and the community's resilience. Since opening, Connect has had thousands of visits and now serves up to 100 people per day.

Connect Community Feedback

"Connect is the only place to go during the day. If it weren't for Connect, I would just be hanging out on the streets."

"Connect is warm and has some of the things we need like warm clothing. I stop by a few times a week for something. I like to sit in there and talk to people."

Shower Program

The shower program operates at the Lewis Centre. The program provides a safe and private space, towels, and hygiene items required to shower. Outreach and peer support are also onsite to provide supplies and harm reduction if needed. The successful program continued throughout 2022, Monday- Friday, from 10 am-1 pm.

The shower program is the only opportunity for the unhoused and precariously housed to get fully clean without passes to a facility. Not just homeless people use the shower program but also those displaced into other less-than-ideal living situations. The City of Courtenay provides the space in kind; Financing the program requires grants and is currently supported through the Strengthening Communities grant until June 2023.

Hygiene is essential for health, safety, and inclusion. People use the shower program to clean for their jobs and to feel comfortable attending appointments and services.

Travelodge- Supportive Housing Program

At the onset of the pandemic, Coalition agencies worked with BC Housing to provide 42 motel rooms for those experiencing homelessness. In 2021, those rooms increased to 52, and in 2022, available rooms increased to 64. The short-term supportive housing program includes onsite outreach workers, security, job opportunities, and assistance with essential life skills. BC Housing funds the program while the Transition Society operates the program.

The Travelodge has a waitlist of 200 people looking for housing. Without the Travelodge, 74 more people would be on the streets. The goal with the residents of the Travelodge is to provide the support needed immediately and then to find long-term supportive housing.

The Travelodge residents have offered an outside sweep and clean service to the downtown businesses and surrounding areas for over a year. In 2022, people living at the Travelodge were hired to maintain the shower program. Further, others have been able to work at surrounding restaurants and businesses. Those who report feeling secure at the Travelodge and having a place to call home usually become more productive and are willing to engage in volunteer and paid work.

People with Lived and Living Experiences

Nothing for us without us is a model that the Coalition values. In April of 2022, the Coalition started a meeting for people with lived and living experiences of homelessness. The meeting went weekly in June of 2022 and has grown to hold 30 people each week- the maximum attendance that is allowable. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss housing needs, gaps, and desires, but the conversation is also open to the group's needs. Discussions have linked people to services, identified gaps, advocated for change, and offered space to hold emotions.

Discussions with our unhoused community on their current needs and wants led to connecting with Cowichan Housing and visiting the Village in Duncan- a property with tiny sleeping cabins arranged to form a community within a community. Coalition leadership, Comox and Courtenay mayors, and the Community Action team met with the planners and operators of the Village to learn about the project.

Further, peers have been involved with the Turtle Pod rolling shelter discussions, the Community Listening events, the Coalition meetings, Drug Toxicity Awareness events, and the supply drive.

In 2023, the team would like to concentrate on a project to bring more housing to the Comox Valley.

“This meeting is awesome. How come we didn’t do this before? It is really informative.”

“We all have skills and abilities that we cannot use while we are trying to survive. This meeting gives me something to focus on and I really appreciate that.”

“We want to use recycled materials and build our own tiny homes. Can we partner with other agencies and do this?”

“How did I not know about these services? No one has cared before. You have changed my life.”

Extreme Weather Shelters and Warming Centres

The Coalition coordinator actively collaborated with partners to ensure that all Comox Valley residents would have opportunities to find relief from environmental elements during both the extreme heat and cold in 2022.

To add history, at the end of 2021, the Coalition worked with the regional emergency planning team to source staff and opportunities for a warming centre that Emergency Management BC would fund during the extreme cold.

