

# Celebrating a place to call home

## HOUSING

### Ambrose Place is a light in a system that is failing many



**Kevin Maimann**  
Metro | Edmonton

In a city falling short of its goals to house the chronically homeless, one Edmonton facility is emerging as a success story.

Alberta Health Services released an evaluation report this week for Ambrose Place – which accommodates people previously labelled as the city's hardest to house – and found significant progress is being made.

Alberta Health Services collected data for residents two years prior to moving into the McCauley building, and again after living in their residence, since it opened in November 2014.

The report notes overall inpatient days decreased by 81 per cent, EMS calls for mental



**Elder Russell Auger and Ambrose Place executive director Carola Cunningham at Ambrose Place in Edmonton's McCauley neighbourhood on Friday.** KEVIN MAIMANN/METRO

health and addictions dropped 68 per cent, hospital admissions went down 58 per cent.

"The biggest reason (for our

success) is we really do operate as a community. There's no pressure to sober up or stop doing what you do," execu-

tive director Carola Cunningham said.

"But it's common sense. When you give somebody

a safe, secure environment, their health is going to improve and they're going to eat better and they're going to reduce consumption of alcohol and drugs."

Earlier this week, city council discussed numbers showing Edmonton has added just 213 of the 1,000 permanent supportive housing units identified as a need in a 2009 report.

Coun. Scott McKeen mentioned Ambrose Place as a model for other programs, and Cunningham agrees.

"Absolutely we have something to share with others," she said.

Ambrose Place set out to be a safe, secure home for hard-to-house Indigenous people, to start a "decolonization process," as Cunningham puts it.

Some of its first residents had been living on the street for 40 years.

It's named for Ambrose Daniels, who died outdoors from pneumonia after being kicked out of shelters.

New residents come in with complex needs in mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health, Cunningham said. Some are missing limbs



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Carola Cunningham,  
Ambrose Place executive director

and confined to wheelchairs.

"We look to see how serious their needs are, and take them based on that. Which is totally backwards from the way other people fill their buildings," she said.

Fifty people currently live at Ambrose Place, in 42 units. They pay rent, usually through AISH supports, which cover utilities and comprehensive care including 24-hour health-care supports, an addictions counsellor, social worker, housing support workers, independent living support workers and Indigenous elders.

Ambrose Place and AHS are working on a follow-up study to see how much public money has been saved by getting its residents into stable homes.