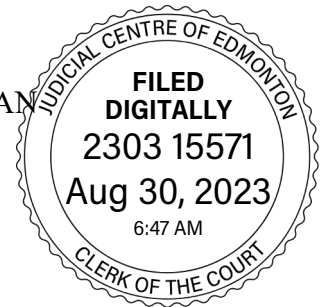


COURT FILE NUMBER 2303 15571  
COURT COURT OF KING'S BENCH OF ALBERTA  
JUDICIAL CENTRE EDMONTON  
PLAINTIFF COALITION FOR JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS LTD.  
DEFENDANT CITY OF EDMONTON  
DOCUMENT **AFFIDAVIT**  
ADDRESS FOR SERVICE AND CONTACT **ENGEL LAW OFFICE**  
INFORMATION OF PARTY #200 - 10209 97 Street NW  
FILING THIS DOCUMENT Edmonton, AB T5J 0L6  
Telephone: 780-448-3639  
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File No. 7872 CRW



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Email: avnish@nandalaw.ca

### **AFFIDAVIT OF DR. DAMIAN COLLINS**

**Affirmed on August 29, 2023**

I, Damian Collins, of Auckland, New Zealand, MAKE OATH AND SAY THAT:

1. I am a Professor of Human Geography in the Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. I completed my PhD in Human Geography at Simon Fraser University in 2004. Attached as **Exhibit "1"** to this Affidavit is a copy of my *curriculum vitae*, which sets out my education, work experience, academic research and service contributions.
2. I research housing and homelessness issues in Canada, including in Edmonton, with a focus on the role of social and affordable (non-market) housing in meeting the needs of Canadians.
3. I am the Director and Principal Investigator of Community Housing Canada, a university-community partnership funded by \$1.45 million in grants from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), and administered by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

4. I am the recipient of multiple competitive research grants, which have supported studies into diverse aspects of housing and homelessness. I am the author of more than 70 peer-reviewed publications, and have supervised 19 graduate students to successful completion.
5. I am on the Editorial Board of *Housing Studies*, a leading international scholarly journal for housing research, where I serve as the Co-Editor for North America.
6. I have researched homelessness in Alberta, and through that process, have acquired specialized insight into the homeless population, the shelter system, and encampment policies in the City of Edmonton. I have specific expertise on the difficulty individuals have around exiting homelessness and entering permanent housing, and how municipalities perceive and police homeless people in public space.
7. I have been retained by the Plaintiff in this lawsuit to provide an expert opinion on the City of Edmonton's shelter and encampment clearing policies and their impact on unhoused individuals living in the city. As a result of my education, training, credentials, work experience, and other details set out below, I have personal knowledge of the information set out in this affidavit, except to such matters based upon information and belief.
8. I certify that I am aware of my duty as an expert witness to assist the court, and not be an advocate for any party. I have made this affidavit and have given this written testimony in conformity with that duty. If I am called on to give further testimony, it will be in conformity with that duty.

### **Background: Homelessness and Encampments in Canada**

9. Canada is experiencing a widespread and persistent homelessness crisis, which is recognized by housing scholars, advocates, elected officials, public servants, and people with lived experience. It is 25 years since the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee called on all levels of government to declare homelessness in Canada a 'national disaster', requiring humanitarian relief.<sup>1</sup>
10. The Canadian Definition of Homelessness<sup>2</sup> recognizes four types of homelessness:
  - i. *Unsheltered*, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
  - ii. *Emergency sheltered*, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;
  - iii. *Provisionally accommodated*, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure; and

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<sup>1</sup> Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, (1998). State of emergency declaration: An urgent call for emergency humanitarian relief & prevention measures. Attached at **Exhibit "2"** to this Affidavit.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2017). Canadian Definition of Homelessness. Attached at **Exhibit "3"** to this Affidavit.

- iv. *At Risk of Homelessness*, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.
11. The four categories of homelessness are not discrete, and it is common for homeless individuals and families to move between categories on a regular basis. In particular, people may move frequently – or ‘cycle’ – between *unsheltered* and *emergency sheltered*.
  12. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that approximately 235,000 Canadians experienced some form of homelessness every year, with approximately 25,000-35,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night.<sup>3,4</sup> It is highly probable these numbers are now considerably higher, due to declining housing affordability across all major housing markets in Canada, as well as worsening crises surrounding drug use and mental health, which are known risk factors for homelessness.
  13. For many individuals, homelessness is a short-term experience, lasting only days or weeks. However, for a proportion of those experiencing homelessness – sometimes estimated at 10%<sup>5</sup> – it becomes an episodic (i.e., recurring) or chronic (i.e., long-term) condition.
  14. People who experience homelessness, especially on a chronic or episodic basis, spend much of their time outdoors in public space, and may spend entire nights without formal shelter. This *unsheltered* population is also known as ‘rough sleepers’.
  15. Commonly, people who are rough sleeping will seek to find or create informal shelter, either as individuals or as groups. This makeshift shelter is essential for their own survival, in terms of protection from the elements, as well as for the protection of their possessions (including sleeping materials, food, water, clothing, medications, etc.). The wellbeing of family members and pets, if present, is also dependent on informal shelter.
  16. Informal outdoor shelters can take various forms, including making use of public infrastructure such as bridges or tunnels, living in vehicles, or using materials associated with recreational camping, such as tents and tarpaulins. The sites where this activity occurs are commonly referred to as ‘camps’ or ‘encampments’.
  17. Encampments vary widely in size and permanence.<sup>6</sup> Some encampments may have several hundred residents or occupants, and last for months or years, forming a semi-permanent