Further, in 2021 and 2022, the Coalition continued to support the full expansion of Connect. These collaborations resulted in the following in 2022:

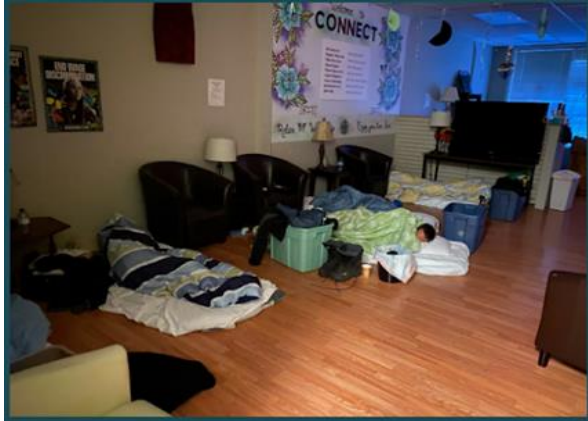
1.) Community Cares Warming Centre At the Salvation Army Church

An overnight drop-in centre operated from Jan 2022- April 2022.

Emergency Management BC first funded the centre and was open during the extreme cold front. Then, with further funding from the Strengthening Communities grant, the team worked together to open a nightly drop-in centre for 10 weeks. The Community Cares Warming Centre saw over 2500 visits and was integral to the substantial decrease in crime and waste found within the community. The warming centre provided essential services but having the low-barrier outreach service was the opportunity many needed to take steps forward with their health.



2.) Connect Shelter



In 2022, Connect held the regular day program that expanded to 6 days per week. Additionally, the program offered 10 beds from January- March during extreme wintry weather as funded by their contract with BC Housing.

The Comox Valley Transition Society secured renovation funding through the HSS and winter shelter funding through BC Housing and kept 10 beds open during winter 2022. Later in 2022, the Transition Society leased additional space in the Connect building, which, with renovations, will allow room to

run up to a 33-bed shelter.

While the renovations are not complete to open the shelter, the additional space supported an extreme weather warming centre in the winter of 2022.

3.) Community Cares Shelter at Saint John the Divine



In the Autumn of 2022, the Coalition supported the partnership between Nicole Morrison from Community Cares Peer Outreach and Saint John the Divine Anglican parish to receive the Extreme weather response shelter contract with BC Housing. On November 30th, a 30- bed shelter with drop-in space opened at the Church. The drop-in space was volunteer-based community care offering warm beverages, a washroom, and an opportunity to warm up and collect needed supplies.

There is an increase in community concern when the nights get cold; The community supports the shelters through donations of survival goods, baking, and food.

The additional warming centres and shelters allowed everyone to get off the streets during the snowstorms of 2022.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES GRANT

In 2021 the Comox Valley Regional District and the Coalition to End Homelessness and municipal partners were awarded a regional grant of \$1.093 Million through the Union of British Columbia's Municipalities

Strengthening Communities' Services program to better support people experiencing homelessness in the Comox Valley. The City of Courtenay is administering the grant funds on the region's behalf.

The Strengthening Communities' Grant supports:

- **Connect- a Daytime Community Access Hub** that operates 8:30 am- 6 pm six days a week, providing health and harm reduction, hygiene, and personal safety services. In 2022, Connect provided meals over 9000 times and had over 15 000 service interactions.
- **Rural outreach on Denman and Hornby Islands at the Food Bank and the Kitchen-** outreach services are provided weekly on both Islands to facilitate connections to housing and support services. The team has been averaging 12 service interactions per month since its inception.
- **Comox Valley Street Outreach- A peer-based outreach team** to provide outreach and conduct cleaning and remediation activities around locations where support services are provided. AVI supports the program, offers harm-reduction gear, and issues honoraria for the service.
- **Sunday Station- Additional meal service, Community engagement, anti-stigma, and outreach activities-** Meal events are hosted for residents, local businesses, and people experiencing homelessness. Sunday Station has provided over 2000 meals to community members since its expansion.
- **Training and Capacity building activities across municipalities-** Training is provided for local government and First Nation employees, politicians, outreach workers, and volunteers focusing on trauma and culturally informed practices, violence prevention, and mental health and addiction awareness.

For more information, please visit the City of Courtenay [website](#).

Rent Bank

In 2021, the Coalition brought in representatives from the BC rent bank to speak at one of the general Coalition meetings and representatives from the First Credit Union. From there, the Affordable Housing Society collaborated with the Community Foundation, First Credit Union, and the BC Rent bank to bring the community the Regional Rent Bank.

Rent Bank services are one-time crisis interest-free loans. The target is low to mid-income earners who may need help due to an unexpected cost. A persona has 3 years to repay a loan.

