

Belonging in BC: Integrated Support Framework

A GUIDING DOCUMENT TO SUPPORT SYSTEMS COORDINATION AND PLANNING



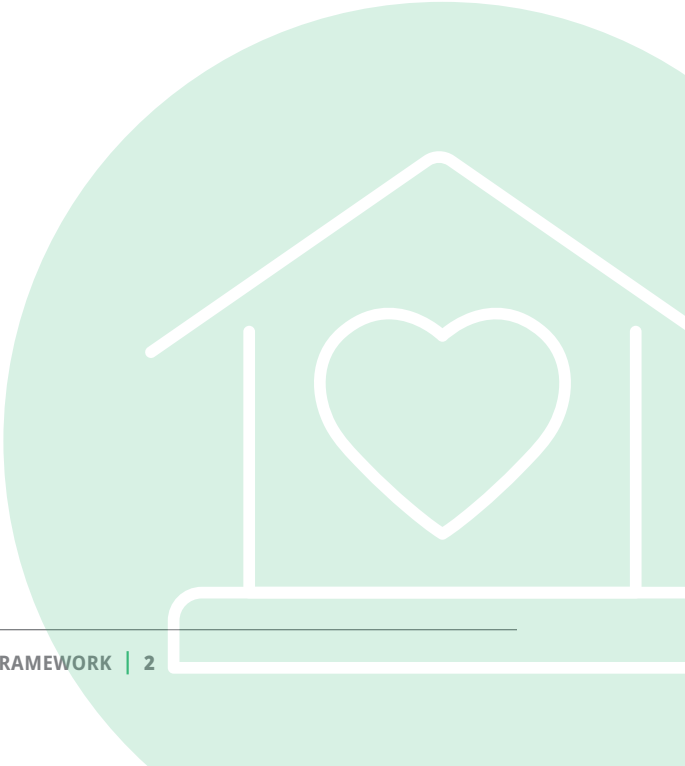
We acknowledge with respect and gratitude this document was produced on the territories of the Ləkʷəŋən peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt (Xwsepsum) Nations, and WSÁNEĆ Nations



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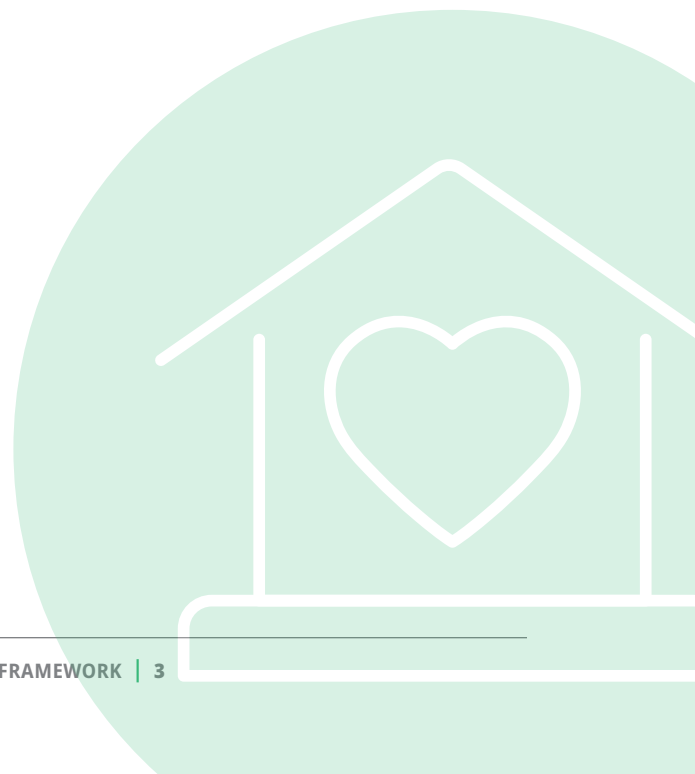
Acknowledgement and Contributions

WE WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE the territories of First Nations around B.C. and are grateful to carry out our work on these lands, including collaboratively developing the Integrated Support Framework.

Specifically, we extend our appreciation to the Ləkʷəŋən peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt (Xwsepsum) Nations, and WSÁNEĆ Nations, whose territories this document was produced on and the location in which the Integrated Support Framework Engagement Sessions were hosted from.

We acknowledge the rights, interests, priorities and concerns of all Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit), respecting and acknowledging their distinct cultures, histories, rights, laws and governments.