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<sup>3</sup> Dionne, M-A., Laporte, C., Loeppky, J. & Miller, A. (2023). A review of Canadian homelessness data, 2023. Income Research Paper Series, Statistics Canada. Attached at **Exhibit “4”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>4</sup> Gaetz, S., Dej, E., Richter, T. & Redman, M. (2016). The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016. Attached at **Exhibit “5”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>5</sup> Gaetz, S., Donaldson, J., Richter, T. & Gullivar-Garcia, T. (2013). The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Attached at **Exhibit “6”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>6</sup> Herring, C. (2014). The new logics of homeless seclusion: Homeless encampments in America's west coast cities (**“New Logics of Homeless Seclusion”**). *City & Community*, 13(4), 285-309. Attached at **Exhibit “7”** to this Affidavit.

community. Other encampments consist of just one or two individuals in a small tent, who may have a degree of mobility, whether voluntarily or due to enforcement efforts.

18. Camping in public spaces as such parks and other greenspaces, as well as civic squares and sidewalks, is generally prohibited or significantly restricted by municipalities, via bylaws and regulations. Municipalities often contend that camping is not an intended or appropriate use of public space, that it poses a barrier to broader public enjoyment, and that it poses risks that are contrary to public interests in health and safety.
19. Municipalities commonly receive complaints about encampments from housed members of the public, based on concerns about real or perceived crime, drug use, litter/garbage, public health risk and/or threats to public safety, including fire.
20. Because of the prohibitions and complaints identified above, there can be an incentive for *unsheltered homeless* people to camp in relatively hidden, remote or less-trafficked areas, in order to avoid detection and potential enforcement of anti-camping bylaws or regulations. This seclusion has been conceptualized as “both a product of imposed constraints *and* elective choice.”<sup>7</sup>

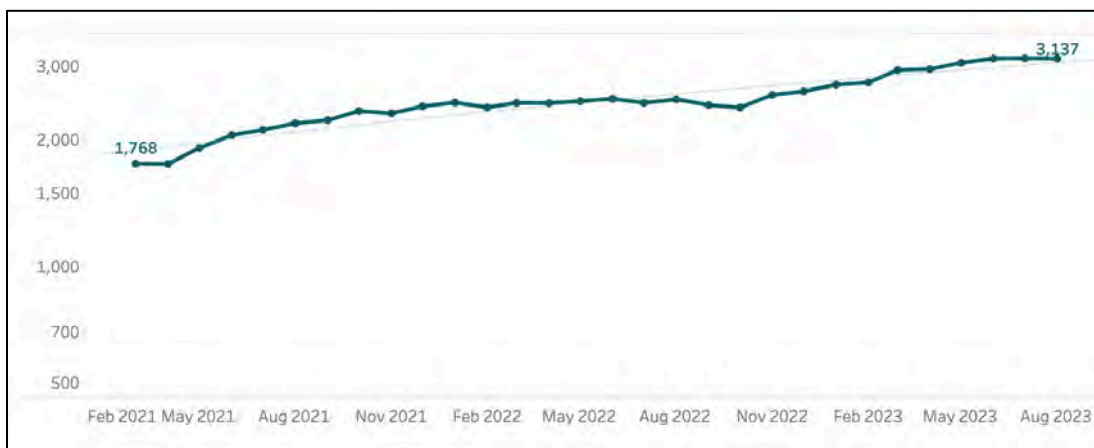
### **Edmonton’s Homeless Population**

21. Homeward Trust Edmonton collects and publishes data on homelessness in Edmonton.<sup>8</sup> Its reporting is based on a ‘by-names list’ – a real-time registry of people experiencing homelessness, based on reporting from over 60 agencies in the city working with members of this population. A by-names list identifies and counts unique individuals, and is superior to traditional methods of estimating the size and characteristics of the homeless population using point-in-time counts or other periodic surveys.
22. As of August 2023, 3137 individuals are known to be experiencing homelessness in Edmonton.
23. The number of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton has almost doubled since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, 2020.
  - i. In 2020, 1651 homeless people were counted.
  - ii. In March 2021, when the by-names list was instituted, 1768 homeless people were recorded.
  - iii. In May 2023, the total number of homeless people passed 3000 and has remained above this level since.
  - iv. Figure 1 shows the upward trend from March 2021 to August 2023, as recorded on the by-names list.

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<sup>7</sup> New Logics of Homeless Seclusion at 289 (emphasis in original). Attached at **Exhibit “7”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>8</sup> Homeward Trust Edmonton. [Edmonton Homelessness Dashboard](#).



**Figure 1: People on the by-names list over time** (Source: [Homeward Trust Edmonton](#))

24. This population can be classified based on the location of their most frequent stay. As of August, 2023, it can be broken down as follows:
- i. *Unsheltered*: 672 (21.4%)
  - ii. *Emergency sheltered*: 624 (19.9%)
  - iii. *Provisionally accommodated*: 1757 (56.0%)
  - iv. *Unknown*: 84 (2.7%).

This is likely due to the fact that people who are housed, but at risk of homelessness, are unlikely to be in contact with agencies that support homeless people. Data collected by these agencies inform the by-names list.

25. Over the last 12 months, the number of people known to be experiencing *unsheltered homelessness* in Edmonton has ranged from a low of 670 to a high of 725. In any given month, the *unsheltered* population has made up 21-28% of the total homeless population.
26. Indigenous people are significantly over-represented among the homeless population in Edmonton. People who identify as Indigenous consistently make up 55-57% of all people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton, while making up 5.8% of the total population of the city. This 10-fold over-representation is a persistent feature of homelessness in Edmonton.<sup>9</sup>
27. Indigenous people are at significantly increased risk of homelessness across Canada, and broadly similar patterns have also been observed in Australia and New Zealand. This risk is due, in large part, to the loss of land, culture and community experienced by Indigenous peoples through the process of settler colonialism.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, J. T., & Collins, D. (2014). Prevalence and causes of urban homelessness among indigenous peoples: a three-country scoping review (“**Prevalence and Causes of Urban Homelessness**”). *Housing Studies*, 29(7), 959-976. Attached at **Exhibit “8”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>10</sup> Prevalence and Causes of Urban Homelessness, 959-976. Attached at **Exhibit “8”** to this Affidavit.

28. The homeless population in Edmonton is divided fairly evenly between men (~52%) and women (~45%). While *unsheltered homelessness* was historically associated strongly with men, it is now also experienced by women, who account for ~38% of all rough sleepers in Edmonton.
29. People of all ages can experience homelessness in Edmonton, but it is most common among adults aged 25-44 years (~45%) and 45-64 years (~29%). Children aged 0-14 years (~12%) and youth aged 16-24 years (~13%) are present in smaller numbers, but are considered more vulnerable to the risks of living without permanent and appropriate housing (including victimization).

### **Edmonton's Shelter System**

30. Homeless shelters, commonly known as emergency shelters, are not housing, and do not fulfil fundamental human needs for adequate, secure and permanent accommodation. People who use shelters remain homeless.
31. Shelters have an important, but necessarily limited role, in responding to homelessness.
  - i. First, they provide protection from physical exposure to the elements, and potentially other threats what would otherwise be experienced by living unsheltered.<sup>11</sup>
  - ii. Second, they can and should function as “a gateway to housing, health and other programs necessary for [homeless people] to resolve their homelessness”.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, shelters are places to connect people experiencing homelessness with housing programs, social assistance (income support), health care providers, cultural supports including Elders, case managers, and other services.
32. Because shelters do not provide housing, and are intended for emergency use, shelter stays should be short-term and oriented towards supporting clients/guests to attain permanent, secure housing as quickly as possible.
33. Traditionally, shelters operated overnight only, and were intended primarily for sleeping. This model required clients/guests to leave each day, often early in the morning. Recognition of the disruptive and unsupportive nature of this model has led shelters in some cities, including Edmonton, to shift to operating on a 24/7 basis.<sup>13</sup> Shelters that operate 24/7 include both overnight sleeping quarters and day-services spaces.

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<sup>11</sup> Kim, J. H. (2020). The case against criminalizing homelessness: Functional barriers to shelters and homeless individuals' lack of choice (“**The Case Against Criminalizing Homelessness**”). *New York University Law Review*, 95, 1150. Attached at **Exhibit “9”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>12</sup> City of Edmonton (2021). City of Edmonton Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards, at 5. Attached at **Exhibit “10”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>13</sup> Falvo, N. (2023). Subsidized Rental Housing and Homelessness Under the UCP. In: T. W. Harrison and R. Acuña, Eds., *Anger and Angst: Jason Kenney's Legacy and Alberta's Right*. Blackrose Books, pp. 349-372. Attached at **Exhibit “11”** to this Affidavit.

34. The capacity of shelter systems varies over time depending on government contracts, the status of particular facilities (due to maintenance, construction, etc.), and the provision of additional spaces during extreme weather or other emergency events. Capacity is measured in terms of the number of beds available.
35. As of August 2023, the capacity of the shelter system in Edmonton is 793 beds. This number was higher during the winter of 2022/23, when capacity peaked at 1218 beds. In August 2022, the capacity was 638 beds.
36. With the increasing homeless population in Edmonton driving additional demand, the shelter system in the city often operates close to or above capacity. In the month of August 2023, the number of people staying in shelters has varied from a low of 629 people per night to a high of 899 people per night. Occupancy rates in August 2023 have frequently exceeded 100% (i.e., 793 beds). High occupancy rates are indicative of the potential for over-crowding within shelters, especially in sleeping quarters. This is because over-capacity is typically met by placing additional sleeping mats or cots within the existing space.

