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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Attorney General  
and Responsible for Housing

### **Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre reactivated for temporary shelter use**

VICTORIA – The Province, through BC Housing, has signed a lease with GSL Group that will allow the Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre (SOFMC) to be used again for temporary housing beginning in March.

Securing, preparing and staffing this facility is a significant step towards meeting the Province and City of Victoria’s goal of having enough indoor spaces available to move people living in encampments in Victoria by the end of March. The facility will provide shelter and wraparound supports for up to 45 people currently experiencing homelessness.

“Today’s announcement is an important step that brings us a step closer to our goal that people experiencing homelessness in Victoria’s encampments will be offered safe, dignified and comfortable emergency accommodation by the end of March,” said David Eby, Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing. “This is transitional housing to respond to this urgent situation. On an ongoing basis, both the city and the Province will continue to work together to move people from the arena ultimately into long-term, sustainable housing, breaking the cycle of homelessness.”

Arena shelter guests will be selected and prioritized through a thorough assessment of applications submitted to BC Housing’s Supportive Housing Registry, in conjunction with referrals from Island Health and community partners.

People experiencing homelessness in encampments throughout Victoria, particularly those who are vulnerable to COVID-19, will be prioritized for access. Priority applications will include Indigenous persons, people experiencing long-term homelessness, people over the age of 55 and those who have pre-existing health conditions.

“This is fantastic news, and we’re extremely grateful to Minister Eby, the Province and BC Housing for their leadership and investment in transitional housing for Victoria’s most vulnerable residents,” said Lisa Helps, mayor, Victoria. “We continue to offer our full support as we all work together towards the goal of having everyone currently sheltering in city parks inside by March 31, on a pathway to permanent housing with supports as needed.”

PHS Community Services Society will operate the temporary shelter as it did last year, from May to the end of September.

Site and operational logistics, including specific access timing and operational funding, are being finalized. The plan is to mirror a similar setup to the previous SOFMC use. This included access to meals, washroom facilities and wraparound supports, such as health-care services, addictions treatment and harm reduction and other supports.

Terms of the lease are from Feb. 1 to May 30, 2021, with options to extend beyond May 30 pending lease extension discussions with GSL Group. The March access date will allow BC Housing and its partners time to set up the SOFMC.

As part of its broader City of Victoria strategy to move people inside, BC Housing continues to work with partners to find more indoor spaces for people living outside.

**Quotes:**

**Grace Lore, MLA for Victoria-Beacon Hill –**

“People in our community need safe and indoor shelter. The current situation isn’t working for neighbours and it isn’t working for those sheltering in the parks. This announcement will help take some of the pressure off and is an important step for addressing the short-term need. We know there is much more to do, and our government is committed to working with all partners to address long-term housing needs.”

**Graham Lee, president and CEO, GSL Group –**

“We are glad to have once again been given the opportunity to serve Greater Victoria by providing our facility as a temporary emergency response centre. We found it imperative, as a member of this community, to be a part of the solution by working with BC Housing to make our facility available to vulnerable individuals.”

**Avery Taylor, director of Victoria operations, PHS Community Services –**

“We’re currently working through the final steps of returning to the arena and are incredibly proud to renew last year’s partnership with BC Housing and GSL Group. The arena created a much-needed space for many community partners to come together to provide not only temporary shelter and services, but a pathway into more permanent housing for people. We are honoured to have this opportunity again.”

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