The Integrated Support Framework was developed with feedback and input from people with lived experiences of homelessness, Indigenous governments and organizations, health authorities, local government partners, and community service providers – we extend our gratitude to all those that contributed and continue to be valued partners in this work.



Introduction

HOMELESSNESS IS A COMPLEX SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUE and a deeply personal experience. Within it are woven stories of resilience, trauma, poverty, discrimination, and marginalization. Homelessness deteriorates health and wellness and can trigger or exacerbate health issues. The longer a person experiences homelessness, the more detrimental the impact. Homelessness has worsened in BC in recent years, compounded by the lack of affordable housing, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing toxic drug crisis impacting individuals, families and communities.

In 2020, the Provincial government mandated the development of a plan to address homelessness. Multiple ministries, organizations and partners were brought together to develop the Belonging in BC Homelessness Plan (the Plan), released in April 2023. The Plan is centred on the importance of community partnerships and the inclusion of people with diverse identities and lived experience to help inform priorities and the path forward. The word *belonging* was chosen as it reflects not only having a physical space to call home but also to embrace people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness as valued and cared for members of communities. The Plan can be found here: [BelongingStrategy.pdf \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

To help create belonging, we first need to understand the challenges of people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness and those that work to support them. Feedback obtained through engagements with people with lived experiences, Indigenous peoples, rightsholders and partner organizations across the province in 2021 and 2022 contributed to shaping the Integrated Support Framework (ISF), a core initiative of the Plan. Throughout the fall of 2022, ISF Engagement Sessions were conducted, and participants shared their experiences which provided valuable insight into the challenges and potential solutions to help people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Learnings from these sessions were carefully consolidated and shared in the What We Heard Report, which can be found here: [WhatWeHeardReport.pdf \(gov.bc.ca\)](#).

The ISF is an approach that has been informed in part by the What We Heard Report, setting out to transform the various resources into a support system that is responsive, accessible and specific to a person's unique needs. The ISF outlines enhancements to system coordination to bridge gaps, streamline access to services and strengthen community level collaboration; and an array of wraparound¹ supports (clinical and non-clinical) that meet the unique needs of individuals in various settings.

¹ The term “wraparound services” refers to an interdisciplinary approach of providing a variety of services with focus on coordination at a system-level.

Why an Integrated Support Framework?

HOMELESSNESS CAN OCCUR because of a range of interconnected factors, including structural factors like inadequate incomes and discrimination, ongoing impacts of colonization and racism, a lack of services, and factors like traumatic events or personal crises. These factors, among others can contribute to difficulties finding, or keeping, stable housing. It is crucial to prioritize basic needs and provide tailored help to address the unique challenges faced by individuals and communities across B.C., including understanding and responding to differences across communities, such as in rural and urban areas.

Access to supports that meet basic needs, promote health and wellness, and help people reach their self-determined goals around housing are critical to addressing homelessness. There are many services, provided by different levels of government and non-profit service providers across the Province, that support individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Despite the array of programs, navigating these services can be challenging. All too often, the onus falls on the individual to navigate services and the sometimes complicated requirements of multiple organizations. Individuals may also not be aware of programs and services available or face structural barriers in navigating them. Barriers may include system complexity, cultural and language barriers, existence of multiple community and government providers for different services, and use of technology. In order to provide a responsive approach that spans multiple systems of care and reduces the barriers people face, service providers and services must be aligned, inclusive and coordinated.

“I can do all the applications and everything for housing. Six VATs [Vulnerability Assessment Tools] and I’m still homeless. I don’t need a program to fill out the right applications – I need the application to go to the right person. Need to be able to ask a lot of questions without being told I’m rude. Need to know when it’s time to fill in a new application.”

*Engagement Session Participant
(Person with Lived Experience)*



GOVERNANCE

The ISF should be flexible and adaptable to communities’ distinct needs.



HOUSING

Throughout the Province, housing supports are needed the most.



RESOURCES

Resources, funding and continuity of services need to be prioritized.



DATA SHARING

Data sharing should be enabled between organizations.



RURAL NEEDS

Rural communities have distinct needs from urban settings.

KEY THEMES FROM THE ISF ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS THAT INFORMED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRAMEWORK:

- The importance of a sound framework for organizing, governing, coordinating, and implementing the ISF.
- Provision of housing as a starting point in the successful delivery of wraparound supports to individuals in need.
- The critical shortage of resources in the sector – people and funding – as well as the difficulty of securing funding and being able to provide services in a timely manner.
- A need for better sharing of data between the organizations offering wraparound supports, which would improve the efficiency and timeliness of services.
- The difficulties faced by organizations based in rural areas when it comes to offering wraparound supports, such as limited internet connectivity and transportation options, as compared to what can be found in urban areas.

