

# **Vancouver Agreement Hotel Analysis Project: Summary of Findings**

**March 2007**

## **Acknowledgements**

The Vancouver Agreement wishes to thank the individuals and agencies that came together and contributed their time and expertise to this project.

Partner agencies include:

- Vancouver Police Department
- City of Vancouver Fire and Rescue Service
- City of Vancouver Property Use Branch
- Ministry of Health, B.C. Ambulance Service
- Vancouver Coastal Health, Health Protection and Environmental Health
- Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services, Employment Standards Branch
- Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance

Particular thanks goes to Ken Frail, coordinator of the Hotel Analysis Project and primary author of the final report.

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## Preface

In early 2006, the Vancouver Agreement brought together a number of government partners to study Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) in the Downtown Eastside to develop a better understanding of the conditions of premises that house a large proportion of vulnerable residents. The intent of the Hotel Analysis Project was not to close hotels, but to learn about the elements that may contribute to residential premises being operated effectively for tenants, and that lead to reduced use of emergency services, such as Police, Fire and Ambulance. While effort went in to examining many aspects of hotel operations, the real focus of the project was on improving the living conditions for the people residing in the hotels

Representatives of a number of government agencies examined the conditions in over 50 SROs in the Downtown Eastside – from the number of Police, Fire and Ambulance calls, to the way the hotels were managed, to environmental health conditions in the hotels, to safety, to the cost of renting rooms. Some of the hotels were well known to the agencies due to high volumes of emergency calls to the premises. Other hotels were included in the study because they had far fewer calls or because they represented different kinds of operations.

Instead of inferring causal relationships from this data, the reader is invited to use the report to understand the conditions under which many people in the Downtown Eastside live. Regardless of why, the report shows that all of the agencies, and in particular Police, Fire and Rescue and Ambulance services are spending a great deal of time and money attending calls, and agency partners need to come up with ways to redirect those resources to help people maintain healthier lives.

The project is intended to provide baseline information that describes the difficult conditions many SRO residents experience – from bed bugs and vermin infestations, to buildings that violate fire and safety codes, to management practices that take advantage of vulnerable and impoverished residents by charging visitor fees, to rents that mostly exceed the shelter allowance set by government income support programs.

This information will provide much of the context for Vancouver Agreement partners as they move forward and address the housing and living conditions of vulnerable people living in the Downtown Eastside.

While the Hotel Analysis Project provides much insight into the conditions of people's lives in SROs in the Downtown Eastside, the project also leaves many questions unanswered. For example, it might be easy to infer that the more calls Police, Fire or Ambulance services attended, the worse the conditions in the particular hotel were. However, this is not necessarily the case. Diligent hotel managers may call emergency services more often than managers that don't want to get involved, or where the majority of residents in the hotel have severe mental health and/or addiction issues that require more emergency support.

## **Executive Summary**

In 2002, the Vancouver Agreement initiated a pilot project called the Enhanced Enforcement Initiative to develop and carry out collaborative enforcement initiatives among Vancouver Agreement partners. In early 2006, the Vancouver Agreement brought together a number of government agency partners to study Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) in the Downtown Eastside to develop a better understanding of the conditions of premises that house a large proportion of vulnerable residents. The intent of the Hotel Analysis Project was to identify the elements that may contribute to residential premises being operated effectively for the tenants and that lead to reduced use of emergency services, such as Police, Fire and Ambulance.

In total, the Housing Analysis Project looked at one year's data (2005) for 54 SRO hotels, including some with the highest utilization of emergency services and others with the lowest, privately run hotels and some operated by non-profit housing providers supported by government funding.

Seven government agencies took part in the review, each contributing according to their area of expertise to create a picture of living conditions for many people in the Downtown Eastside.

### **Emergency Service Use**

The buildings under review generated high numbers of emergency service calls, with the 54 single room occupancy premises generating a total of 11,269 emergency service calls over one year. Based on the total number of rooms, this averages to slightly less than three service calls per room per year. (These figures also include calls that were made to the vicinity and attributed to the street address of the SRO.) For the 20 SRO hotels with the highest number of calls, the average number of calls per room rose to 4.4.

### **Police Emergency Calls**

The most common reason for Police service calls to the Downtown Eastside was for general public disturbances (22.8 per cent) and assistance requests (22.6 per cent). Nine hotels required more than 200 attendances by Vancouver Police. Together, the 20 SRO hotels with the highest utilization of emergency services required 4,504 attendances by Police.

### **Ambulance Emergency Calls**

For Ambulance service calls, the most common call types included overdose incidents, physical assaults, psychiatric assistance, respiratory distress and general illness.

### **Fire and Rescue Emergency Calls**

The reasons for Fire and Rescue Emergency calls were not available. However, in the city overall, only 4 percent of Fire and Rescue emergency calls are to attend a fire.

In addition to providing data on the total number of emergency calls broken down by hotel, Vancouver Fire and Rescue inspected 2,767 rooms for compliance with the fire code. A total of 82.5 percent of the rooms were found to have fire code violations, with a total of 2,283 violations identified. Two buildings in particular averaged 3.5 violations per room.

Common violations included: disabling smoke alarms to stop alarms from sounding, removal of self-closures on fire doors, fire doors propped open or padlocked shut, fire exits blocked by mattresses, equipment and garbage, obstruction of sprinkler heads and pipes, improper storage of combustible materials and tenants using candles for lighting.

### **Overall Emergency Calls**

The hotels surveyed had higher numbers of calls than anywhere else in the city. The number of calls ranged from 112 to 1,303 with 20 of the premises averaging 200 or more calls.

### **Health Protection/Environmental Health**

Two senior Environmental Health Officers from the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority's Health Protection and Environmental Health departments conducted inspections of 3,100 rooms. The review revealed that 80 percent of buildings have bed bugs, 77 percent have rodents and/or cockroaches and 65 percent did not provide syringe disposal receptacles. Other common issues that inspectors noted include water leakage, poor garbage handling and few buildings with a pest management plan.

Fifty rooms were ordered vacated as a result of the review due to sanitation and hygiene issues. Tenants were assisted in relocating to other premises.

### **Property Use**

City of Vancouver Property Inspectors carried out regular inspections and found a variety of maintenance issues in rooms and common facilities including: one quarter of the hotels admitted to charging illegal guest fees, three quarters of the rooms did not have kitchen facilities, 58 percent of premises did not have laundry facilities, 69 percent did not have an elevator, 88 percent of premises had no housekeeping services and the same percentage were staffed by a single desk clerk. Three quarters of building managers had no formal training and 40 percent of hotels did not use rental agreements.

### **Employment Standards**

The Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services, Employment Standards Branch conducted on-site visits and provided aggregate data on their findings, in compliance with the Privacy Act. For a variety of reasons, they were able to review only 34 of the 54 premises. Of these, 24, or 70 percent, were in compliance with the Employment Standards Act. The reasons for non-compliance among the remaining 30 percent of SROs included: not keeping a daily record of hours worked by employees, not maintaining payroll records, not paying the minimum wage and not adequately compensating employees for overtime or statutory holidays.

### **Income Assistance**

People receiving Income Assistance occupied approximately 57 percent of rooms in the premises under review. Eighty-five percent of the SROs charged rates in excess of the \$325 per month Income Assistance Shelter Allowance for a single employable person, with some buildings charging as much as \$475 per month.

Of the 20 SROs with the highest demand for emergency services, only three offered rooms at the base rate of \$325. At one hotel, while people receiving Income Assistance occupied 96 percent of the rooms, rooms charges were between \$350 and \$375 per month, with additional guest fees of \$10 to \$20.

In the case of some SROs, the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) found a relationship existed between the amount charged for a room and the amount of Income Assistance received by the individual resident, with people who received higher benefit amounts due to a disability or a persistent multiple barrier to employment being charged more.

The number of Income Assistance cheques issued directly to the SROs was compared with the actual occupant capacity of each premise and a number of inconsistencies were identified. For example, at one building, MEIA found 43 client cheques went to the hotel, but only 33 Ministry clients resided there. The Ministry has already taken a number of steps to begin addressing these issues.

### ***About the Downtown Eastside***

- *Total population: 16,000*
- *People with substance use issues: 4,000 to 6,500*
- *Number of clients of Strathcona Mental Health Team: 1,300*
- *Number of Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance cases in the Downtown Eastside, Strathcona, Chinatown and Victory Square: 6,233 (Cases may include more than one individual.)*
- *Percentage of Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance cases designated as a person with persistent multiple barriers to employment or a person with disabilities: 65 percent*

## **Background**

Approximately 16,000 people live in the Downtown Eastside, one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country. Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels make up a significant and important part of the housing spectrum in Vancouver, particularly in the Downtown Eastside. In 2005, there were 139 SRO hotels in the downtown core, with 122 of these located in the Downtown Eastside, accounting for 4,993 rooms.<sup>1</sup> The average SRO was built a century ago and was originally intended to provide nightly or seasonal accommodation, often for resource workers. Due to their age and/or lack of upkeep, many of the SRO hotels suffer from structural, plumbing and electrical problems, and few are up to current seismic standards. The average room in an SRO is about 100 square feet, with residents generally sharing bathroom facilities. Kitchen facilities are largely unavailable.

Primarily because of their affordability, SROs continue to be an integral part of the Downtown Eastside housing stock. SROs are often a primary housing option for low-income earning individuals who have lived in the Downtown Eastside for a long time, for people with low incomes who are new to Vancouver, and for vulnerable and marginalized individuals facing serious physical and mental health challenges or who are experiencing or recovering from addiction.

### **Vancouver Agreement and Housing in the Downtown Eastside**

The Vancouver Agreement is an urban development initiative of the governments of Canada, British Columbia and Vancouver to promote and support sustainable economic, social and community development in the city of Vancouver. In 2004, the Vancouver Agreement initiated a pilot project called the Enhanced Enforcement Initiative to develop and carry out collaborative enforcement initiatives among Vancouver Agreement partners. In early 2006, the Vancouver Agreement brought together a number of partners to study SRO hotels in the Downtown Eastside to develop a better understanding of the conditions of premises that house a large proportion of vulnerable residents. The Vancouver Agreement promotes long-term housing security for SRO residents. The intent of the Housing Analysis Project was to find ways to support better housing – either through a range of improvements to existing sites or using the City of Vancouver’s policy of one-to-one replacement of closed SRO units.

The Hotel Analysis Project looked at both privately run hotels and hotels operated by non-profit housing providers supported by government funding.

The findings from earlier Vancouver Agreement multi-agency initiatives prompted this Hotel Analysis Project. Projects Lucille (Winter 2004), Raven (Fall 2004) and Haven (Fall 2005) confirmed poor and corrupt management practices in over 30 Downtown Eastside businesses, including SRO hotels, pubs, convenience stores, pawn and second-hand stores. Project Haven was an undercover police operation in three Downtown Eastside hotels. The project verified a significant amount of criminal activity, including welfare fraud, the purchase and sale of stolen goods and drug trafficking. As well, Project Haven identified serious sub-standard living conditions.

For the current Hotel Analysis Project, a multi-agency team selected 54 premises that represent a sampling of private and non-profit hotels, as well as hotels with both higher and lower utilization of emergency services.

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<sup>1</sup> 2005 Survey of Low-income Housing in the Downtown Core. City of Vancouver Housing Centre, 2005



The intent of the Hotel Analysis Project is to identify the elements that may contribute to residential premises being operated effectively for the tenants, and that lead to reduced use of emergency services such as Police, Fire and Ambulance.

This document provides a summary of the data collected during the project. A companion document provides recommendations to address the situation.

## **Project Objectives**

The Hotel Analysis Project was designed to:

- Identify which hotels account for the largest number of emergency calls.
- Document violations of standards.
- Work with building owners, residents and community organizations that offer services to people with mental health and addiction issues to identify the reasons for the large number of emergency calls and to find solutions to address the problems.
- Improve understanding of specific business practices that contribute to positive and negative living conditions.
- Inform public policy approaches that can assist in providing improved accommodation for vulnerable people rather than through the use of emergency services.
- Remedy any immediate life-safety issues.

## **Project Partners**

In January 2006, seven key government agencies partnered to review the living conditions for residents of 54 residential buildings in the Downtown Eastside. The project was designed to bring together the municipal, provincial and federal governments to work collaboratively towards addressing some of the issues that affect the Downtown Eastside.

The partner agencies include:

- Vancouver Police Department
- City of Vancouver Fire and Rescue Service
- City of Vancouver Property Use Branch
- Ministry of Health, B.C. Ambulance Service
- Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, Health Protection and Environmental Health
- Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services, Employment Standards Branch
- Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance

Each agency contributed to the review according to their area of expertise, creating a picture of the living conditions for many people in the Downtown Eastside.

The Vancouver Police Department, City of Vancouver Fire and Rescue and the Ministry of Health, Ambulance Service provided data on the number of emergency calls logged from each building reviewed. Vancouver Fire Inspectors assessed each building's compliance with fire code requirements. Environmental Health and City of Vancouver Property Use inspectors also reviewed each building. The Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance examined the records and payments associated with each building. The Employment Standards Branch determined whether SRO and rooming house staff received legitimate wages. Members of the Vancouver Police, Beat Enforcement Team also attended these premises to contribute to the on-site review process.

## **Selection of SRO Hotels**

Vancouver Police developed a list of 20 SRO hotels that had high utilization of emergency services, defined by a count of the number of attendances at a specific premise address along with documentation of the type of event. Vancouver Police shared this list with Vancouver Fire and Rescue and Emergency Health Service. Significant consensus existed among the agencies as to which hotels should be on this list. An additional 34 premises were added to ensure the study also looked at buildings that had low utilization of emergency services and buildings that represented different kinds of operations. The majority of premises were SRO hotels with individual sleeping rooms and shared washrooms. However, several buildings were comprised of individual living units, and as such, had self-contained washrooms.

It is important to note that in identifying the SROs with the highest utilization of emergency calls, when a telephone call comes in the dispatcher determines the closest address for the purpose of dispatching a service provider. As a result, figures for some premises include calls to the adjacent area and may not relate to an incident in the hotel itself. For example, calls to the Roosevelt Hotel at 166 East Hastings St. are disproportionately high due, in large part, to the influence of the surrounding environment at Main and Hastings Streets.

## **Data Collection**

Over the course of two months, a variety of data were collected by the project partners, including:

- Capacity of each hotel and actual occupancy.
- Number of police calls to each building and reasons for the calls.
- Number of fire calls to each building and reasons for the calls.
- Number of ambulance calls to each building and reasons for the calls.
- Compliance with maintenance standards.
- Identification of environmental health issues that pose a health risk for residents, including vermin or bugs.
- Identification of best practices that contribute to a well-run hotel that provides a safe and secure environment.
- Identification of practices that create an unsafe environment for tenants and may impact the surrounding community.
- Rents and vacancy rates.

Detailed information was collected for each building and maintained in project binders.

## **The Findings**

### **EMERGENCY SERVICE USE: The buildings under review generated high numbers of service calls**

In 2005, the 54 single room occupancy premises generated 11,269 emergency service calls. Based on the total number of rooms, the average is slightly less than three service calls per room per year. (These figures also include calls that were made to the vicinity and attributed to the street address of the SRO.) For the 20 SRO hotels with the highest number of emergency calls, the average number of calls per room rose to 4.4.

