



# Temporary Housing Program (Seniors Services Society)

<http://www.seniorsservicesociety.ca/>

## PROGRAM PROFILE: OVERVIEW

June 2017

<b>Type of Program</b>	Affordable Housing
<b>Organization</b>	Seniors Services Society
<b>Community Served</b>	New Westminster, Vancouver and other lower mainland communities
<b>Program Goal</b>	Keep seniors out of homeless shelters and provide them with an opportunity to decompress and organize their lives
<b>Services Provided</b>	Provides clients with fully furnished temporary housing for 3-6 months, One-on-one support to find permanent housing solution
<b>Target Population:</b>	Seniors 55+ who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (in an inappropriate living arrangement)
<b>Staffing</b>	1 outreach worker, Support provided by other housing team members
<b>Program Strengths</b>	Supports seniors through the full journey to permanent housing; Serves population of seniors typically not served by other homelessness programs; Partnership with BC Housing; Commitment of Seniors Services Society and staff to the program

## Program Description

The Temporary Housing Program (THP) is an innovative program offered by the Seniors Services Society in New Westminster that provides temporary housing to seniors (55+) and one-on-one support to help these seniors find a permanent housing solution. The goal of the program is to keep seniors out of homeless shelters and to help them secure stable housing. Shelters are challenging living environments, which is particularly true for seniors who may be frail and experiencing health problems (often made worse by living in a shelter).

Participants experiencing homelessness are usually going through a stressful and traumatic time, and the program offers them an opportunity to decompress and organize their lives. To prevent the situation from repeating itself in the future, the program seeks to understand and address the multiple causes that contribute to a person becoming homeless, such as the loss of a spouse, mental health issues, rising rents and/or financial insecurity. In addition to providing the THP, Seniors Services Society also provides Housing Counselling (one-on-one, tailored information and referral services for seniors who need to move) and Housing Outreach Services (to those who are homeless or severely at-risk).

The THP targets seniors who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including those living in an inadequate or inappropriate situation such as couch surfing or residing in an abusive household. The program receives referrals from all over Metro Vancouver, with the majority coming from New Westminster (where Seniors Services Society is located) and Vancouver. Seniors can self-refer to the program or be referred by another agency, the healthcare system, or sometimes even their landlord. Before being accepted, the senior in need of housing is interviewed by staff to see if they are appropriate for the program. Participants must be able to live independently in their suite, agree to work with the THP Outreach Worker and agree to their responsibilities as a tenant.

Participants are provided with a fully furnished suite, where they usually stay for 3-6 months, paying 35% of their income for their monthly rent. The Outreach Worker works with participants to develop a case plan to identify important areas that need to be addressed, such as filing income taxes, applying for benefits and/or referral to bereavement services. The Outreach Worker usually meets at least once a week with the participant to provide them with support and to work with them to find a permanent housing solution. After a permanent housing solution is found and the participant moves in, the THP continues to provide support to the senior for the next 2-3 months (as needed), which can include help with rent for the first few months and/or assistance setting up utilities (hydro, phone, etc.). If the participant lacks belongings to furnish their new suite, the THP allows them to take some of the items from their temporary suite to their new home.

There is just one THP Outreach Worker and they receive support and referrals from the three other housing team members at Seniors Services Society. Most of the housing team members are social workers, and all of them have training working with those who are experiencing homelessness. Volunteers do not interact with the THP participants, but do provide support with collecting donations and furnishing the suites.

BC Housing is the main funder of the THP and they provide funding for the Outreach Worker (this funding is renewed every two years). Additional funding is provided by the Cities of New Westminster and Vancouver. The THP operates on a budget of approximately \$100,000 a year, which includes the costs of the Outreach Worker and all the costs associated with renting and maintaining the 20 THP units that are in BC Housing facilities in Burnaby and New Westminster. Seniors Services Society keeps a storage locker full of items (primarily donated), with which to furnish the suites and engages in fundraising activities to support the program.

## Impact

Since 2008, when the THP started with just a single unit, the program has provided temporary housing to over 240 seniors in housing crisis. Currently the program has 20 units, and each month about 1-2 new participants enter the program. The THP provides seniors who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, with a safe and affordable living environment. In the hierarchy of human needs, housing is one of the basic needs for human survival. Providing appropriate housing can lead to health improvements, as housing provides psychological security, a safe environment and can promote other positive health behaviours. Seniors are currently the fastest growing homeless population in BC, and have different needs compared to other homeless populations that need to be addressed through catered services.

## Strengths and Challenges

The THP operates on a comprehensive model that supports seniors throughout the full journey from homelessness to permanent housing and tries to address the multitude of factors which can contribute to an individual becoming homeless. A strong partnership with BC Housing is a critical factor that contributes to the current success of the THP and allows Seniors Services Society to rent units at a significantly discounted rate.

The THP targets seniors who are not typically served by other homelessness programs – those who are first time homeless or at risk of homelessness. Currently, the federal government provides funding for homelessness to Metro Vancouver through the Homeless Prevention Strategy, and Metro Vancouver has targeted these funds for *Housing First* programs, which require individuals to be homeless for at least 6 months, with a lot of these funds earmarked to assisting individuals who reside in the Downtown Eastside. As a result, there are no programs in the

Lower Mainland that offer housing supports for seniors who are recently homeless (less than 6 months) or at risk of homelessness, and only the THP provides large-scale temporary housing. This factor, combined with a housing crisis, results in a very high demand for the services of the THP.

When the THP began in 2008, it was funded by the United Way and this support was instrumental in the development of the program. In 2014, after a change in strategic priorities at the United Way, the funding for the THP ended. This led the Seniors Services Society to approach BC Housing, who decided to invest in the program, recognizing the value of the THP. Seniors Services Society was also receiving funding from the Federal Government through the Homeless Prevention Strategy for outreach but as mentioned above, Metro Vancouver changed their focus for this funding and in 2016, Seniors Services Society lost this source of funding, resulting in less support for the THP. Because of these funding challenges, Seniors Services Society has lost two full time Outreach Worker positions in the last three years, resulting in decreased services for seniors experiencing homelessness.

There is a great need for the provision of more temporary housing and subsidized housing options for seniors in the Lower Mainland. Currently, the THP is only able to admit about 1/5 referrals into the program and there often is a waitlist for suites. The program tries to not have more than 2-4 seniors on the waitlist at a time, and Seniors Services Society offers as much other support as they can to waitlisted seniors. Demand is so high that the program could likely keep 100 or more units full if they had the units and staff available. Unfortunately, the situation is getting worse, with the program having to turn away an increasing number of seniors in recent years due to the general housing crisis in Metro Vancouver and because of the loss of the two Outreach Worker positions. Having to turn away seniors in need is a challenging and stressful experience for both the seniors and the staff.

The success of the program can be attributed to several factors, one of them being the skilled and dedicated staff at Seniors Services Society, who regularly address complex situations with very limited resources. Seniors Services Society believes strongly in the value of the THP program, which has meant a commitment to providing the program even when facing funding and other challenges.