“Wraparound supports are only effective if everyone can access them – if you have to travel for culturally competent services or can’t access them, then functionally the services do not exist in your community.”

Engagement Session Participant

In response to these identified themes, the ISF has been structured into two core components to address the key concerns raised in the engagement sessions:

1. Enhanced system coordination to bridge gaps and streamline access to services; and
2. Enhanced availability of wraparound supports to meet a variety of distinct needs in various settings.

Who will benefit from an Integrated Support Framework?

THE ISF IS INTENDED TO SUPPORT those at risk of or experiencing homelessness as well as those that support them, such as service providers and family members. More specifically, the ISF approach aims to help:

- People sheltering outdoors, including encampments. People in emergency shelters, single room occupancy (“SRO”) housing, or congregate supportive housing.²
- People receiving rental subsidies living in market rentals.
- People leaving correctional or treatment facilities with no return address, or who are moving amongst temporary housing situations.
- People with social and community support needs.

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2 In British Columbia, supportive housing is generally understood to be subsidized housing to help individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Supportive housing offers on-site supports and is geared towards helping individuals maintain housing stability

- 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- Youth and seniors at risk of or experiencing homelessness.³
- People and children fleeing abuse or violence.
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- People from marginalized/racialized communities who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- People with disabilities, including physical, long-term health, end-of-life, mental health and cognitive issues, brain injury and severe allergies.

Implementation of the ISF to assist these demographics will use a phased and iterative approach with consideration of the unique needs in different communities.

Guiding Principles of the Integrated Support Framework

THE ISF IS GUIDED BY THE PRINCIPLES outlined in the Belonging in BC Homelessness Plan:

- Housing First approach.
- Healing-informed, culturally diverse, culturally safe, and person-centered care.
- Harm reduction⁴ approach.
- Client-centered and collaborative.
- Preservation of dignity and personal agency.
- Family and community focused.
- Application of gender-based analysis plus (GBA+)⁵ principles to create an atmosphere of safety and respect for diverse populations.
- Prioritization of people with distinct needs⁶ – Indigenous, Métis, Inuit, First Nations, urban, rural, racialized and immigrant populations, youth, seniors, people fleeing abuse and violence, 2SLGBTQIA+ and people with disabilities.
- Flexible and adaptable for local health/housing partnership solutions.

³ This program may serve youth and young adults with moderate support needs that are not served or attached to MCFD programs.

⁴ Harm reduction is a philosophy and practice that aims to reduce health, social and other harmful impacts related to drug use. Harm reduction can refer to a direct strategy with an individual, a program, or policy. Harm reduction is supported by evidence and is grounded in social justice and a client-centered approach.

⁵ GBA+ is a method of analysis used to assess how diverse groups of people may experience policies, programs and initiatives differently. The “plus” indicates that the analysis goes beyond sex and gender and includes the examination of a range of other identity factors that may intersect (e.g. Indigeneity, age, education, language, race, ability, class, etc.).

⁶ Distinct needs refers to understanding that factors, such as identity, culture, disability status and many others, impacts a person’s experience of the world and their needs. It is important that all needs are be reflected and addressed in services, and that diverse perspectives are included in the design and delivery of programs.

In addition, the ISF is guided by cultural safety principles, drafted with input from Indigenous and community partners, and include:

- Listening to and learning from community leaders and allies as the experts in the health and wellness needs of their community, and their input, teachings, recommendations, and advocacy is responded to respectfully, with action taken when possible.
- The diversity of Indigenous Peoples, Nations, and cultures, as well as racialized peoples and cultures, are respected and inform relationship building, engagement, policy development, and actions taken using a decolonized, trauma informed, distinctions-based, and intersectional lens.
- Development of cultural competency and humility⁷ is ongoing and integrated into processes, policies, and decision making including identifying personal cultural location and biases and building knowledge about the histories and realities of Indigenous and racialized peoples in B.C.
- Programs, policies, and initiatives provide benefit to Indigenous Peoples and racialized peoples and communities in BC by furthering their self-determined goals.
- Relationships with Indigenous and racialized communities, peoples, and organizations are collaborative, authentic, ongoing and reciprocal.
- Processes are transparent, accessible, embody cultural competency and humility, and strengthen mutual capacity.

The Province recognizes the importance of these principles and will work to incorporate and abide by them at all partnership levels and stages of the ISF.