### **Emergency Police service calls**

The most common reason for police service calls to the Downtown Eastside was for general public disturbances (22.8 percent) and assistance requests (22.6 percent). The remaining service calls are currently under review by a Vancouver Police Department Planning and Research analyst.

Nine hotels required more than 200 attendances by Vancouver Police. Together, the 20 SRO hotels with the highest utilization of emergency services required 4,504 attendances by police.

### **Emergency Ambulance calls**

B.C. Ambulance Service provided data showing a breakdown of calls per SRO hotel and reasons for the calls. The most common call types included 'man down' (17%); sickness (12%); psychiatric (9%); falls (8%); assaults (8%); overdoses (7%); and breathing difficulties (6%).

Emergency Health Service Station #48, which is situated on Powell Street and is the main hall for the Downtown Eastside, reports attending 20,000 calls per year. The top six reasons for emergency calls dispatched from this location, in descending order of prevalence, are situations involving a "man down," sickness (including a wide variety of illnesses including abscesses), psychiatric disorders, falls, overdoses and breathing issues.

### **Vancouver Fire and Rescue service calls**

Vancouver Fire and Rescue Service assigned two fire prevention inspectors who conducted site inspections specific to this project. Of 2,767 rooms inspected, 82.5 percent were found to have fire code violations for a total of 2,283 violations identified. Two buildings in particular averaged 3.5 violations per room.

Common violations included: disabling smoke alarms to stop alarms from sounding, removal of self-closures on fire doors, fire doors propped open or padlocked shut, fire exits blocked by mattresses, equipment and garbage, obstruction of sprinkler heads and pipes, improper storage of combustible materials and tenants using candles for lighting.

During the Hotel Analysis Project, Vancouver Fire Department inspectors identified life-threatening safety issues at one premise, resulting in an order to vacate the premise. Tenants were assisted to relocate to other premises. At two other premises, inspectors found a full-size propane barbecue being used indoors and a five-gallon plastic outdoor motor tank full of gasoline, both of which were removed. At another premise, a fire broke out while Fire and Rescue Services inspectors were present.

### **Overall emergency calls**

Table 1 shows the breakdown in emergency calls by agency in the sample of SRO hotels included in the Hotel Analysis Project. In some instances there are multiple agency responses, for example where Police and Fire attend the same call.

Beyond the scope of this report was a detailed analysis of the reason for Fire and Rescue calls. Fire and Rescue estimates that about 75 percent of all fire calls are for medical emergencies and this percentage is even higher in the Downtown Eastside.

**Table 1: Overview of Emergency Service Calls in a Sample of SRO Hotels**

<b>Hotel name</b>	<b># of rooms</b>	<b>Total calls</b>	<b>VPD calls</b>	<b>Fire and Rescue calls</b>	<b>Ambulance calls</b>
Roosevelt	45	1303	487	202	614
Stanley New Fountain	103	521	397	42	82
New Portland Hotel	68	492	285	70	137
Washington	84	257	281	110	66
Hildon Hotel	135	431	298	55	78
Regent Hotel	151	430	327	60	43
DTES Res.	75	410	232	80	98
The Vivian	25	383	214	35	134
Jubilee Rooms	78	330	188	52	90
Sunrise Hotel	52	325	206	60	59
Balmoral	165	296	197	56	43
New Dodson	65	279	157	52	70
Princess Lodge	46	279	185	20	74
Colonial Hotel	147	259	163	25	71
Ivanhoe	102	257	139	45	73
Cobalt	92	247	158	42	47
Brandiz	99	238	156	42	40
Lucky Lodge	48	225	148	37	40
Astoria	85	215	133	50	32
Hugh Bird Res.	64	209	138	36	35
Sun Ah Hotel	44	198	157	16	25
Pandera Place	114	189	63	42	84
Powell Place	36	181	105	30	46
West Hotel	98	172	108	26	38
Gastown	91	170	130	23	17
Empress Hotel	73	166	74	50	42
Abbott Mansions	72	163	104	18	41
Dominion Hotel	67	161	131	12	18
Grand Union Hotel	40	157	117	20	20
Columbia Hotel	76	152	125	10	17
Patricia Hotel	195	133	98	21	14
Jackson Rooms	56	125	105	8	12
Silver Avalon	85	112	95	17	Missing

