

Ref: 255926

Daniel Jackson
Strathcona Residents Association
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cc: Premier Horgan
Minister Darcy
Minister Simpson
MLA Mark

Dear Daniel Jackson:

Thank you for your July 13, 2020 email addressed to the Honourable Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding the Strathcona Park Encampment. As Acting Executive Director of the Housing Policy Branch, I am able to respond. I apologize for the length of time it has taken to reply as we manage the many housing issues that have arisen due to the COVID-19 situation.

The Province recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic represents a challenge for vulnerable people in communities across the province, including Vancouver. We also recognize that vulnerable populations are experiencing dual public health emergencies with the ongoing opioid overdose emergency. Furthermore, people experiencing homelessness often have a higher incidence of underlying health conditions, and as a result are at greater risk if exposed to COVID-19.

During the pandemic, the Province has been working to quickly provide safe indoor spaces for vulnerably housed people. In Vancouver, the Province has secured over 850 spaces across 18 sites where vulnerable individuals, including those who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, can maintain physical distance. These sites are crucial in preventing the spread of COVID-19 as they thin the number of people in existing shelters, reduce pressure on the acute care system, and prevent crowding. More information on these locations is available online at: <https://www.bchousing.org/COVID-19/community-sites>.

The Province's work to support vulnerably housed people through the pandemic has also involved efforts to end major encampments in Vancouver's Oppenheimer Park and in Victoria's Topaz Park and on Pandora Avenue. These steps have helped ensure physical distancing can be followed and allow people improved access to hygiene facilities and wraparound healthcare and social supports.

We know that not everyone from Oppenheimer Park moved into indoor shelter and that there are additional people experiencing homeless who are sheltering in the Strathcona Park encampment, in part because shelter spaces and other services have been reduced due to physical distancing requirements and other COVID-19 related impacts.

Together with partners including PHS Community Services and Indigenous representatives, the Province has been actively assisting with outreach efforts for people experiencing homelessness in Vancouver, including those who were previously sheltering at CRAB Park, as well as those who currently shelter at Strathcona Park and other parks. Outreach workers are connecting with campers.

The Province also understands the urgent need to provide more permanent housing and shelter space for people experiencing homelessness, and BC Housing is working on a variety of long-term housing solutions. For example, with the recent [purchase of the American hotel](#) on the Downtown Eastside, the Province will provide 42 units of affordable housing for people who have been living in supportive housing and want to take the next step toward independent living. This builds on the more than 780 supportive homes that the Province has opened over the past two years in partnership with the City of Vancouver, non-profit organizations, and health authorities. Overall, across British Columbia, BC Housing has opened 2,100 supportive homes over the last 3 years, with over 900 more underway. This is part of Government's commitment to build 4,900 units of supportive housing, as outlined in our 10-year housing plan, [Homes for BC](#).

The Province has also recently partnered with the City of Vancouver to launch B.C.'s first-ever "[navigation](#)" centre to help people who are experiencing long-term homelessness. This navigation centre will provide enhanced shelter services such as integrated clinical health supports, as well as culturally appropriate services for Indigenous people

We recognize that there is still much work to be done to address homelessness in B.C., and the Province will continue to work in coordination and collaboration with local governments and service delivery partners to support those who need it most.

You can find the latest updates on BC Housing's actions to address homelessness during the pandemic online at: bchousing.org/COVID-19. Further information on the Province's response to COVID-19, including information on housing and income supports, is available at: gov.bc.ca/COVID. You can also find more information on the Province's work to prevent homelessness [online](#).

Thank you for sharing your perspective as a neighbour and community member on these complex and important issues.

Sincerely,

Avery Kelly
A/ Executive Director
Housing Policy Branch
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing