

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

Legislative Chamber/Video Conference

Wrap-Around Supports for Homeless Nova Scotians

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Tracey Taweel - Deputy Minister

Joy Knight - Executive Director, ESIA

Shelter Nova Scotia

Linda Wilson - Executive Director

Melissa Puddicombe - Director, Practice and Development

Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Society

Pamela Glode-Desrochers - Executive Director

United Way

Sara Napier - President and CEO

Kevin Hooper - Manager, Partnerships and Community Development



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2022

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Melissa Sheehy-Richard

VICE CHAIR

John White

THE CHAIR: Good morning. This is the Standing Committee for Community Services. I'm Melissa Sheehy-Richard, the MLA for Hants West, and I will be chairing the meeting today.

Note that we did poll the members prior to the meeting to agree to holding the meeting in a hybrid format. I'd like to set some reminders to both those in the Chamber as well as those joining us online to please make sure that your mics are all muted on the call, except for when you're going to speak. Wait until the Chair has recognized you to unmute your mic. Indicate you wish to speak by physically raising your hand so I'm able to see it.

I would like to start with introducing the rest of the members, and I will begin with Mr. White.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I would also like to remind the witnesses and everybody joining the meeting today to please turn their cameras on at this point.

On today's agenda we have officials with us from the Department of Community Services, Shelter Nova Scotia, the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Society, and the United Way to discuss wraparound supports for homeless Nova Scotians. I'd like to welcome the witnesses joining us virtually today and ask them to please begin their presentations, and I'd like to start with the Department of Community Services. Ms. Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for the invitation to be here today. I am joined by Joy Knight, Executive Director of the Employment Support and Income Assistance program here at the Department of Community Services.

As you referenced, Madam Chair, we are here today to talk about wraparound supports and the difference they can make in the lives of vulnerable Nova Scotians. Independent living and traditional housing don't work for everyone. People with complex challenges such as mental health and addictions issues sometimes need additional help to maintain their shelter. That is why it's not enough to simply add more housing. We know that preventing and breaking the cycle of homelessness requires wraparound supports.

There is no one single description of wraparound supports. These supports are customized, depending on an individual's strengths and needs. It could mean ensuring bills are paid or that someone has transportation. It could also be wellness checks, managing addiction or mental health issues, or accessing health care. The idea is to meet individuals and families where they are to help them overcome the barriers that make it difficult to maintain a stable home. Some people will need wraparound supports for a lifetime; for others, it's temporary.

To give you an example, our partners at Adsum for Women & Children work with women and families in crisis. Support workers help them reconnect with their family and culture, and work with landlords to secure and retain housing. In the past two years, those wraparound supports have included working with landlords when clients have lost working hours due to COVID-19 restrictions and can no longer pay their rent. The right services at the right time can keep a family housed and together until they are out of a crisis.

There are others who will need wraparound supports for a lifetime. We acknowledge this and are taking a new approach. We are creating permanent supportive housing with wraparound supports where urgent needs have been identified. For the first time, housing is now included in the mandate letter for the Minister of Community Services. We are embracing this and are working with the Office of Addictions and Mental Health and the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing to design a supportive housing strategy for the province. This will include short- and long-term initiatives and will move us away from emergency responses to an approach that is deliberate, preventive and planned.

As we speak, a first-of-its-kind project for Atlantic Canada is unfolding in Halifax. With an investment of \$3.5 million, the Province worked with HRM and the federal government to buy the former Travelodge Suites hotel in Dartmouth, now known as The Overlook. Renovations are well under way to convert the hotel into a permanent home for 60 people who are chronically unhoused.

The Overlook will take a strength-based approach to their programming and supports that won't penalize residents for the complexity of their circumstances and choices, working with them in real time with extensive wraparound supports on site. The Department of Community Services has committed \$1.5 million annually to our partners at the North End Community Health Centre to pay for these supports, which includes a 24/7 team of harm reduction housing workers, a registered nurse, personal care workers, a nurse practitioner, an addictions specialist, dedicated access to physicians, and supports around end of life.

The harm reduction model at The Overlook is a first for our permanent housing project in Atlantic Canada. Residents will have on-site access to a safe supply of alcohol and drugs. This recognizes that abstinence is not realistic for everyone. It reduces the risk of accidental overdose and takes pressure off the health care and justice systems. The Department of Community Services is also supporting a project led by HRM to put 64 modular units in place in Halifax and Dartmouth. The department has partnered with the Out of the Cold Community Association to provide wraparound services, including harm reduction, at both sites.

The Department of Community Services is also funding projects that address specific cultural needs. We are providing \$350,000 to the North End Community Health Centre to operate a supported housing project for men from the African Nova Scotian community. We have earmarked \$1.8 million for the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre to develop the Diamond Bailey House. This project will have 21 supportive housing units and 32 emergency beds for the Mi'kmaw community. In-house services will include elder supports, cultural mentoring, and life skills programming as well as mental health and addictions counselling.

As we work on more longer-term solutions, we will continue to expand wraparound services through the Shelter Diversion Support Program in HRM, and through one-time funding provided to eight rural communities to support emergency hotelling during the Winter months. These interventions, large and small, change lives.

Working with partners such as those who have joined us here today will ensure that we keep our focus as we work on long-lasting solutions to address homelessness, including supportive housing and wraparound supports. We know this work is adding up and that it will make a difference. Providing our most vulnerable with the supports they need to remain safely housed has huge benefits for individuals and for our community. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Taweel. I will move on to Shelter Nova Scotia. Ms. Wilson.

LINDA WILSON: Good morning and thank you very much for inviting us here today. I do have a slide presentation. I think that's available.

I'm really happy to be here today with our Director of Practice and Development, Melissa Puddicombe. We will be happy to answer your questions together.

Is the slide presentation available?

THE CHAIR: I believe we have hard copies of it, so if you wanted to go through it, we could follow along.

LINDA WILSON: What I plan to do is give you a very high-level overview of what Shelter Nova Scotia does and then speak more specifically to the question about wraparound services.

Shelter Nova Scotia operates four different sectors. We have a Corrections Sector, a Homelessness Sector, a Housing Sector, and a Community Sector. Our Homelessness, Housing, and Community Sectors operate very closely together. Their operations are partially funded by the provincial Department of Community Services and the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy. We make ends meet through generous community donations of cash, services, and goods.

I'd like to take this moment to say that we're very pleased and proud that as of October 2021, the organization was further stabilized by the Department of Community Services. Now we're offering a competitive wage to all 100 of our employees. It just makes all the difference in the world to have good employees.

From our perspective, wraparound programs can include prevention, diversion, crisis care, case management, low-barrier health services, legal services, recreation, transportation, education supports, peer support, family support, rental subsidies, and residential treatment. Shelter Nova Scotia offers some of these services now, and we're evolving to provide more wraparound services with our newest program offering. We're building a future vision to provide more supportive housing and a service centre.

If you're looking at the PowerPoint, I'm just going to, again, speak really quickly and briefly. We operate Barry House, which is an emergency shelter located on Gottingen Street. We have 17 sleeping spaces that we call snugs. The guests there are single female-identified and gender-diverse individuals experiencing homelessness.

At 2170 Barrington Street, we also operate Metro Turning Point Centre, which is an emergency shelter with 30 sleeping spaces. That's available for male-identified and gender-diverse individuals.

We have two supported permanent housing programs. The first, you'll see there, is the Rebuilding. It's located at 5506 Cunard Street. The tenants are people who identify as male who've experienced episodic or chronic homelessness. It's permanent supported housing.

The second housing program we call Herring Cove Apartments. It's located on Herring Cove Road. It supports permanent residence for up to 12 high-risk, high-needs individuals with alcohol dependence and a history of chronic homelessness.

From our Community Sector, we operate a Community Trustee Program, which is located in the basement at Metro Turning Point. We really see it as an eviction-prevention program. It supports about 180 people a year.

[10:15 a.m.]

Our newest project, where we are confirming many of our assumptions and learning all kinds of new information, is what we are calling the Housing Hub. It opened in November 2021 at 5506 Cunard Street on the ground floor, which was our admin offices. It's also below the Rebuilding. What's happening there is that our housing support workers work from there. They support past shelter users who are housed - people who have lived at Barry House or Metro Turning Point. They support them with advocacy, referral, and support services.

We're also, for the first time in a very formal way, supporting unhoused people. Those people come and use the shower, laundry, or food. What would make them different from people who are staying at shelters is that they have no access to showers, laundry, and food. That is a service we're offering twice weekly.

We are also now offering shelter diversion, which includes advocacy, referral, and support. What we see happening in the Housing Hub is a microcosm of our proposed project, which we've been discussing and in negotiations with HRM for probably the last four years.

You'll see on the next slide there's a concept design of the property where we would see a service centre operating and supported affordable housing above that. The next slide just shows where it is; it's the vacant lot that's currently owned by HRM, next to Metro Turning Point.

We would identify the Housing Hub as a pilot wraparound model. As I said, it opened in November and it provides a safer space for individuals to access basic needs,

food, showers, laundry for people who are unhoused. What is very crucial, and we intellectualize it a lot, but it's showing up over and over again: an opportunity for social inclusion. It provides support with diversion and eviction prevention, but also it's a place to connect with other human beings.

We target third-party partnerships, and we've been successful with this so far, so anybody who comes there is also eligible to have haircuts, receive legal services, some health care, and more. The Housing Hub, in January alone, supported 173 people: 74 of those individuals came just through the drop-in, so people living outside; and 99 of the clients were our regular caseload, so people we know through the shelters, Barry House and Metro Turning Point.

Of the 74 people who don't receive the regular support because they've been in our shelters, 54 per cent returned for repeated support or services, 79 per cent identified as male, and 89 per cent of the requests were for clothing for people who were sleeping outside or to be temporarily housed in a hotel.

Diversion supports were provided to 131 people, so that would be in the form of funds to either assist them in paying their rent and prevent eviction or for hotel referral. Sixty-two per cent are male-identified. One of our goals is to become a men's expert. We're very aware that there are fewer services for men, and we are looking very carefully at what we can do in terms of wraparound services specifically for men.

Thank you very much for having us today, and I'll look forward to your questions when the time comes.

THE CHAIR: Next we'll hear from Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Society - Ms. Glode-Desrochers.

PAMELA GLODE-DESROCHERS: Thanks everyone; happy to be here. A lot has already been said, so I don't want to really repeat those pieces. What I would like to talk about is the real importance of culturally appropriate supports as well. That is a really key part in maintaining our Indigenous population that we work with very closely.

We currently have a Bedford property, Waverley, and we are working with the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association in Sydney on transitional housing. We are also in talks right now with Lennox Island First Nation, who are going to provide three tiny homes for us, so we'll be looking to reach out to the Province and the city to help us find locations for those in Halifax here, or surrounding areas of Halifax.

We are going to target some of our senior elderly men who have been living rough for a long time. They are key informants we've been dealing with who we know will never go into regular housing. We have those individuals who will never be placed in long-term

housing without full wraparound supports, and we have identified that they will not do well with a group of individuals for many different reasons.

Those are some of the pieces that we have ongoing and have started now. We have put in an application as well through the CMHC National Housing Co-Investment Fund and the women's shelter. We've actually put that proposal not only to them, but also to the Province as it will hopefully include a 24-hour daycare to support those women as well.

Those are some of the pieces we have ongoing. We have started conversations for some development on a property that we own on Wyse Road as well. It's a much smaller piece of property, but we have started looking at that to see how we can help with additional housing for our community.

I think some of the pieces I'd like to talk about that we haven't really touched base on is long-term funding for these wraparound supports, knowing that the funding is there consistently. I've been having these conversations in Ottawa as well. There need to be long-term supports here and real investment in this.

We also have identified the real need for investment in capacity support for organizations and for staff. We've had the conversation time and time again. These jobs, working in the field, are some of the hardest jobs you will ever do, and we have a lot of turnover rate. It's high burnout. It's really hard to walk away at the end of the day. We need to invest in our community members who are doing this work so that we have long-term, real-knowledge, on-the-ground individuals.

Another piece that I'd like to touch base on quickly is the fact that these are really great conversations that we're having, but there is a real need to continue this conversation outside of the standing committee. We have to include people with lived experience. There is a difference for me in an urban context - and quite often we get pulled into rural issues. We have a lot of community members.

We have 55 programs here at the Friendship Centre. Jordan's Principle is one of the many programs that we have. Quite often we're pulled into rural issues around housing when those individual community members are attached to some of our other programs like Jordan's Principle. There are unique needs in those areas, so I think that's something that also needs to be very much aware of in this kind of conversation.

The most important piece is - please take this away - have the conversation with those with lived experiences. I've watched many of my community members, and I've gone through many of the programs here at the Friendship Centre. The most success you have with projects that you will do are ones that actually include people who have the lived experiences. There is a real need to invest in that time frame, so I would like to highlight those two things.

We also have had a shelter in the past that was mentioned. We learned very quickly that in order to include the appropriate cultural supports, that structure is not meant for everybody. It is not a healthy structure when it comes to being able to provide the appropriate cultural supports, and that's access to elders, access to traditional knowledge keepers, land-based learning opportunities. There are some structures that may work for one and may not work for others, so the need to be adaptable and flexible is really key in how you are going to provide those wraparound supports.

There are unique circumstances from my community, from residential schools, centralization, to the Sixties Scoop, and there's so much more, so there are different traumas for different individuals, and we have to understand that everybody is unique. If you have a newcomer who is coming in and has experienced war, there's a whole different scenario as well. Please, the opportunity to have long-term funding that is flexible and adaptable is really going to be key in how we keep these people housed and keep them housed long term.

There's also the reality that you're not going to house everybody. I know for a fact that we have individuals in our community who will never be housed. They don't wish to be housed, and we have to recognize that. We have to work with people where they're at, and I think somebody already said that. Being able to be flexible and being able to adapt how you are working with individuals is really key in the success of all community members.

We recognize that there is the hard investment side, the actual capital side of things, and I've always said we can build these things today. If I had a magic wand and I could build them all today, it would be fabulous. But the reality is that you're not going to keep people housed without those wraparound supports, and I think that is something that we have to remember. We have to recognize that some people will need more supports than others. Some may be short term; some may be long term.

A lot of times we're forced into funding situations where you have a year to do this, or you have a year to keep somebody in a transitional housing space, but the reality is somebody may need transitional housing a lot longer. It could be two years, three years, even. Or you could have somebody in that transitional space for a month, so again, being really flexible and being open to innovative ways of working within community.

It's always a challenge. I've been doing housing and homelessness; I've been with the Friendship Centre for 33 years and the reality is that what works for one doesn't work for everybody. We have to be adaptable.

Another piece that I would love to talk about is the silos that we often get put in and try to work with. I know that was mentioned at the top. Joy and others have been working very closely and trying to break down some of those silos. Those are entrenched silos and it's really hard to overcome those pieces. Being able to break down those silos

will be key to your success and our success as providers, and most importantly, success for our community members who need it the most.

It's not just those silos. It's the levels of government that quite often are not - if we could just get over who's going to take the credit for it and just worry about the problem and worry about that person, we would all be so much better off. Being able to be flexible, not just within organizations and within your own province, but let's be flexible and open to having the solution of all levels of government.

I also have an extra layer of governance that I have to deal with, and that's my chiefs. Sometimes those are challenging conversations, but it's worth the time and effort to invest in those pieces. If everybody's on the same page and we're all trying to achieve the same things, and that is ultimately keeping people housed or getting people housed or just providing supports for them. We've all seen in the past two years the impact COVID-19 has had on all of our communities. It really puts things into perspective as to what is really important.

Those are just some of the key pieces that I would really like to raise here. Again, I could go through all 55 programs that we have. I'm happy to share that with everybody if you would like them. But for me it is about the long term and long-term investment too. These year contracts - we're always trying to plan. I have to say, the Province has been a really solid player in this, but the reality is, I would love to see 10-year contracts, by the way. I know that's probably pushing it, but even with a five-year, we know that this is what we have to work with and we're able to decide what is needed for the community. It could change from year to year.

The importance of being able to have a cultural person on hand and it's not just staff trying to do this off the side of their desk needs to be recognized. That is a key, important piece to keeping somebody housed or talking them off the ledge sometimes. Just having that opportunity to talk with an elder or a traditional knowledge keeper or being able to get on the land. Talking about food security - not just food security but traditional food security as well.

There are different aspects of all of this. It is a very complicated system that we all work in. I sit on the National Housing Council in Ottawa. I know that we're working really, really hard for some of those long-term investments, certainly for the Indigenous population. Rural has always been on my mind as well as remote. Northern is a big issue. And again, recognizing that those areas are all different and may require that this funding be very flexible to address those unique needs in each one of those communities.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We do have one more presenter. We will go to the United Way. I believe it is the last. Ms. Napier.

[10:30 a.m.]

SARA NAPIER: My name is Sara Napier. I'm the CEO of United Way Halifax. I am joined today on the line by Kevin Hooper, who is the Manager of Partnerships and Community Development for United Way. I will provide a few opening comments, and then Kevin and I both will be ready to, along with our other colleagues on the line, answer any questions from the standing committee.

First and very quickly about United Way, we are an impact organization that brings donors, volunteers, and partners together to focus on creating lasting social change. How we do this is we aim to alleviate and reduce local poverty by funding other organizations and programs, by partnering with others, by convening conversation and activities, and by advocating for solutions. Why we do it is because, similar to what some of my other colleagues on the line have shared, we believe that everyone matters and deserves to belong, be safe, and live a life of their choosing.

As United Way Halifax, we focus on poverty, housing, isolation, and the social determinants of health overall, and how people are being supported in those ways societally and as a community. Collectively, as United Ways across Nova Scotia, we fund and invest millions of dollars towards these ends annually.

I'd like to raise four points, and I'll speak to each briefly, and you also will see some layering effect of comments from Linda and Pam. I think that's okay, because it's emphasizing the criticality of some of the points that have been shared.

For our first point, number one: Addressing homelessness is a health care issue. As I mentioned the social determinants of health, without housing, people have difficulty addressing other challenges in their life as well. Other pieces of social determinants of health include items that have been mentioned: nutrition, childhood development, the absence of racialization discrimination, education, physical and mental health, healthy workplaces, income, social supports, culture, et cetera. We need to be thinking really holistically about how all the social determinants of health impact individuals who reside within Nova Scotia.

Folks who are at the most risk of homelessness are often missing several of these key determinants of health. We believe that a broader focus that takes all these other needs into consideration is really imperative for our wraparound support conversation. We also believe that homelessness and housing need to be considered as a part of the top priority of the provincial government in terms of its commitment to health care reform, because it is highly connected to the health care agenda.

Number two - Linda and Pam also both spoke about this: There is greater need for direct service providers and to have increased core funding and support funding. From a core funding point of view, we're speaking about operations, program funding, but also

funding for staff learning, retention, development, mental health for staff who are working in the sector. Some of the experiences that individuals have who are working in direct service can be highly traumatic, and the workload and pressures are acute. We need to find ways to better support and sustain these incredibly talented and passionate people to continue to be thriving in this space. That's a real concern and worry. It's that strengthening capacity, but also strengthening the program funding itself.

What we have also noted is that, especially within COVID-19, these issues have existed beforehand, but we've noticed that the clients' needs are becoming more and more connected to precariousness of housing. The number of clients is increasing. The needs that people are trying to manage their way through are more complex, and that's taking more resources.

We do know as well that the sector is very nimble and adaptable, and the stress has been very high during COVID-19, but the costs take a toll. The costs on people working in the sector, the costs of the programs, the costs of the operations are all really profound, and the operational cost and core funding needs - additional support would help to alleviate that significant burden.

My third point: Homelessness exists in every community in Nova Scotia, and it has never been so acute, so it's not just an urban issue. The reason why I shared that - and I know that I'm speaking, in many ways, to the converted - is that homelessness is often hidden. We don't often see it, and I know from talking with my colleagues at United Ways right across the province that they are also dealing with issues and supporting issues of housing and homelessness and wraparound supports in communities that are urban, rural, and suburban. That's true within HRM, and that's true within the province-wide system. Similar to what Pam said, we need to find a way to work together as a provincial government and as the sector - absence of jurisdictions, absence of credit, absence of specific departments - to find that shared system view and that focus on a system solution for all those individuals and people involved in really caring about the issue.

The fourth point, to reiterate what Pam also spoke about, is that it's wonderful to hear from us, and thank you very much for that opportunity. We also strongly believe that the committee would benefit greatly from speaking with and hearing directly from individuals with lived experience in homelessness and poverty, and it needs to be unstructured and in a longer period of time. You need a space to listen, to learn, and see how those voices can influence the work that this committee cares about and that the Department of Community Services cares about, and to help transform housing for the province overall. Those are types of conversations that we as colleagues and peers and people who want to partner with you can help to convene, so please connect with us on those opportunities.

THE CHAIR: We'll move into the questioning. We're going to be doing it in 20-minute intervals. I would invite the Liberal caucus to begin. Ms. Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: It's nice to see the three women on the - I know Sarah well from my municipal government past, and also Pam, so thank you for the great work. It's the first time I've met Linda. I understand that she's been working with HRM for the last four years, so I'm not necessarily sure how long Shelter Nova Scotia has been in operation, but thank you for your tenacity in trying to respond to homelessness. I don't know if any of us ever foresaw where we would be right now with 427 unhoused in HRM itself.

I'm going to base my questions along the what, the how, and going forward. When it comes to the wraparound services used a lot, you alluded to what they might be with regard to mental health and the lived experience. I know from being in government many times people don't know how to navigate the system. I just wondered how when someone finds themselves homeless - take us to that lived experience and how you're engaged. I don't know who would want to answer that in that regard. What would you do at first? I'm trying to figure out the coordination of the responses and the wraparound services and providing them.

THE CHAIR: Who is the question directed to?

LORELEI NICOLL: Well, it could be either one of them. It could be all three, in essence of time.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we'll invite the Department of Community Services to begin. Ms. Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I'll respond briefly so that I can pass it along to my colleagues as well. I would say that we can become aware of an individual who has become precariously housed through a number of channels. The Department of Community Services may become aware because the client is engaged with our income assistance program or maybe engaged with other programs that exist within the Department of Community Services. We also can become aware through housing support workers who work with our partners that are part of this meeting today.

The need for wraparound supports emerges as we begin to identify - we, depending on who is engaged, so I say that very broadly. As we identify the unique needs of the individual, the wraparound supports they require will become clearer, and how the system more broadly can support those individuals.

I will pass it along to my colleagues, but I would say that the answer is that individuals can enter, if you will, the system through a variety of channels, and our collective goal is to ensure that there is no wrong door, that they receive the type of support they need as quickly as they possibly can.

THE CHAIR: I see Mr. Hopper would like to comment.

KEVIN HOOPER: It's Hooper, but thank you. I think there's an important thing to recognize here in terms of just where the frontline service system is at in terms of capacity. I think there needs to be a dynamic in which people who found themselves homeless could engage with a shelter, and at times in the past, there would be capacity enough to do some navigation at that point and help the person, provide them with those support services.

I think what's happening now, and I may be speaking a little bit out of turn because I'm not a shelter worker at this stage in my career, but shelters are at capacity. Shelters are overwhelmed day to day with the people they have in front of them, people who are taking up the bed spaces at their location.

There is an increasing number of people looking for a place to engage the system, a place that is accessible, a place that is familiar, a place that they trust. A lot of the time, they're simply being turned away or just have no opportunity to be recognized because those existing services are at capacity.

The Housing Hub that Linda referenced, I think, is a good example of how the system needs to be built out to accommodate this growing need. It's not about having a bed in that facility that's going to give you access to services, but it is a street-level accessible location with experienced professionals whom you trust who can give you insight into how you work your way through that challenging period of time.

What I really mean to say is, online services or government programs in which you have to go through layers of bureaucracy, if you put it that way, are real challenges for people who are homeless and for people who don't have access to resources - sometimes people who don't have the real personal capacity to navigate those systems.

They really need to have access to an individual in a service agency that they know who can walk them through the process. That, in my experience, is about the only way it works for a large number of people who are homeless.

THE CHAIR: My apologies for pronouncing your name incorrectly. Ms. Puddicombe.

MELISSA PUDDICOMBE: I just really wanted to jump in and say that homelessness is a very complex problem, and complex problems don't come with easy answers. I think it's really important to highlight - and I'm really echoing what I've heard from Kevin - the importance of connection. COVID-19, if anything, has taught a lot of us a lot of things about what it feels like to be lonely, or at least to give us a little bit of an insight into that. Being lonely hurts, and in our experience at the shelter, we have a lot of folks who were formerly experiencing homelessness, who are sleeping rough, who are unable to access the shelter for a variety of reasons that could include that we're just full.

Our teams are supporting people who are in our spaces, but there's a ton of work that goes on outside of that where we support people in our parking lots, who come to our windows for support around safe supply access or food or a tent or a blanket. We have really seen by opening the Housing Hub, which I would say we did on a bit of a - ultimately it wasn't financially supported at the time we moved forward with that project, and in our four years of operation we had some thoughts around what that might look like.

[10:45 a.m.]

I think we've learned a few things over the years, things that we've heard from people with lived and living experience. What we've really seen is that people need a place to come and to connect, and to get their needs met in a very adaptable, responsive way to what they're presenting at the time.

People who we've worked with over many years - and at Shelter Nova Scotia, we work with generations of families. We may have seen a son, a father, and a grandfather, and sometimes we have two of those folks in the shelter at the same time. What we've found is that people really need a place to be accepted and to be able to have someone help them at various times to figure out how we navigate these big, complicated systems. Ultimately, when people say what is it that someone needs when they're experiencing homelessness, what I would suggest is that we re-frame that to recognize that they need what everybody needs.

The thing is that there are more complex considerations that need to be made so that people are positioned in ways that they can access those supports more effectively. That means that they have a place that they can rest their head, and there's no expectation that they're going to be going into treatment after spending all day walking around in poor shoes, being hungry, and not knowing where they're going to sleep that night. I think recognizing that a day in the life is so vastly different from one person to the next.

Even within that person's life, things can change dramatically from one point to another, so just recognizing the need of a bunch of different services that the person can access at different times, and different organizations with different mandates and missions that can provide those supports. Ultimately, it's not one-size-fits-all, and that's really important.

THE CHAIR: We have until 10:57 a.m. Ms. Glode-Desrochers, is that pronounced correctly?

PAMELA GLODE-DESROCHERS: It's Glode-Desrochers. That's alright. Just call me Pam, it's all good - Pamela if you're mad at me. (Laughs)

I just wanted to add - everybody has raised some valid points here. I know through the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, we have close to 200 employees, and they're

working in one capacity or another. The reality is that quite often, we will have somebody come in and say I need a job, so they get sent to the employment team.

We've developed a system, and United Way helped with some of this funding. We have a navigator at the front desk who sits down as people come in to have a conversation. Sometimes it's just a tea, sometimes it's a chat, but to actually start to build a relationship with new community members who may not be familiar with us. It takes time to build those relationships.

Quite often, somebody will come in for a job. The reality is they're not ready for a job, but what they're really looking for is housing, food security, a place to lie down, a place to wash their clothes, to have a shower - a place to just be themselves, and a safe space.

I always say to my staff that we have difficult clients. I recognize that, but the reality is you don't know what happened to them as they walked through that door. We have to recognize that we are often the safe space for them, so when they are reacting to us in a negative way, there's a good chance that something has happened to them in the last five minutes. Being open and being able to adapt and have an elder on hand - have somebody with some traditional knowledge on hand to work with these individuals and be open to those pieces, building capacity of those with lived experience - what a better way to build a relationship.

There is nothing any better than to sit down with somebody who understands where you've come from, what it's like sleeping on the streets, what it's like to fight that urge to go get high or to have a drink, or you just feel like this is it - to be able to have that safe space.

I know we provide that a lot with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, but the importance is it's not just with one organization. It's got to be all of us doing this work. The reality is that not every Indigenous person feels comfortable coming into the Friendship Centre because they don't know who they are. They don't understand their culture. They don't understand where they come from. They've been adopted out or they're part of a residential school. They're still embarrassed of who they are. Being able to have those wraparound supports done by all of us, that's how we're going to see real impact.

The needs of some of my community members are so high. Then I have some who walk in, and we get them housed, we give them some food, get them some clean clothes, they have a shower, and then they're gone again. They'll come back in two weeks time and do the same thing over. You have to be open that that's okay.

Being able to have conversations with other service providers is key too. I've had non-Indigenous people show up here and we've been able to connect them with other organizations doing this work, so that we're not just leaving people on the streets. We work

really hard to be that effective organization. We don't have all the answers. We don't have all the solutions. This is a much larger issue than just ours.

Being able to do that work and recognizing that not everybody just comes in and says, I need a place to sleep. They may come in and just say, I need a job. Being able to work and to have the capacity to recognize that you've got to have a conversation with people, that you've got to build a relationship - that takes time. I also think it's really important that - and I know somewhere there are organizations - we have an Indigenous CAB, a community advisory board, through Reaching Home. I know the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia has a CAB as well.

We've done the homework. We've done our research. We're all researched to death, or at least I know my community is. The reality is, those who're doing the work - I can guarantee you, Linda and her colleagues know exactly what needs to be done. We don't need another research project. We don't need to be another five years into a long-term research project. What I need is the long-term supports, the flexible supports, and the adaptable supports to actually do the work. Again, I'm going to harp on the importance of building capacity for those community members who are doing the work. I'll leave it at that.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful, thank you. We do have about five minutes left. I see a hand up. Are there any others replying? Ms. Nicoll, did you have another question you would like to ask at this time?

LORELEI NICOLL: Are you allowing my colleague, MLA Tilley, to speak as well?

THE CHAIR: Sorry about that, Mr. Tilley.

LORELEI NICOLL: Before we go to my colleague, could I just ask Pam - because she was the last one on the screen and she was the one who said she would like to see the silos removed - to sort of elaborate on that?

PAMELA GLODE-DESROCHERS: Sure. We've all seen how somebody comes in for support and they get passed around - oh, it's not my problem, you've got to go here or you've got to go there or you've got to go there. Being able to go to a one-stop shop in the province and say, look, these are our needs - and it's all connected.

Sara has pointed out the health determinants and how important that - housing is not just a structure. It's not just that physical piece of capital that you can touch. Housing is so much more. It is about a safe space, belonging, feeling like you are important, and feeling like you matter. Being able to go in and say, look, these are our needs, and instead of my having to apply for 10 different funding pots to get a program up - which, by the

way, I do now. I have hundreds of proposals that I'm writing every year, and I'm trying to get all these supports together.

The importance of being able to recognize - I know Tracey has said that they're working hard at the Province to do some of this stuff: bringing in mental health, bringing in addictions, bringing in childhood education even. There are needs for daycare supports. There are needs for youth supports. All of those things, instead of an organization having to figure out those pieces, it should be a conversation with the Province to say, here's a proposal, how are we going to make this work? We're touching on all this stuff. We have Indigenous women who come in all the time, and they're coming in with kids, and yet - you don't fit in this box over here, but this piece will fit there, but we're going to have to go over here to make it work for you.

It takes time to do that. Sometimes you lose that individual in that system, in that structure, so it really is about, let's work together and find the solutions, being adaptable, being flexible with funding, and recognizing that not everybody fits into a box. We have to be open to that. We have to recognize that those silos often cause us to lose individuals in our communities. That's not what anybody wants. It is truly about us. We're putting and centering the community person in the middle, and we should be standing around figuring it out and not, oh, well, I can do this piece, you can do that piece. Let's figure it out before we get there, and let's have a smooth piece for us.

I know anybody who's done any proposal writing - when reporting time comes, it doesn't matter even within the province, I've got 5 or 10 or 20 or 30 different reports that need to be done and they're all different. Why can't I do one report for one project and just call it a day and take that stress and burden off the organizations? Let us do the work that we're designed to do.

I'm fully aware, being open and transparent and being accountable, I'm 5,000 per cent behind that. But how many times do I get bogged down in just trying to do the reporting on it because it's not in a special format, or it's not set up this way, or it's not set up that way. I hope that answers the question.

THE CHAIR: Okay, Mr. Tilley, you've about a minute to get your question in.

FRED TILLEY: I'll defer my question to another time.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Hooper, did you want to make a comment in the last minute?

KEVIN HOOPER: I just want to give an example, I think, that reflects this idea of the difficulty of silos that we've been dealing with in Halifax for a number of years.

We have what is called an extreme-weather response program intended to provide emergency housing or emergency accommodations for people in the case of extreme

weather events. The cost of running this program is not particularly high - I think it's in the order of \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year - but we have failed year over year to find consistent funding for this program because . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. I will move to the NDP caucus now - your time will go until 11:17 a.m. Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: This was brought up by several groups, and I want to talk to the Department of Community Services about it. How do the wraparound supports for people experiencing homelessness in Halifax compare to the supports available in other areas of the province? For example, what is available in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, as well as other rural areas?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I think it's a really good question because, as one of my colleagues on the call referenced, homelessness is not unique to the urban environment of HRM. We know there are individuals experiencing homelessness from one end of the province to the other - I think it is becoming more and more visible.

Recently, we have made investments right across the province supporting rural-based shelters. The honourable member may be aware we actually had an announcement last week supporting an additional seven organizations right across the province, including providing additional funding to the Cape Breton Community Housing Association which, as you would be aware, has presence in Sydney and Port Hawkesbury.

We have also provided additional support to the Cape Breton Community Housing Association - just over half a million dollars to stand up 14 additional units - and in October, funded a new housing locator within Cape Breton. All those investments help to support the creation and the standing up of wraparound supports. As I referenced in my remarks and as my colleagues have referenced, those wraparound supports vary depending on the unique needs of the individual.

I think that is a really important point that we can't lose sight of, and I really take Pam's comments to heart about we need to meet people where they are. We need to be open; we need to be flexible. Part of our desire in providing funding to rural-based organizations - including those within CBRM - is to make sure that we do have capacity from one end of the province to the other. Regardless of whether they live in an urban setting or a more rural-based setting, we provide them with the support that they need in order to be successful. Whether that is in the short term, whether it's temporary support, or whether it's a longer-term wraparound support that they require to be successful.

KENDRA COOMBES: I also want to touch on what many of our witnesses have already discussed, and that is funding - particularly core funding. We hear departments talk about their partners, but yet, many of these partners have to go out and fundraise. A majority of their time, I believe, is spent fundraising and looking for money to be able to

support the programs that they're doing. Has the department looked into establishing core funding with regard to the issue of homelessness?

[11:00 a.m.]

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I completely agree: Core funding is critical. I am pleased that we are providing core funding within HRM, and we are providing core funding as well outside of HRM. I think the point is well taken - sorry, and the Cape Breton Community Housing Association does receive core funding.

I think the point is well taken that some of my colleagues have made, that it is important for organizations to know that core funding is in place over the long term. That point is really critical and until recent years, that core funding was accessed on a year-over-year basis. Organizations were never 100 per cent certain that they would receive their core funding, and that creates instability in a sector that works extremely hard under very trying circumstances to provide unique supports to individuals who need those supports.

Certainly within the department, we recognize the need to simplify our funding processes to ensure that organizations have the confidence of knowing that core funding is there. To have an ongoing dialogue and - as Pam very eloquently articulated - breaking down those silos is absolutely critical. This department continues to work hard to break down silos that at one point in time existed within this department; that work is ongoing. Core funding is one piece of that.

In addition to core funding, it is also really critical that when we think about things, such as Pam has articulated - reporting requirements, applying for project-based funding. We certainly recognize that that redeploys a resource that could be used to provide wraparound support or welcome an individual who needs support.

We are actively looking at and working with partners on how we can simplify that. We will continue to work with our colleagues within the provincial system to look at how we can simplify those reporting requirements and how we can look at ensuring that organizations have the resources that they need to do the really important work that they do each and every day.

KENDRA COOMBES: On that note, I'd like to ask our witnesses who are doing that core work: What could government do to strengthen your organization's abilities to do your core work?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Coombes, who would you like to hear from?

KENDRA COOMBES: If Sara Napier would like to start?

SARA NAPIER: I'll be brief and then hand it over to my colleagues who are working in direct service. All three of us spoke about the need for strong wages for people working in this sector, for training budgets for mental health supports for those working in the sector, as the trauma that is experienced by those with the stress and strain is acute, and the extent of turnover is rapid.

I would also say in addition to core funding, which is critical - and I really appreciated the deputy minister's comments about the longer kind of runway of knowledge about that core funding. I still think there's a need for increases in core funding and also some programmatic funding that's supportive of organizations who are dealing with issues related to housing, maybe for the first time.

The issue is so rampant that we're seeing it show up at neighbourhood hubs, for example, that might be more focused traditionally on social isolation work or education programs or youth programs or food security programs, and they're now having to address housing-related supports as well. The depth and the range of the work are much more extensive than they once were.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Puddicombe.

MELISSA PUDDICOMBE: I just want to quickly add that within our experience operating two shelters for people who are experiencing homelessness, what happens in those spaces is that when you are with us, we're working with you to help you find longer-term sustainable housing and other connect points. But once you leave the shelter, you can't come back in anymore. It's a really disruptive relationship when we're working with people in their most vulnerable moments and from there they leave our space and they can't come back inside. As I've said, people will come to the window and connect with us or they may come back and let us know how they're doing, but the relationship is very much ruptured.

With that in mind, and based on what people were telling us, with lived and living experience, we opened up the Housing Hub to folks, not really knowing what we'd find out. We had some ideas about what might happen, but we weren't really sure. We were using that opportunity to really learn some things and learn from people about what those unmet needs are.

What showed up right away is the number of referrals we get from other institutions, like health and justice, where people - usually social workers like me - are reaching out to us and saying, we have this person, they're not connected, we're going to make this referral and we're just hoping you can fill in the blanks.

There really is a challenge for us, being community-based, because we don't have direct access to these systems. We don't have priority access to health care beds. What's available in the community is limited and under-resourced. As I said earlier, and as had

been said by other witnesses - as carers, we hurt when other people hurt. The compassion fatigue and the cost of doing this work is high. We don't have enough staff to take on one more thing. We know what some of these issues are and some things we'd like to do, but we're not resourced adequately to be able to have the teams in place to provide these responses.

Ultimately, what I would say is, we need more people to do more work, and also an ability to have the funding in place so you're not scrambling by writing 100 proposals a year. As Pamela says, it's very time-consuming and very challenging. Most importantly, it takes away from the work that we're meant to be doing, which is providing that support to folks we are connected with.

I would just say - and I know it's probably ad nauseum - that more resources are really needed in terms of people and funding to be able to do those creative, more flexible responses - just the opportunity to be able to try things and see what works.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Ms. Coombes, do you have any further questions?

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm turning it over to my colleague, Suzy Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: First, I wanted to just say thank you to the witnesses for all your hard work and dedication to our communities before, during, and continuing in this pandemic. As Pam has alluded to, it is one of the hardest jobs to be able to do, especially during a pandemic - the shifting and adapting was immense. I just wanted you to all know that I appreciate all the work that you do, and continue to do, throughout this whole time.

As well, I'm grateful to see some of the service providers based out of my own riding, Halifax Needham, and grateful to have many conversations with a number of you today.

Taking this information in, I've made a lot of notes. A lot of these things we will raise while we're sitting in the House. This is near and dear to us as well, especially those of us who have lived experiences.

My question is going to be shifted in another direction, because I need to have more knowledge of particulars. This will be to service providers. The Province currently has a rent cap in place until December 31, 2023, and there is also currently a ban on renovations. Before the ban that was put in place, there were multiple cases reported where landlords were using renovations to get rid of tenants so that they could charge higher rent to the next tenant.

The ban on renovations is set to lift when the provincial state of emergency ends - possibly March 21st. The Minister responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act says that he's comfortable with that. For the service providers that I've just suggested here, are you

comfortable with that, or do you expect it could increase the number of people who are unhoused?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Glode-Desrochers.

PAMELA GLODE-DESROCHERS: This is not far from mind at any given time. Everything aside from this, this is going to cause a huge influx for us, and we know that. We are trying to prepare for that, but we know it's coming. We know as soon as that ban is gone, it will affect us, absolutely, and we are trying to prepare for it. The reality is I have a lot of community members right now that I can't house because I cannot find true affordable housing.

These are conversations I have at all levels of government, by the way. These are real, on-the-ground impacts that we're going to see, and I lose sleep over it, and I know probably a lot of my staff lose sleep over these kinds of conversations. These are really tough conversations to have. I understand and see where landlords come from. Everything is so much more expensive, let's be honest, and just look at the cost of gas right now. I filled my car up and almost went, oh my gosh, I think I'm going to get a horse and buggy.

I understand the real push to remove them, I do, and I think we have to find a better way to actually support everybody. We have to find a better way to recognize that there is real impact on landlords financially, but for me, I am so focused on what happens to my community member when that's lifted. There's going to be a real impact. It's a really tough conversation. Nobody really wants to have it, but the reality is, it is going to change and impact us. The rent ban was one thing. We could even throw in the justice issues in there as well.

We didn't stop when COVID-19 happened - we actually exploded. We hit the ground running and we worked even harder. We're still working harder, and with all the impacts that are going on in the world today, I suspect the next little while is going to become even harder for all of us and how we respond to all of this. It's certainly going to have a direct impact on us, no question.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Hooper, did you want to have a comment?

KEVIN HOOPER: I think it's just important to accept that the housing crisis is not a product of the pandemic. It's exacerbated some of the issues, but lifting the ban according to the state of emergency, and the end of this emergency period of the pandemic, is just misdirected. The housing crisis preceded the pandemic, and it's really only getting worse. I can only speak to Halifax, but I suspect similar statistics could be found in other parts of the province.

We're attracting something in the order of 3,500 new households to the city every year for the last five years. We're producing 2,500 units of housing. We're short 1,000

units year over year over the last five years, and there's no sign of that slowing down or getting any better, because the construction industry can't resource labour positions to build any more housing than they're currently building.

Like Pam said, lifting this ban is going to have an immediate impact on the number of clients seeking service from emergency service providers. No doubt about it. They're already tapped out. This is going to add a lot of challenge to an existing crisis. There's no doubt in my mind.

[11:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: We have about three minutes left. If you have another question, Ms. Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm going to ask my final question. Our caucus has put forward a bill to establish housing as a human right. The bill would require government to commit the maximum available resources to increase access to housing, to prioritize the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized individuals or groups living in precarious housing conditions, to increase the share of publicly owned and non-market housing, and ensure that businesses refrain from activities that would result in a loss of affordable or non-market housing.

If we were able to pass this bill into law, what impact do you think it would have on the present situation? I know there's going to be a lot of discussion on this, but I think it needs to be heard because as we said, housing is one piece. There are a lot of other pieces to that when it comes to health, mental health, and other services. What type of impact do you think it would have? This could be for service providers. Ms. Wilson.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Wilson, you have roughly a minute.

LINDA WILSON: Of course, it's going to make a huge difference. We've all heard about the whole idea of housing first. You have to start somewhere. Absolutely, people need a place to live, but it couldn't stop there. We need these wraparound supports - the reason that we're here to talk about this today.

I can tell you, one of the greatest strains that our employees feel - they're struggling themselves to find housing and to stay housed economically. When their job is to help people find housing and there's no housing, it's one of the reasons that people choose to leave and go find another job. They're so defeated because there's no affordable housing to find.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Wilson. You timed that perfectly. We will move to the Progressive Conservative caucus. Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: My first question is for Pam. In October 2021, our government announced an investment of \$10.1 million over two years to provide wraparound services, support, shelter, and culturally relevant housing. Can you speak to how the Diamond Bailey House will address the unique needs of Indigenous men experiencing homelessness?

PAMELA GLODE-DESROCHERS: Certainly. The Diamond Bailey House was always designed - and this has been 15 years in the making by elders, by the way. We had always hoped that this would be a true wraparound support project. This was not about an emergency shelter, it was not just about transitional housing, and it was not just about providing housing. It was about providing true wraparound supports that were working with elders. It was a program.

We've discovered the shelter structure does not work very well for us. It actually caused some harm and trauma, so we're working within the community with elders, with people with lived experience, to find a traditional way to move forward. That is going to include such things as access to elders, talking circles, traditional knowledge, and language. We're talking about land-based learning and building on the assets of community members who are going to be living, working, and playing in those areas.

Hopefully a good example - we have one person right now who is homeless but has years of experience working within the food security industry around food prep and stuff like that. We're talking about working with individuals who have that kind of capacity, identifying capacity with those community members, and building on it, and they become part of the program.

We're talking about totally immersed with elders, traditional knowledge, having the opportunity for Indigenous people to actually experience what it is like and what it is to be Indigenous where, quite often, those people have lost that ability over the years. They've never experienced - they don't know who they are. We want to build who they are with them and walk them through.

The other two levels in that building, it is about moving them through the system and getting them into long-term housing that is truly affordable and that - I think it was Linda who said when people leave their space, we're not leaving them. We want to continue that with them. If they need something from us, they know they can come back to us. That is really important for us. You can't expect somebody who has spent 5, 10, 15 years homeless to have a magic day and never need a support again. We may trip and fall many times but knowing that ongoing cultural supports that are there, will be there no matter what, I think, is the biggest piece.

We're really thankful to the Province for that investment. It's a huge investment. I think it's the first time in the history that I have seen - and I've been doing this for 33 years - that kind of investment and the importance around culture. We're really thankful for that. We want to work with the Province to ensure that as we build that out, it is meeting the

needs of the community, and recognizing that the shelter structure doesn't work for us, so let's be flexible and adapt, and we'll find the right structure that does.

NOLAN YOUNG: Thank you so much for your answer there, Pam. I'll pass it off to my colleague Mr. White.

JOHN WHITE: My question is for Ms. Wilson. The Housing Hub drop-in centre is doing wonderful work. Can you describe this model to us and maybe what makes it unique to help us understand that, Ms. Wilson?

LINDA WILSON: I certainly could do that, but Melissa oversees it, so she might be the better person to answer very specific questions. I think I'll ask Melissa to do that.

MELISSA PUDDICOMBE: The Housing Hub essentially is in response to what Pam referenced a few minutes ago. Our struggle at the shelter is that once people left our space, there was no longer an opportunity to do ongoing work with that individual, but they did continue to require that work, and they were seeking out that support. We opened the Housing Hub as a space that people could come into. It offers a drop-in twice a week, and we also support people outside of that by appointment only. Although we have learned that appointments don't work very well because oftentimes people don't come, or when they do come, we may not have enough folks in the building to be able to accommodate their request.

Essentially, it allows us to work with folks beyond our regular ongoing caseload. Our team of housing staff supports 99 people on an ongoing basis, and those folks are housed. But the Housing Hub allows us to support people who are unhoused, who traditionally we haven't provided support to, folks who may be coming in to access the most basic of needs like a shower or food. This often turns into much deeper and - I don't want to say more meaningful work because I think ultimately the access to basic needs is of the utmost importance - but being able to connect people with other resources, work around access to medication, things of that nature.

We provide access to basic needs, we provide referrals to various needs, and then we partner with third-party organizations to provide some on-site services because ultimately, we believe that part of the barrier for folks accessing services is getting to the services. I don't mean that just through a transportation lens, but even just in the sense of trying to go to these big, scary places. That doesn't work for everyone, so bringing things whether it be a haircut or court support, or different types of services into our spaces so that people can engage with them when they are ready.

That might take a few visits. That might see someone talking to someone a few times, and then one day they say maybe today's the day that I'm going to talk to that person. So really not underestimating the importance of being able to plant a seed. Then we do other things like what we call a housing clinic, which is a partnership service that we do

with other community agencies, but ultimately helping folks fill out some paperwork to help them apply for things like public housing or a housing subsidy or things of that nature.

I'll just finish it up by saying the other thing that we do, which is something very new to us, is diversion work. Traditionally, we haven't done a lot of diversion in the shelters. We really sort of screen people in and support them while they're in the shelter space. Now we've really shifted our mindset to try to help folks either not come in the door in the first place - so how can we support you to find another option? Or if they do come in, a really rapid resolution to that experience of staying in a shelter, and are there things we can do or supports that allow you to access other things more quickly? Whether that's some money for transportation to move outside, to go to a place where you're able to stay, or is this some assistance around arrears? Maybe you need some help with a power bill or whatnot. In some cases, it's a referral to access a hotel or emergency housing when the shelters are full, and the shelters are always full.

THE CHAIR: Mr. White, any further follow-up?

JOHN WHITE: Thank you. I appreciate the answer.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I'd like to ask my question if I could to Deputy Minister Taweel. We know that homelessness is not just an urban problem. The Department of Community Services recently announced \$20,000 to help sustain seven rural emergency shelters across the province. Can you tell us how this program will address the growing community needs in rural Nova Scotia?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: You are correct. We did recently announce some investments for rural parts of the province. As I referenced earlier, we have made investments in seven community-based organizations across the province, and more rural-based. This funding is intended to fund housing support services and hotel rooms in rural parts of the province when shelters are at capacity, or for people who might be better served through a hotel environment.

There is a mixture of investments that were made in recognition of the fact that there is absolutely, as I referenced earlier, a need for support - not just in the urban centres within our province, but also rural parts of the province. One particular investment, Pictou County Roots for Youth Society - I'll use that as an example - received funding to reduce its reliance on volunteers in order for them to hire trained support staff who would have the skills required to support vulnerable youth as they try to stabilize their lives to transition to independence.

I use that example because I think it really does highlight the fact that many of our rural shelters are staffed by volunteers. They're not staffed by professional paid staff, if

you will. They do the absolute best they can, but as all of my colleagues here today have referenced, individuals can present with really complicated needs. If we want to meet those individuals and provide them with the supports that they need when they need them, sometimes that's beyond the capacity of a volunteer to be able to support.

As we work hard to tackle the issue of homelessness right across this province, we need to recognize that these organizations do amazing work. But they're doing it often out of the kindness of volunteers who have perhaps tried to support what at one time may have been a small number of individuals, but is growing. The issue has certainly grown in rural parts of our province.

I think these investments will absolutely provide some needed support. Our conversations with partners right across this province, in rural parts of the province, continue. We recognize there is much more that we need to do, and we're committed to working collaboratively to find solutions not just in urban centres but also in rural parts of the province.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: This is directed towards Deputy Minister Taweel. The Overlook is an example of the Province, the federal government, and HRM working together to address homelessness in Nova Scotia. Could you speak to us about potential future collaboration projects such as this?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The Overlook certainly is a great example of levels of government and community working collaboratively to best support individuals requiring support. The Overlook will be a 60-bed facility with five respite beds. The Overlook will be permanent housing for a number of high-acuity men in our community who require support. As the committee will be aware, the Province committed \$3.5 million to the purchase of the facility, and we have a commitment of \$1.5 million for ongoing operating, which will provide those wraparound supports that we're here to talk about today.

We'll also provide just over \$400,000 to AHANS, which will be responsible for the maintenance of that facility and ensuring that it continues to be upgraded and has everything that it requires.

The Overlook, working in partnership with the North End Community Health Centre, is a unique model - certainly the first of its kind in Nova Scotia. I think there will be a lot of learnings that will come not just from the fact that we've come together to collaborate in this way but also the model that the North End Community Health Centre has put in place. I think there will be a lot of learnings that will come from that as well, that we can then take and apply in either potentially similar-sized settings or smaller settings.

[11:30 a.m.]

The real learning for me - and I think all of my colleagues here have said this - is that there is a need for levels of government and community to work together to break down those barriers that are artificial, that exist between our various levels of government. We all have levers. We all have areas of accountability, but at the end of the day, we have a shared focus and commitment to supporting individuals in our province who need support. When those artificial barriers that exist - either between departments in the provincial government or between governments and community or between levels of government - get in the way of providing these needed supports, everybody loses.

I think this model really does provide us with a nice path forward. We can learn from this, and I think we will absolutely be looking for other opportunities to collaborate in this way. I recognize that we need to also be able to move quickly when opportunities present themselves. Bureaucracies aren't necessarily known for their speed. As fast as I would like to move things, sometimes we perhaps move more slowly. There's a lot we can learn from community, who move at the speed they need to move to support the clients who present to them on a daily basis.

I am looking forward to continuing those conversations, looking at how we can provide better support, how we can move more quickly, and how working collaboratively across levels of government, we can make a real impact. I would say that modular units that have been established in Dartmouth and soon in Halifax are also another example of working collaboratively between two levels of government and community providers to provide support to high-acuity clients who really need that wraparound support and need a safe and secure and stable place to call home.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I truly appreciate your response, Deputy Minister Taweel. I'm going to stay on The Overlook for a second. I'm wondering, could you speak to the type of wraparound services or support that will be offered at The Overlook?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I've mentioned some of the wraparound supports already here today, so ensuring that there are mental health supports, that there is addictions counselling. There will also be the safe provision of drugs and alcohol, recognizing that some individuals who will reside at The Overlook will require that supported, safe environment and recognizing, as I referenced in my opening remarks, that abstinence isn't always possible for some individuals. We want to make sure that they are safe and that they are able to remain safely housed.

Within The Overlook, there is going to be a programming space as well, where individuals can come together to ensure that they are not socially isolated. I believe that perhaps it was Melissa who referenced the importance of ensuring a sense of community. The wraparound supports are critical. They're really important, but that sense of being part of a community, of contributing to supporting your neighbour, of contributing to the

community around you, is also critically important. To that end, there will be opportunities to landscape the area around The Overlook, for residents to participate in that, for residents to participate in learning opportunities.

There'll be a nurse practitioner on site, there'll be access to health care services, as well, on site, all with the intent of ensuring that individuals who are in need of wraparound supports can receive those supports in an environment where they feel safe and secure.

There are individuals who move into The Overlook - our hope is that they will be successfully housed there over the long term. This is not necessarily transitional housing. This is permanent housing for individuals, recognizing that some individuals will require, and do require, ongoing wraparound supports. Some individuals need support on a short-term basis, and others require it on a long-term basis. Our responsibility is to determine and work with that individual to best support them in the way that makes sense for them.

THE CHAIR: We have less than a minute. Did you have any follow-up to that, Ms. Barkhouse?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I'll just ask a quick question to Ms. Napier. I would like to know how many United Way organizations there are in Nova Scotia, and if they share the same mandate.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hooper - or, Mr. Hooper?

SARA NAPIER: I'm Sara Napier. I may take that one on behalf of United Way. There are six United Ways in Nova Scotia, and, yes, we do all share the same overall mandate and function related to poverty alleviation and the core areas in social determinants of health. We work very collaboratively together when we can, and share information as a system.

THE CHAIR: Order. Sorry about that. We ran out of time for the first round of questioning. We will move on. We'll have three minutes, and we will begin with Mr. Tilley for the Liberal caucus.