Picadilly	46	106	93	4	9
Funky Winker Beans	32	103	49	35	19
Walton	50	99	51	20	28
Arco Hotel	63	97	61	0	36
Savoy	28	94	53	22	19
Main Hotel Rooms	28	88	60	12	16
Winters Residence	79	83	54	7	22
Pender Hotel	36	81	59	8	14
Powell Rooms	24	80	54	9	17
Chelsea Inn	28	75	35	22	18
New Wings Hotel	55	75	55	13	7
Cambie House	42	67	36	11	20
United Rooms	91	67	37	8	22
Backpackers Inn	42	62	50	62	Missing
Woodbine	45	62	51	5	6
Cosy Corner Inn	7	49	34	7	8
St. Clair No.2	28	45	36	3	6
Burns Block	18	43	35	5	3
Golden Crown	28	41	27	5	9
Old American Hotel	37	36	28	5	3
Travellers Inn	59	9	8	1	Missing
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,754</b>	<b>11,269</b>	<b>6,947</b>	<b>1,754</b>	<b>2,618</b>

*Note: service calls are to the location and not necessarily to hotel rooms and may reflect calls from hotel management for assistance.*

### **HEALTH PROTECTION/ ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH: The majority of buildings have insect and rodent infestations**

The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority generally conducts inspections in SRO hotels on a complaint or referral basis. However, as part of the Hotel Analysis Project, two senior Environmental Health Officers conducted inspections of 3,100 rooms. The review revealed that 80 percent of buildings have bed bugs and 77 percent have rodents and/or cockroaches.

Other common issues that inspectors noted include water leakage, poor garbage handling and few buildings with a pest management plan. Inspectors determined that in some cases untrained staff used pesticides inappropriately and ineffectively or provided over-the-counter pesticides for tenants to use in their own rooms.

Other findings included:

- Few premises perform room inspections specific to sanitation or health conditions.
- Few premises keep written records of when maintenance, sanitation or pest control have been performed.
- Upkeep and cleanliness of washrooms, bathing and common areas was less than adequate at many of the premises.
- A number of rooms had water leaking into them due to deterioration of the building envelope.
- Few residents have the capability or funds to properly prepare their belongings and rooms for pest treatment or to properly maintain their rooms following treatments.

Following the review, 50 rooms were ordered vacated due to sanitation and hygiene issues. Of these rooms, 14 were in a building also assessed as being unsafe for occupation by Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services. The building remains vacant as the owner has chosen not to do the necessary work. Tenants were assisted to relocate to other premises.

### **PROPERTY USE: Many buildings lack basic management and amenities**

The City of Vancouver Property Use Branch enforces the City's Standards of Maintenance By-Law. City inspectors reviewed the premises and discovered the following conditions among the buildings under review. While not all of these conditions are violations of licensing standards, many are generally recognized as being part of best practices for an SRO.

- 58 percent did not have laundry facilities.
- 88 percent did not offer any form of housekeeping.
- 88 percent are staffed only by a desk clerk. When the desk clerk is called away, entry to the building is left unsupervised. Most have a staffed desk, however the door control in these premises was found to be sporadic, leading to a lack of security.
- 40 percent did not use rental agreements.
- 66 percent did not have syringe disposal receptacles.
- 73 percent of building managers had no training in managing a building.
- Vacancies ranged from 0 to 35 percent, with one premise having 18 of 28 units empty.
- In one premise, two out of six bathrooms worked.
- In one premise, the rental cost for each of four rooms was \$400 per month, but they were furnished with only a chair and table and no bed.
- 69 percent of premises did not have an elevator.
- Some SRO hotels operated several rental registers at the same time for the same premise or had incomplete/inaccurate records.
- Many of the premises had overloaded electrical outlets.
- Few buildings conducted their own maintenance inspections or kept records of work that was carried out.
- Many buildings only carried out repair work when ordered to by City staff. In effect, City inspectors were responsible for the building maintenance program.