The Rent bank acts as an eviction prevention service.

Local Engagement Activities

Turtle Pods

In 2022, the Coalition offered partnership support to the Walk with Me team on their Turtle Pod project. The Turtle Pod is a portable rolling shelter that allows someone to sleep off the ground, stay warm, and store belongings. The third prototype and a civil plan are currently being discussed.

The Turtle Pod idea came from the needs expressed by those with lived and living experiences. In addition, phases 2-3 included bylaw, emergency planning, architects and engineers, outreach, and City staff. Each step has been in direct consultation with peers living on the streets. The process has strengthened relationships and has introduced the Coalition to new prospects for 2023.

Community Listening Event

In the Spring of 2022, the Coalition participated in the second community listening event. The conversations were sometimes group discussions and, at other times, individual talks. The Coalition took a different approach and invited peers, and the Community Cares Peer Outreach team to join. To create awareness of homelessness and substance use, the group offered a lending library where those with lived experiences of homelessness provided their stories to those interested in hearing and learning more.

Comox Valley Community Foundation Homelessness Supports

2022 was the second year the Coalition participated in a trust pilot with the Community Foundation. The Coalition has partnered with the Foundation to make recommendations for their homelessness support stream. The Coalition leadership establishes a review committee of members and advisors who make recommendations to the Coalition. The Coalition then votes on the proposed recommendations.

Supply Drives

The Homelessness Response Team put on a tent and supply drive in the Spring of 2022. The intent was to collect donations for outreach to hand out when someone was in need, to increase awareness of what homelessness is, and to come together to advocate for change. Indigenous Woman's Society hired musicians to sing and rap, and peers came out to do art and to collect a bag full of supplies. The event engages the community with agencies and leads to an increase in support throughout the year.

The Coalition is directly involved with the following committees:

- Strengthening Communities Grant
- Homelessness Response Team
- Substance-Use Committee

- Poverty Reduction Strategy Committee
- Equity in Public Policy
- Local housing funding review and recommendations
- Turtle Pod
- Coop Housing
- Unhoused- those with lived and living experience of homelessness

Thank you to our Municipal Partners

- The Comox Valley Regional District
 - The City of Courtenay
 - The Village of Cumberland
 - The Town of Comox
-

Thank you to Coalition Member Agencies and Advisors

- Affordable Housing Vancouver Island Society
- AVI Health & Community Services
- Better At Home- Seniors Services
- Community Cares Peer Outreach
- Comox Bay Care Society (Care-a-van)
- Comox Valley Affordable Housing Society
- Comox Valley Chambers of Commerce
- Comox Valley Community Action Team
- Comox Valley Community Health Network
- Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative
- Comox Valley Family Services Association
- Comox Valley Head Injury Society
- Comox Valley Lions Club
- Comox Valley Pride Society
- Comox Valley Recovery Centre
- Comox Valley Regional Chapter of Nurses & Nurse Practitioners
- Comox Valley Seniors Support
- Comox Valley Seventh Day Adventist Church
- Comox Valley Social Planning Society
- Comox Valley Street Outreach
- Comox Valley Transition Society
- Cumberland Community Housing Society
- Dawn to Dawn: Action on Homelessness
- Hornby Island Housing Association
- Eureka Support Society
- Glacierview Lodge

- Habitat for Humanity
 - Indigenous Women's Sharing Society
 - K'omox First Nation
 - L'arche Comox Valley
 - LUSH Valley Food Action Society
 - Saint John the Divine Anglican Parish
 - Salvation Army
 - St. George's United Church
 - Stepping Stones Recovery
 - St. Vincent de Paul
 - Sunday Station
 - The Views at St. Joseph
 - United Way of BC- Central and Northern Vancouver Island region
 - Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry
 - Wachiay Friendship Centre
 - Walk with Me
-

Thank you to our 2022 Funders

- The Comox Valley Regional District
- The City of Courtenay
- The Town of Comox
- The Comox Valley Community Foundation
- Union of British Columbia Municipalities
- EMCR, formerly EMBC

Thank you to each person that has volunteered or that has donated. Thank you for sharing information and collaborating on this journey to ending homelessness.



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For questions or requests for more
information

cvhousing.ca