### **Shelters vs. Encampments**

37. Several studies conducted in North America have considered the decisions that people experiencing homelessness make in choosing between emergency shelters and encampments. These studies emphasize that homeless people make strategic choices, actively and consciously weighing which option best meets their needs for shelter, security, privacy and autonomy, etc.
38. There are many reasons why homeless people may choose to avoid using emergency shelters, assuming that capacity exists and beds are available (which is not always the case). Homeless people commonly report negative experiences of shelter spaces, which discourage use, including:<sup>14,15,16</sup>
  - i. Inter-personal violence and conflict;
  - ii. Theft or loss of possessions;
  - iii. Inability to stay overnight with a romantic partner of a different gender;
  - iv. Surveillance, hierarchy and extensive sets of rules, which create an institutional environment perceived as unwelcoming or hostile;
  - v. Operating hours that are inconsistent with social and economic activities;

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<sup>14</sup> Olson, N., & Pauly, B. (2023). 'Forced to Become a Community': Encampment Residents' Perspectives on Systemic Failures, Precarity, and Constrained Choice ("**Forced to Become a Community**"). *International Journal on Homelessness*, 3(2), 124-138. Attached at **Exhibit "12"** to this Affidavit.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, A., Gillies, S., Marshall, V., Mcgurk, H. & Pin, L. 2022. Homeless Encampments Through a Human Rights Lens ("**Homeless Encampments**"). *Wilfred Laurier University*. Attached at **Exhibit "13"** to this Affidavit.

<sup>16</sup> The Case Against Criminalizing Homelessness, 1150. Attached at **Exhibit "9"** to this Affidavit.

- vi. Discrimination from staff and/or other clients/guests;
  - vii. Inaccessibility for those with physical impairments;
  - viii. Exclusion of pets;
  - ix. Sobriety requirements (where applicable), which mean that clients/guests will not be admitted if they are intoxicated, or if staff believe them to be intoxicated;
  - x. The religious character of some shelters, which can be perceived as unwelcoming and/or judgmental, and may be contrary to the beliefs of some clients/guests;
  - xi. The presence of infectious diseases among clients/guests and the heightened risk of disease transmission in a congregate space.
39. Canadian public health scholars Nicholas Olson and Bernadette Pauly characterize experiences such as these as evidence of “systemic failures in the homeless sector.”<sup>17</sup> American legal scholar Joy H. Kim notes that systematic barriers to shelter access may mean that “shelters are not ‘practically available,’ even if they technically have available beds.”<sup>18</sup> Conversely, there are many reasons why homeless people may choose to camp, at least some of the time. In broad terms, many of these reasons are counter-points to the above list – for example, it is possible to reduce exposure to violence and conflict, to keep closer watch on possessions, to stay with romantic partners and pets, to set one’s own rules (or decide on rules with a small group of others), and so on.
40. Many of the potential benefits of camping are conditional on being able to stay in one place over the medium- to long-term, and cannot be realized if campers are regularly displaced by authorities. Specific benefits of being able to remain in camps include:<sup>19, 20, 21</sup>
- i. A sense of stability and wellbeing related to having a regular place to stay;
  - ii. A provisional sense of community with other campers (if present);
  - iii. A sense of autonomy associated with being able to build, maintain and improve one’s own campsite;
  - iv. The ability to establish services and supports on-site at larger group encampments.
41. In light to the above points, Olson and Pauly argue that camping should be seen as a “constrained choice” – something that may be chosen not simply because of “the amenities and benefits of an encampment” but because the alternatives are so unappealing or

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<sup>17</sup> Forced to Become a Community, at 127. Attached at **Exhibit “12”** to this Affidavit..

<sup>18</sup> The Case Against Criminalizing Homelessness, at 1150. Attached at **Exhibit “9”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>19</sup> New Logics of Homeless Seclusion. Attached at **Exhibit “7”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>20</sup> Forced to Become a Community, at 124-138. Attached at **Exhibit “12”** to this Affidavit..

<sup>21</sup> Homeless Encampments. Attached at **Exhibit “13”** to this Affidavit.



inaccessible.<sup>22</sup> The US sociologist Chris Herring refers to the choice to camp under these conditions as “adaptive strategy”.<sup>23</sup> Both terms invoke the idea that camping may be a rational choice under the conditions in which people experiencing homelessness find themselves.

### **City of Edmonton Response to Encampments**

42. The City of Edmonton seeks to close and clean up homeless encampments on public land. The number of camps closed and cleaned up is regularly reported – e.g., 1780 in 2021.<sup>24</sup>
43. The City of Edmonton does not conduct ‘street sweeps,’ which involve dismantling all camps and displacing all campers within a given area, often with little or no warning. Such sweeps often lead to possessions being left behind, seized and/or destroyed.
44. The City’s process is ‘complaints driven’, in that it responds to reports of encampments made by members of the public who call 311 or use the 311 app.<sup>25</sup>
45. Initial investigations by Peace Officers following a public report determine whether a camp is low-risk or high-risk. The factors used in the determination include: “the size of the encampment, biohazards, needles, garbage, fire, amount of materials present, propane tanks, and proximity to schools or playgrounds.”<sup>26</sup> For example, the presence of fire and/or propane tanks may lead to a camp being classified as high-risk, especially at times of year when fire risk is elevated.
46. Where a camp is determined to be low-risk, closure is not considered urgent and the camp is removed within a few weeks. This allows time for in-person outreach by housing and social services agencies, who seek to connect campers with relevant supports. Campers are also provided with notice of closure. This response can be characterized as “clearance with support.”<sup>27</sup>
47. Where a camp is determined to be high-risk, closure is considered urgent. The City provides a short period of notice (1-3 days) and Peace Officers are expected to “communicate shelter and transportation options to encampment occupants.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Forced to Become a Community, at 133. Attached at **Exhibit “12”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>23</sup> New Logics of Homeless Seclusion, at 303. Attached at **Exhibit “7”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>24</sup> CBC News, 2023. [Residents, businesses take aim at Edmonton’s approach to homeless camps](#). Attached at **Exhibit “14”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>25</sup> City of Edmonton, n.d. How the City and its partners respond to encampments (“**COE Encampment Flowchart**”). Attached at **Exhibit “15”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>26</sup> City of Edmonton, n.d. [Responding to Homelessness in our Communities](#).