What is an Integrated Support Framework?

THE ISF IS AN APPROACH to provision of housing, health, social, cultural, and food supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness across settings from encampments and shelters to supported housing, complex care housing and private market rentals. The ISF is the foundation of an approach to providing a variety of wraparound supports with a focus on belonging and facilitating access and navigation of services. Supports implemented from the ISF will be delivered through partnerships and in a manner that is accessible, culturally safe⁸, trauma-informed⁹, gender-based plus-informed¹⁰, healing-informed, and oriented towards peoples' unique and intersecting needs.

The intention of the ISF is to create a system where people in need of services and the providers who support them can easily gain access to the right supports at the right time.

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7 Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience (First Nations Health Authority, 2023).

8 Cultural safety is an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care (First Nations Health Authority, 2023).

9 Trauma-Informed Practice is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

10 GBA+ is an approach that identifies people's diverse social identities and complex living realities. The lens is intended to bring attention to the role that structural forces play in producing and reproducing discriminatory policies and practices, institutions and systems which lead to the marginalization of certain populations and identities.

COMPONENTS OF THE INTEGRATED SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

1. Systems Coordination	2. Wraparound Supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improving access to supports that meet basic needs, promote health and wellness, and help people reach their self-determined goals ➤ Bridging the gap to create a continuum of services as people transition to more stable housing environments ➤ Support for improved community level coordination, including information sharing and access to data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Meeting needs of those experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness to provide supports for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Maintaining or securing housing » Physical health, mental health and substance use » Cultural, social, emotional and community connection » Personal care » Food security

1 | Systems Coordination

A KEY COMPONENT OF THE ISF is to enhance system coordination to bridge gaps, streamline access to services and support community level collaboration that relieves the burden on the individual to navigate services and systems. Improved systems coordination ensure that the wraparound supports delivered are accessible and beneficial to the individual, while also building on partnerships and collaboration across sectors to strengthen this work.

Access to wraparound supports will be streamlined and coordinated through local community level systems that connect individuals to the services they need, where they need them, when they are needed. This will include streamlined processes for navigation, access, assessment, prioritization, and referral for housing and other services.

Support for community level coordination will include access to real-time data, to understand the unique needs of individuals experiencing homelessness to help ensure a targeted response. Homeless Management Information Systems, local systems used to collect individual-level data, will help to unite the range of providers who provide housing and support services to people experiencing homelessness. These systems help to stitch together and coordinate service providers, creating a single system of care, and bridge gaps to create a continuum of services as people transition to more stable housing. Improvements to local community level systems will also result in enhanced information sharing and data to allow for expanded insight and reporting. Local community planning depends on accurate and comprehensive information.

Enhancements to system coordination through the ISF will be rooted in collaboration, built on B.C.'s commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and Reconciliation through partnerships with Indigenous people, Nations, and community-based organizations, and informed by the diverse voices most impacted by its implementation, including people with lived experienced of homelessness and those who support them.

Indigenous individuals access services from Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous organizations and the implementation of the ISF recognizes the need for cultural safety across services and supports. Collaboration and coordination between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers will build understanding and support non-Indigenous organizations to help ensure Indigenous people experiencing homelessness have access to services and supports in a culturally safe manner.

2 | Wraparound Supports

THE ISF EMPHASIZES AN APPROACH to provision of holistic care and supports that are flexible in terms of individual choice, service type and duration. As an individuals' situation changes, so will their needs. Implementation of the ISF will include enhanced availability of wraparound supports to meet distinct needs and may include:

HOUSING SUPPORTS

Housing supports promote stability and community integration throughout the experience of finding, securing, moving in and living in housing settings that meet people's needs. Through housing supports, individuals will receive outreach, lodging and landlord liaison aid. This will ensure individuals are supported in various settings and in their transition to housing.

BC Housing is a key partner in the delivery of housing and non-clinical wraparound supports, and as a liaison with community partners. Housing outreach providers and community partners will provide housing supports and connect with other organizations as needed to ensure that individuals receive the assistance that they need to maintain stable housing.

PHYSICAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE SUPPORTS

Health authorities and community partners will provide health (including Indigenous health), mental health and substance use supports, based on individual choices and needs. These supports can be delivered and accessed in various settings, for example: at home, through outreach, primary care, and mental health and substance use specialized community services programs. Enhancements to systems coordination will improve access and integration of health supports across settings.

