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PROVINCE LAUNCHES HOMELESS STRATEGY WITH FOCUS ON MENTAL-HEALTH HOUSING

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Up to 2,000 Manitobans to Benefit from 285 More Mental-health Housing Units, 600 to Benefit from New Portable Housing Benefit: Ministers

A new strategy to reduce and prevent homelessness will connect homeless people and those with mental-health challenges to stable, secure housing and support services, Healthy Living Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross and Family Services and Housing Minister Gord Mackintosh said today.

"The foundation of healthy living is good housing. But stable housing often requires outreach to connect vulnerable Manitobans to housing with services to support individuals in their tenancy and mental-health recovery. This housing-first approach will make a real difference," said Irvin-Ross.

The HOMEWorks! homeless strategy includes the following 10 new initiatives:

Emergency Shelters

- 100 homeless shelter beds added - Funding has increased by 64 per cent since 2007 to stabilize emergency shelters in Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson and The Pas.
- Emergency homeless shelter standards introduced - Guidelines developed in consultation with shelters are being concluded to ensure that quality, consistent and safe services are provided at Manitoba's five emergency homeless shelters to support both shelter users and staff in the delivery of supervised emergency homeless shelter services.
- The Salvation Army Service Co-ordination Project - Manitoba Family Services and Housing is working with the Salvation Army and its partner, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, to permanently house long-term shelter users with supports.
- Cold weather shelter strategy - Based on the experiences of providing emergency homeless shelter in one of the world's coldest major cities, a protocol was developed by the Winnipeg shelters to serve 80 additional people. The province will work with the shelters to ensure the plan protects Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens during the cold winter months.

Outreach

- Homeless outreach team - To reduce the number of homeless individuals, seven new outreach workers based at community agencies will link as many as 300 people a year to housing, social and health services in four communities (Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson and The Pas).
- Province joins Project Breakaway - The capacity of this Winnipeg Police Services initiative to work with chronic users of police, health and social services will be doubled through provincial funding for a co-ordinator and an outreach worker based at the Main Street Project.

Housing with Services

- 285 more mental-health housing units with supports - Integrated housing options ranging from independent living with supports to 24-hour supportive housing units will be funded including:
 - 50 privately owned or converted Manitoba Housing units redeveloped into permanent housing with supports,
 - 30 units with on-site supports for individuals with persistent mental illness,
 - 40 units in downtown Winnipeg converted to housing with supports for individuals who are chronically homeless,
 - 74 additional Canadian Mental Health Association integrated housing units including units at Brandon's Massey Building,
 - four Manitoba Housing units converted into interim housing for youth with support from Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY), and
 - 87 existing units at Madison Lodge to receive enhanced support services.
- Portable housing benefit - 600 low-income Manitobans with mental-health challenges and an unstable housing situation will receive a rent subsidy of up to \$200 per month to access a broader range of private housing, as well as housing supports provided by eight support workers in communities across Manitoba.
- Manitoba Housing Wellness initiative - 760 tenants will receive supports from the expansion of the Community Wellness Initiative (CWI) to 14 sites within and outside Winnipeg from five Manitoba Housing sites in Winnipeg. The expansion includes enhanced services with the addition of 11 housing and mental-health support workers.

Prevention

- Homeless prevention summit - A long-term prevention strategy will be based on a summit to be held this fall.

The strategy will be enhanced and complemented this fall when the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) begins an \$18-million, four-year demonstration project providing housing with services for up to 300 Aboriginal people in Winnipeg who are homeless and living with mental illness.

"I would like to commend the Manitoba government's investments in mental-health housing with supports and its homeless initiatives," said Michael Kirby, chairman of the MHCC. "Having available housing with a basket of services integrated in the community will support and complement the MHCC's initiatives with the homeless population and with the anti-stigma campaign."

"With more supportive housing units and the portable housing benefit, people living with mental illness will have more housing options. And based on successful initiatives elsewhere and in Manitoba, the new outreach and support services mark a strong start to this province's homeless strategy," said Mackintosh.

The HOMEWorks! homeless strategy is funded by an investment of \$9.8 million in 2009-10 and includes funding for 60 new support workers.