<sup>27</sup> Homeless Encampments, at 8. Attached at **Exhibit “13”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>28</sup> COE Encampment Flowchart. Attached at **Exhibit “15”** to this Affidavit.

48. The City of Edmonton response to encampments avoids mass closures, closures without notice, and requirements for daily ‘decampment’, all of which occur in some other North American cities.
49. Given the number of people experiencing *unsheltered homelessness* in Edmonton (672 in August 2023), and the absence of any excess capacity in the Edmonton shelter system (which is operating at or above its capacity of 793 beds in August 2023), it is clear that shelters have very limited potential to accommodate people displaced from camps.
50. In simple terms, it could be argued that the shelter system would need to increase its capacity by 85% (i.e., by 672 beds) to meet the need of the unsheltered population. However, this calculation disregards the dynamics of the homelessness population. In practice, spaces do become available in shelters, for example as clients/guests attain housing and exit the system. Homeward Trust Edmonton reports that 601 individuals were housed in the six months to August 2023.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, however, there are also new individuals entering homelessness.
51. Even if more beds were available in the shelter system, increasing its capacity, they may not be “practically available”<sup>30</sup> and fail to meet the needs of Edmonton’s unsheltered population for the reasons set out above.
52. Other options that may be offered to campers include transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and market housing (supported by Housing First programs). In general, however, there are waiting lists for these services, and demand exceeds supply. As such, they would seldom be available on an immediate basis for someone displaced from a camp.<sup>31</sup>

### **Impacts of Camp Closures and Displacement**

53. Camp closures and the resulting displacement may be harmful and even traumatic for campers, as they involve the loss of the various benefits that can accrue from camping, including a sense of (relative) security, privacy and autonomy – and potentially community, in the case of group encampments.<sup>32</sup>
54. Where campers do not enter the shelter system or a form of housing - whether due to choice or lack of system capacity - they are highly likely to establish another encampment. This can lead to a cycle of enforcement and displacement, involving frequent moves that involve

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<sup>29</sup> Homeward Trust Edmonton. [Edmonton Homelessness Dashboard](#).

<sup>30</sup> The Case Against Criminalizing Homelessness, 1150. Attached at **Exhibit “9”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>31</sup> Anderson-Baron, J. T., & Collins, D. (2019). ‘Take whatever you can get’: Practicing Housing First in Alberta. *Housing Studies*, 34(8), 1286-1306. Attached at **Exhibit “16”** to this Affidavit.

<sup>32</sup> Forced to Become a Community, at 124-138. Attached at **Exhibit “12”** to this Affidavit.

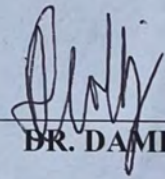
dismantling shelters and moving belongings, before setting up again.<sup>33</sup> This can exacerbate feelings of hopelessness, stress and alienation.

- 55. Decampment often involves the loss of personal belongings, which may be variously left behind, seized by city officials, or disposed of as garbage or debris. These possessions can include supplies that are essential for surviving outdoors, including tents, tarpaulins, warm clothing, and sleeping bags. This increases the vulnerability of people experiencing *unsheltered homelessness*.
- 56. Conversely, where campers do have the time and opportunity to retain their possessions, they face the practical challenge of transporting them to a new location, and keeping them safe and secure. This can become a substantial hardship, especially when it is repeated on a regular or semi-regular basis, as part of the cycle of enforcement and displacement.<sup>34</sup>
- 57. The City of Edmonton has commissioned studies of Edmonton's homeless population, reasons for encampments, views of the shelter system, and the impacts of displacement. This includes *Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton*,<sup>35</sup> which provides direct insight into the experiences and constraints that homeless individuals face in the current homeless crisis in Edmonton.

*dl*

*Affirmed*

SWORN BEFORE ME virtually via Google )  
 Meet videoconferencing technology with the )  
 Affiant at Auckland, New Zealand, and the )  
 Commissioner at Edmonton, Alberta this )  
 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023. )  
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DR. DAMIAN COLLINS

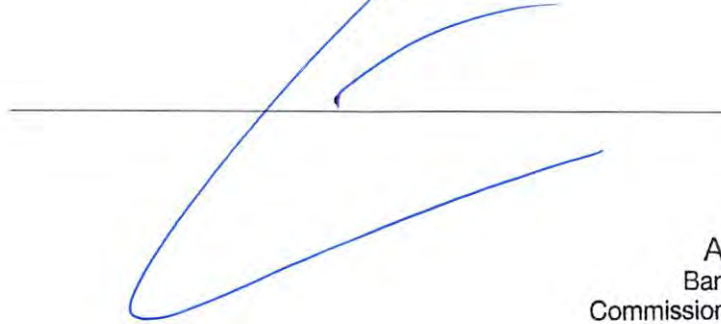
<sup>33</sup> MAPS Alberta Capital Region (2023). *Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton Report*. Prepared for City of Edmonton Encampment Response Team ("**Staying Outside**"). Attached at **Exhibit "17"** to this Affidavit.

<sup>34</sup> *Forced to Become a Community*, at 124-138. Attached at **Exhibit "12"** to this Affidavit.