Note: When they were constructed, these buildings were not intended to be used as permanent lodgings. The buildings are seriously deteriorating and do not meet today's infrastructure standards.

## **EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS: The majority of buildings operated in compliance with Employment Standards**

The Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services, Employment Standards Branch conducted on-site visits of buildings under review and provided aggregate data on their findings, in compliance with the Privacy Act. The review was conducted to find out whether employees in SRO hotels, such as front desk and managerial staff, were earning fair and legitimate wages.

Twenty of the 54 premises were not included in the review. Seventeen were either unionized and therefore outside the jurisdiction of the Employment Standards Branch or were closed. Two were subject to a current Employment Standards Branch dispute resolution process and in one case no employees could be found.

Of the remaining SROs reviewed, 24, or 70 percent, revealed no evidence of non-compliance with the Employment Standards Act. The remaining 30 percent were not in compliance with the statutory requirements of the Employment Standards Act, including:

- 8 SRO hotels were not keeping a daily record of hours worked by employees.
- 2 SRO hotels did not maintain payroll records.
- 2 SRO hotels were not paying employees the minimum wage.
- 1 SRO hotel was not adequately compensating its employee for overtime and statutory holidays.

According to interviews conducted by the Vancouver Police Department during the Hotel Analysis Project, building staff compensation practices were inconsistent: some staff were not paid at all, some received between \$3.50 to \$5 per hour, some received minimum wage and some received higher than the minimum wage in some unionized workplaces.

## **INCOME ASSISTANCE: The majority of SRO residents receive Income Assistance; the majority of SRO hotels charge more than the Income Assistance shelter allowance**

People receiving Income Assistance occupied approximately 57 percent of rooms in the premises under review.

### **Room Rates**

Eight-five percent of the SRO hotels charged rates in excess of the \$325 per month Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) Shelter Allowance with some buildings charging as much as \$475 per month. A recent City of Vancouver report indicates that only 230 rooms in the Downtown Eastside are available for under \$400 per month.

Of the 20 SRO hotels with the highest demand for emergency services, only three offered rooms at the base rate of \$325. In another example, 96 percent of the rooms were occupied by people receiving income assistance and the room rates were between \$350 and \$375 per month with additional guest fees of \$10 and \$20.

At another hotel, 85 percent of the rooms were occupied by people receiving income assistance, with only three units available for \$325 per month.

At still another location, people receiving income assistance occupied 97 percent of the rooms, but only one quarter of the rooms were available for \$325 per month. The remaining rooms rates were between \$350 and \$410, plus additional guest fees of \$10.

In the case of some SROs, the Ministry of Employment and Income assistance found a relationship existed between the amount charged for a room and the amount of income assistance received by the individual resident, with people who received higher benefit amounts due to a disability or a persistent multiple barrier to employment being charged more.

### **Income Assistance and Occupancy**

The number of income assistance cheques issued directly to the SROs was compared with the actual occupant capacity of each premise, with a number of inconsistencies identified. For example, at one building MEIA found 43 client cheques went to the hotel, but only 33 Ministry clients resided there. The Ministry has taken a number of steps to begin addressing these issues.

During the Hotel Analysis Project, the Ministry initiated a 'hotel Integrated task team' to verify delivery of cheques to three SRO hotels each month. On the day cheques were issued, an investigative officer from the Ministry and a Vancouver Police Department officer attended the hotel to compare Ministry records with the register, issuing or withholding cheques accordingly.

### **Next Steps**

The participant agencies are developing a series of recommendations from the data collected during the Hotel Analysis Project, as well as observations made during the on-site inspections. These recommendations appear in a companion report titled Hotel Analysis Project: Recommendations for Action.