CULTURAL SUPPORTS

Through partnerships with community and cultural organizations, including Indigenous-led organizations, the ISF will support innovative approaches to deliver distinction-based Indigenous cultural supports and cultural supports for racialized peoples, refugees, and newcomers to Canada, and capacity for organizations to provide such assistance.



“...Housing is only part of it; community is the rest. We don't need authority, we need love. We need genuine caring and someone to hear that our needs are being met.”

—
*Engagement Session Participant
(Person Currently Experiencing Homelessness)*

Homelessness is more than a lack of a structure of habitation and may include disconnection from culture, spirituality, family, relationships, and land. Culturally safe and relevant, distinctions-based, and intersectional cultural supports are essential, in addition to services to meet basic needs and self-determined goals.

Indigenous-led organizations and partners will lead the provision of Indigenous cultural supports and connect with other programs or services as needed to ensure cultural supports are specific to an individual's choices, personal journey, and needs. These supports will promote the importance of learning through experience and ensuring the activities are purposefully and thoughtfully integrated with other services or programs.

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Social, emotional and community supports promote well-being and community belonging in housing settings and in communities. These supports will include a diverse array of services to help people integrate into their communities and may include education, skills development and training; multi-lingual supports; and community supports for youth, seniors, 2SLGBTQIA+, and other distinct groups.


Community partners will provide social, emotional and community supports and facilitate connection with other providers as needed to ensure ISF services are tailored to meet the individual's and needs.

PERSONAL CARE AND LIVING SUPPORTS

Personal care and living supports provided across settings will help ensure assistance with activities of daily living, as needed. This may be integrated with other supports, such as health and housing. One of the goals of personal supports is to empower individuals in shaping and meeting their personal needs and goals for stability and wellbeing. Examples may include ensuring access to home support, assistance with grocery shopping, medication management, personal hygiene routines, and crisis intervention.

FOOD SECURITY SUPPORTS

Having access to a healthy balanced diet supports physical health, mental health and can be a key step in an individuals' journey to health and wellbeing. Access to food, including food that suits an individuals' cultural needs has been highlighted as a crucial component of wraparound supports. Food should be accessible, nutritious, and reflect the diversity of communities around the Province.



“Right now, I’m just focusing on what I’m going to eat today. All my focus is on getting food.”

***Engagement Session Participant
(Person Currently Experiencing Homelessness)***

Current State and Next Steps

INITIATIVES CURRENTLY UNDERWAY that are supported by the ISF include the implementation of the Supported Rent Supplement Program (SRSP) through community organizations and in partnership with BC Housing and Ministry of Health.

An important next step is enhancements to system coordination to bridge gaps, streamline access to services and support community level collaboration, such as streamlined processes for navigation, access, assessment, prioritization, and referral for housing and other services. This work will lead to broader systems change, transforming our approach to one that is more inclusive, responsive, comprehensive, and integrated.

Conclusion

THROUGH ENGAGEMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED from the What We Heard Report, it is clear there is no “one size fits all” solution to addressing homelessness and supporting the path to safe housing for individuals across British Columbia. The ISF is core component of the Belonging in BC Homelessness Plan that will work to support British Columbians experience or at risk of homelessness, alongside other complementary Provincial initiatives, such as the [Homes for People Action Plan](#). The development and implementation of the ISF aims to address some of the service, coordination and connection gaps that impact people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. By bringing together a strong network of partners along the housing, health, social, and community-support sectors, the ISF will build an accessible system of specific and connected supports to meet the intersecting needs of each individual.

In conjunction with earlier documents like [TogetherBC: British Columbia's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#) and [A Pathway to Hope: A roadmap for making mental health and addictions care better for people in British Columbia](#), the Province is committed to addressing and bridging gaps towards belonging for all British Columbians, with a focus on cultural safety and humility, accessibility and community.

Partnership and collaboration will be ongoing as we continue to create a diversity of housing and support options that reflect and respect distinct needs of individuals. Responding to these needs and building the specifics of the ISF will be a journey informed by the people it is designed to serve, and the community and government organizations that support them.

THE SUPPORTED RENT SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM

READY: The SRSP is a new wraparound support program under the ISF that will offer more individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness access to housing supports (i.e., rent supplements to access market rental housing) coupled with the clinical and non-clinical supports they need.

SET: A Request for Proposals was launched in late 2022, inviting non-profit service providers to submit proposals to participate in the SRSP.

GO: Successful proponents will work in partnership with BC Housing, Ministries of Health, Mental Health and Addictions, Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Indigenous partners, regional Health Authorities, First Nations Health Authority, and other service providers to deliver integrated coordinated services to program participants.



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