<sup>35</sup> *Staying Outside*. Attached at **Exhibit "17"** to this Affidavit.



This is Exhibit "1" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

# DAMIAN COLLINS, PhD.

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## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

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- **Core interests:** Housing, homelessness, cities, public spaces, social geography.
- **Publication overview:** 76 peer-reviewed publications, including 63 journal articles. First (lead) author on 27 publications, and sole author on another six publications.
- **Key metrics:** 3450 citations; h-index 33; three articles with 200+ citations; six articles with 100-199 citations; 12 articles with 50-99 citations.
- **Current funding:** CMHC-SSHRC Partnership Grant (\$1.45 million)
- **Supervision:** 19 graduate research students supervised to completion (15 theses; 4 projects); 14 undergraduate students supervised to completion (2 Honors theses; 12 projects).
- **Highly-Qualified Personnel collaboration:** 20 HQP co-authors; 30 publications with HQP.
- **Editorial roles:** North American Editor for *Housing Studies* (2022-present); Editorial Board member for *Health & Place* (2016-present) and *Geography Compass – Social* (2006-2015; 2021-present); former Section Editor for *Geography Compass – Social* (2015-2020); Special Issue editor for *New Zealand Geographer* (2007, 2016).

## EDUCATION

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|-----------|--|
| 1999-2004 | <b>Doctor of Philosophy</b><br>Department of Geography,<br>Simon Fraser University, Canada                         |
| 1997-1999 | <b>Master of Arts (with Honours, 1st class)</b><br>Department of Geography,<br>University of Auckland, New Zealand |
| 1994-1997 | <b>Bachelor of Arts</b><br>Majors: Geography, Political Studies<br>University of Auckland, New Zealand             |

## EMPLOYMENT

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- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 2019-Present | <b>Director, Community Housing Canada Research Partnership</b><br>CMHC-SSHRC Collaborative Housing Research Network           |
| 2018-Present | <b>Professor of Human Geography</b><br>Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences,<br>University of Alberta, Canada           |
| 2012-2018    | <b>Associate Professor of Human Geography</b><br>Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences,<br>University of Alberta, Canada |

- 2008-2012      **Assistant Professor of Human Geography**  
 Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences,  
 University of Alberta, Canada
- 2006-2008      **Postdoctoral Research Fellow**  
 School of Geography, Geology & Environmental Science,  
 University of Auckland, New Zealand
- 2004-2006      **Lecturer in Human Geography**  
 Department of Geography,  
 University of Otago, New Zealand

## AWARDS

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- 2018              **President’s Award for Collaborative Research**  
 New Zealand Geographical Society (with R. Kearns)
- 2015              **Teaching Excellence Student Choice Honor Roll**  
 Faculty of Science, University of Alberta

## PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

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Underlined = Highly-Qualified Personnel (HQP) under my supervision

### Articles

1.      Bates, L. & Collins, D. 2023. Addressing the continuing quandary of theory in housing research: A systematic review of contemporary literature. *Housing, Theory & Society*, 40(4): 463-484.
2.      Stout, M., Collins, D. & Evans, J. 2022. “We embrace winter here”: Celebrating place in winter cities. *The Canadian Geographer*, 66(4): 728-740.
3.      Borth, K., Summers, R.J. & Collins, D. 2022. Conceptualizing location efficiency: A narrative review and scale based consolidated definition. *Journal of Planning Education & Research*, accepted Mar 2.
4.      Shirgaokar, M., Reynard, D. & Collins, D. 2021. Using Twitter to Investigate Responses to Street Reallocation during COVID-19: Findings from the U.S. and Canada. *Transportation Research Part A*, 154: 300-312.
5.      Stadler, S.L. & Collins, D. 2021. Assessing Housing First programs from a right to housing perspective. *Housing Studies*, accepted Sep 13.
6.      Evans, J., Stout, M., Collins, D., McDowell, K. 2021. The reticent state? Interpreting emergency responses to homelessness in Alberta, Canada. *Housing Studies*, accepted Aug 23.
7.      Collins, D., de Vos, E., Evans, J., Severson Mason, M., Anderson-Baron, J., Cruickshank, V. & McDowell, K. 2021. “When we do evict them, it’s a last resort”: Eviction prevention in social and affordable housing.’ *Housing Policy Debate*, 32(3): 473-490.
8.      Reynard, D., Collins, D. & Shirgaokar, M. 2021. ‘Growth over resilience: How Canadian municipalities frame the challenge of reducing carbon emissions.’ *Local Environment*, 26(4): 448-460.