FRED TILLEY: My question is for the department. It is around the rural/urban piece with homelessness, referencing MLA Taggart's question on the investments. You had mentioned one of those investments was in Pictou County. Could you give the committee an idea of where the other six investments were placed?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes. There were investments placed with Viola's Place in New Glasgow; the Cape Breton Community Housing Association, which I believe I referenced earlier, in Sydney and Port Hawkesbury; the YMCA of Cumberland in Amherst; the Truro Housing Outreach Society in Truro; South Shore Open Doors Association in

Bridgewater; the Portal Youth Outreach Association in Kentville; and A Roof Over Your Head in Antigonish, in addition to Pictou County Roots for Youth.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Tilley, the time will be until 11:40 a.m.

FRED TILLEY: Another quick question with regard to the gaps. I know we only have a couple of minutes, so I'll direct this to the department as well. Where do you see the biggest gap in wraparound supports for Nova Scotians at this particular point, given the number of factors that are affecting homelessness, such as mental health, addictions, lack of affordability, et cetera. Where is the biggest gap, and how can we have an impact on that?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: That's a challenging one to answer really quickly, but I guess I would say, and I think my colleagues would agree, I think it is probably in the human resource capacity to deliver the wraparound supports. I think we all recognize the criticality of these wraparound supports. Certainly, we recognize it in the Department of Community Services, not just in support of individuals who are homeless, but also on a number of other fronts - individuals who work with the Department of Community Services on any number of challenges that they may be facing. Wraparound supports are critical, but they are provided by people. If we recognize that there are . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. We will move to the NDP. Ms. Coombes, you have until 11:43 a.m.

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the department. In the last calendar year, the Department of Community Services spent more than \$1.5 million on hotel rooms for ESIA clients. Was most of this due to a lack of appropriate housing options, and what supports were provided by the department to people living in hotels to help them find more appropriate housing?

THE CHAIR: Is that to Ms. Taweel again?

KENDRA COOMBES: That is to Ms. Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Yes, the department does and has provided support to house individuals who are either homeless or precariously housed in hotels. It is part of the continuum of supports that we provide. We've recently launched within HRM the Shelter Diversion Support Program, wherein we are supporting individuals to live temporarily in hotels until such time as they can be permanently housed.

When an individual enters a hotel, they are connected with a housing support worker, as well as other supports that they may require to help them transition to permanent housing. Residing in a hotel is not a long-term solution, but for some individuals, residing in a hotel is a better option than perhaps being temporarily housed in a shelter environment,

for example. We will continue to support individuals to reside in hotels if that is what is required to help them stabilize and then transition to longer-term permanent housing.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm sending it to my colleague Suzy Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I have a short time, so I'm just going to ask a quick question. We know about the encampments and the housing shelters that are in the parks in our communities. My question is for service providers: Based on your training and experience working with unhoused people, has the police response to temporary crisis shelters and other encampments been reasonable or productive?

THE CHAIR: Is that to the department? Ms. Taweel?

SUZY HANSEN: I can ask Pam if she'd like to answer.

PAMELA GLODE-DESROCHERS: That's a really complicated question. I'm just going to throw this out there: The reality is most of my community members are not in those encampments. They are pushed outside of that due to racism. For me to answer that, I'm probably not the best one, however, in saying that . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. We will move to the PC caucus and the time will end at 11:46 a.m. Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: My question is for Pam. Can you tell us a bit more about the importance of culturally responsive support for those experiencing homelessness?

PAMELA GLODE-DESROCHERS: I'm happy to do so. I think when you're talking about an individual who is homeless, or just anybody who's walking through our doors, basically, we have deep trauma within our community. We've lost our language, we've lost our culture, we've lost connection to the land, we've lost connection to our own communities.

Quite often, community members will come through the door not even realizing that some of the trauma they are experiencing is just that. They've lost their connection and identity. The importance is that connection to language, connection to traditional teachings, connection to our elders, connection to our knowledge keepers. Often somebody will just come in to talk with an elder and we can move a person along much quicker than if we didn't have that elder available.

It is about identity, it's about self-determination, and it's about building the capacity of who we are as individuals. If you don't know who you are or where you come from, it's really easy to get lost in that. I know from personal experience what it's like and how easy it is to choose other options in how you're going to survive in life. It's easier to drown yourself in a substance than it is to recognize why you are where you are in that moment

in time. Language and culture are very forgiving, and we're able to pick people up time and time again and let them recognize that they as an individual are so important. Your history is important, knowing who you are is important, language is important, traditional knowledge is important. All the other pieces fall into place as we start incorporating that in all of our programs.

[11:45 a.m.]

It's not something that should be an afterthought, and we tried to do that with our first experience with the shelter. We dropped the ball on that. We were so excited to house people, and without it, it got lost. My community members couldn't even access the shelter that we were supposed to be providing supports for. We had non-Indigenous people saying that they were Indigenous - not their fault, by the way. They're trying to survive, but the reality is that language and culture have to be . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Thank you very much, Pam. Before we move into committee business, I would just ask if there were any very brief closing remarks from any of our witnesses here today. Thank you for appearing virtually with us. Pam, would you like to give a closing remark?

PAMELA GLODE-DESROCHER: There are two things I would ask that you guys continually think about. One is that housing and homelessness - it's a human rights issue. We need to stop looking at housing as a commodity; it is a human rights issue. We also need to start looking and thinking outside the box around land trusts.

There is opportunity here in social investments to actually think long-term, think seven-generational thinking. I challenge each and everyone to think about that as you guys do your work. You guys have a tough job when you guys are doing this work. These are tough conversations. I ask you to think about that issue moving forward.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. If there are no more closing comments, the witnesses are able to leave the rest of the meeting, should they wish. They don't need to appear for our committee business. Once again, thank you so much for joining us today.

Our first topic of committee business is the discussion of our next meeting, which is coming up next month. I wondered if there was any conversation. Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Just based on our reopening plan, it appears safe and appropriate for the Standing Committee on Community Services to resume meeting in person. With that said, I move that the Standing Committee on Community Services resume in-person meetings.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

I also wanted to address today the next Standing Committee on Community Services meeting possibly being held when the House is sitting, and invite any conversation or discussion on that as well. Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: We don't control how long the House sits, and it's outside of this committee, so I'd like to move that the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services be held at its regular scheduled date unless the House is sitting the week before.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Young. Is there any discussion on the motion? Ms. Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: Just wondered if the motion could specify the date of the next meeting?

THE CHAIR: My apologies. I believe our meetings are scheduled for the first Tuesday of every month, so that would be May 3rd. Mr. Young, did you want to rephrase your motion to include the date?

NOLAN YOUNG: Sure. I move that the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Community Services be held at its regular scheduled date of May 3, 2022, unless the House is still sitting the week before.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Is there any further discussion on the new motion? Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Yes. It says, "unless the House is sitting the week before." I'm just wondering, for clarity so that we don't miss a month, would the committee be willing to resume the week following for scheduling purposes? It sounds to me, and I might be wrong in the motion, but it sounds to me like if we're still sitting a week before we're due to go in, we're going to miss the month of May.

THE CHAIR: Any further comments on the motion? If there's no further discussion, then we will bring the motion as read by Mr. Young: "I move that the next Community Services meeting be held at its regular scheduled date of May 3, 2022, unless the House is still sitting the week before."

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

Sorry. Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: My question was not answered.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: Perhaps it would be better answered by the clerk, but my understanding is that this committee is a committee that typically doesn't meet while the House is sitting. Perhaps Ms. Langille could expand on that.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is: With your motion, do we miss the month of May if the House is still sitting?

THE CHAIR: I do believe that we're just following the procedure as the committee has always run. If the House is still sitting the week before the date of the meeting, then the meeting that following week, due to witnesses and scheduling, will be moved to the following month, the first of June.

KENDRA COOMBES: That was my question. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Sorry about that.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

This concludes committee business. As we just discussed, May 3rd is tentative, from 10 a.m. to noon. I would like to adjourn the meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 11:53 a.m.]