9. **Collins, D. & Stout, M.** 2021. 'Does Housing First policy seek to fulfill the right to housing? The case of Alberta, Canada.' *Housing Studies*, 36(3): 336-358.
10. **Collins, D., Bates, L., Kearns, R. & Evans, J.** 2020 'Considering the camp: Ambivalent geographies of mobile dwelling.' *Applied Mobilities*, 5(1): 21-38.
11. **Severson, M. & Collins, D.** 2020 'Young adults' perceptions of life-course scripts and housing transitions: An exploratory study in Edmonton, Alberta.' *Housing, Theory & Society*, 37(2): 214-229.
12. **Kearns, R., Collins, D., Bates, L. & Serjeant, E.** 2019. 'Campgrounds as service hubs for the marginally-housed.' *Geographical Research*, 57(3): 299-311.
13. **Anderson-Baron, J.T. & Collins, D.** 2019 "'Take whatever you can get": Practicing Housing First in Alberta.' *Housing Studies*, 34(8): 1286-1306.
14. **Evans, J., Collins, D. & Chai, C-A.** 2019 'On thin ice: Assembling a resilient service hub.' *Area*, 51(3): 451-460.
15. **Stout, M., Collins, D., Stadler, S.L., Soans, R., Sanborn, E. & Summers, R.J.** 2018 "'Celebrated, not just endured": Rethinking Winter Cities.' *Geography Compass*, 12(8): 1-12.
16. **Anderson-Baron, J.T. & Collins, D.** 2018 "'Not a forever model": The curious case of graduation in Housing First.' *Urban Geography*, 39(4): 587-604.
17. **Collins, D., Kearns, R., Bates, L. & Serjeant, E.** 2017 'Police power and fettered freedom: Regulating coastal freedom camping in New Zealand.' *Social & Cultural Geography*, 19(7): 894-913.
18. **Li, J. & Collins, D.** 2017 'Smoking environments in transition: The experiences of recent Chinese migrants to Canada.' *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 25(1): 65-74.
19. **Kearns, R., Collins, D. & Bates, L.** 2017 "'It's freedom!" Examining the motivations and experiences of coastal freedom campers in New Zealand.' *Leisure Studies*, 36:3, 395-408.
20. **Kearns, R., Collins, D. & Wiles, J.** 2016 'The Rotoroa Island and Auckland Zoo partnership: Connecting heterotopic spaces.' *New Zealand Geographer*, 72(3): 192-204
21. **Evans, J., Collins, D. & Anderson, J.** 2016 'Homelessness, bedspace and the case for Housing First in Canada.' *Social Science & Medicine*, 168: 249-256
22. **Hoyez, A-C., Collins, D. & Fleuret, S.** 2016 'Parallel worlds? French and Anglophone perspectives on health geography.' *Social Science & Medicine*, 165: 196-200.
23. **Thomson, G., Wilson, N., Collins, D. & Edwards, R.** 2016 'Attitudes to smokefree outdoor regulations in the USA and Canada: A review of 89 surveys.' *Tobacco Control*, 25(5): 506-516.
24. **Wildish, B., Kearns, R. & Collins, D.** 2016 'At home away from home: Visitor accommodation and place attachment.' *Annals of Leisure Research*, 19(1): 117-133.
25. **McIntosh, A., Collins, D. & Parsons, M.** 2015 "'A place for healthy activity": Parent and caregiver perspectives on smokefree playgrounds.' *Health & Place*, 31: 146-153.
26. **Tymko, M. & Collins, D.** 2015 'Smoking bans for private vehicles: children's rights and children's voices.' *Children's Geographies*, 13(6): 707-721.
27. **Kearns, R., Collins, D. & Conradson, D.** 2014. 'A healthy island blue space: From space of detention to site of sanctuary.' *Health & Place*, 30: 107-115.
28. **Anderson, J.T. & Collins, D.** 2014 'Prevalence and causes of urban homelessness among Indigenous peoples: A three-country scoping review.' *Housing Studies*, 29(7): 959-976.



29. McLellan, A. & Collins, D. 2014 “‘If you're just a bus community ... you're second tier”:  
Motivations for Rapid Mass Transit (RMT) development in two mid-sized cities.’ *Urban Policy & Research*, 32(2): 203217.
30. **Collins, D., Parsons, M. & Zinyemba, C.** 2014 ‘Air quality at outdoor community events: Findings from fine particulate (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) sampling at festivals in Edmonton, Alberta.’ *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 24(3): 215-225.
31. Procter-Scherdtel, A. & Collins, D. 2013 ‘Social norms and smoking bans on campus: Interactions in the Canadian university context.’ *Health Education Research*, 28(1): 101-112.
32. **Collins, D. & Kearns, R.** 2013 ‘Place attachment and community activism at the coast: The case of Ngunguru, Northland,’ *New Zealand Geographer*, 69(1): 39-51.
33. **Collins, D.** 2013 ‘Gentrification or “multiplication of the suburbs”?’ Residential development in New Zealand’s coastal countryside.’ *Environment & Planning A*, 45(1): 109-125.
34. Procter-Scherdtel, A. & Collins, D. 2013 ‘Smoking restrictions on campus: Changes and challenges at three Canadian universities, 1970-2010,’ *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 21(1): 104-112.
35. Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2012 ‘Feeling for the coast: The place of emotion in resistance to residential development.’ *Social & Cultural Geography*, 13(8): 937-955.
36. **Collins, D. & Procter, A.** 2011 ‘Smoking’s shrinking geographies.’ *Geography Compass*, 5(12): 918-931.
37. Lang, D., Collins, D. & Kearns, R. 2011 ‘Understanding modal choice for the trip to school.’ *Journal of Transport Geography*, 19: 509-514.
38. **Collins, D.** 2010 ‘Homelessness in Canada and New Zealand: A comparative perspective on numbers and policy.’ *Urban Geography*, 31(7): 932-952.
39. **Collins, D. & Kearns, R.** 2010 “‘It’s a gestalt experience”’: Coastal landscape values and development pressure in Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand.’ *Geoforum*, 41: 435-446.
40. Coleman, T., Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2010 “‘Anywhere you can talk about how you feel is better”’: Young people’s experiences of sexual health messages.’ *New Zealand Geographer*, 66(1): 61-73.
41. **Collins, D. & Kearns, R.** 2010 “‘Pulling up the tent pegs?”’ The significance and changing status of coastal campgrounds in New Zealand.’ *Tourism Geographies*, 12(1): 53-76.
42. **Collins, D. & Kearns, R.** 2010 ‘Walking school buses in the Auckland region: A longitudinal assessment.’ *Transport Policy*, 17: 1-8.
43. **Collins, D.** 2009 ‘Contesting property development in coastal New Zealand: A case study of Ocean Beach, Hawke’s Bay.’ *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, 33(1): 147-164.
44. **Collins, D. & Coleman, T.** 2008 ‘Social geographies of education: Looking within, and beyond, school boundaries.’ *Geography Compass*, 2(1): 281-299.
45. Bean, C., Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2008 ‘Exploring social mobilities: Narratives of walking and driving in Auckland, New Zealand.’ *Urban Studies*, 45(13): 2829-2848.
46. **Collins, D. & Kearns, R.** 2008 ‘Uninterrupted views: Real estate advertising and changing perspectives on coastal property in New Zealand.’ *Environment & Planning A*, 40(12): 2914-2932.
47. Shantz, B-M., Kearns, R., & **Collins, D.** 2008 ‘Intolerance for noise and disorder: Questioning the “publicness” of Auckland’s lower Queen Street.’ *Urban Policy & Research*, 26(1): 39-55.

48. **Collins, D.** 2007 'Legal sense and geographical context: Court rulings on religious activities in public schools.' *Urban Geography*, 28(2): 181-197.
49. **Laurenson, P. & Collins, D.** 2007 'Beyond punitive regulation? New Zealand local governments' responses to homelessness.' *Antipode*, 39(4): 649-667.
50. Mitchell, H., Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2007 'Nuances of neighbourhood: Children's perceptions of the space between home and school in Auckland, New Zealand.' *Geoforum*, 38: 614-627.
51. **Collins, D.** 2006 'Culture, religion, and curriculum: Lessons from the "three books" controversy in Surrey, BC.' *The Canadian Geographer*, 50(3): 342-357.
52. **Collins, D.**, Kearns, R. & Mitchell, H. 2006 "'An integral part of the children's education": Placing sun protection in Auckland primary schools.' *Health & Place*, 12(4): 436-448.
53. Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2006 "'On the rocks?" New Zealand's coastal bach landscape and the case of Rangitoto Island.' *New Zealand Geographer*, 62(3): 228-236.
54. **Laurenson, P. & Collins, D.** 2006: 'Towards inclusion: Local government, public space & homelessness in New Zealand' *New Zealand Geographer*, 62(3): 185-195.
55. **Collins, D.** & Kearns, R. 2005 'Geographies of inequality: Child pedestrian injury and walking school buses in Auckland, New Zealand.' *Social Science & Medicine*, 60(1): 61-69.
56. Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2003 'Crossing roads, crossing boundaries: Autonomy, authority and risk in a child pedestrian safety initiative.' *Space and Polity*, 7(2): 193-212.
57. Kearns, R., **Collins, D.** & Neuwelt, P. 2003 'The walking school bus: Extending children's geographies?' *Area*, 35(3): 285-292.
58. **Collins, D.** & Kearns, R. 2001 'The safe journeys of an enterprising school: Negotiating landscapes of opportunity and risk.' *Health & Place*, 7(4): 293-306.
59. **Collins, D.** & Kearns, R. 2001 'Under curfew and under siege? Legal geographies of young people.' *Geoforum*, 32: 389-403. [Republished in *Geoforum's* 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Virtual Special Issue (2009)].
60. **Collins, D.**, Kearns, R. & Le Heron, R. 2001 'Water pressure: irrigation, governance and land use intensification in Maungatapere, New Zealand.' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 17(1): 29-39.
61. Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2000 'One Tree Hill/Maungakiekie: Contesting the iconography of an Auckland landscape.' *Australian/Canadian Studies*, 18(1-2): 173-188.
62. Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2000 'New Zealand children's health camps: Therapeutic landscapes meet the contract state.' *Social Science & Medicine*, 51(7): 1047-1059.
63. **Collins, D.** & Kearns, R. 1999 'Logging out: Forestry, transport and the health of Hokianga communities.' *New Zealand Geographer*, 55(1): 53-58.

### **Book Chapters**

64. **Collins, D.** & **Stadler, S.L.** 2020. 'Public Spaces, Urban.' In: A. Kobayashi (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography, 2e*. Elsevier, vol 11: 103-111.
65. **Severson, M.** & **Collins, D.** 2018 'Wellbeing in health geography: Conceptualizations, contributions, and questions.' In V. Crooks, G. Andrews & J. Pearce (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Health Geography*. Routledge: 124-130.
66. **Collins, D.** & Evans, J. 2017 'Health geography.' In D. Richardson, N. Castree, M. Goodchild, W. Liu, A. Kobayashi & R. Marston (Eds.) *The International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment, and Technology*, Wiley-AAG: 1-12

67. Coleman, T., **Collins, D.** & Kearns, R. 2015 'Mediating young people's knowledge: Framing school based sexuality education in New Zealand and Canada.' In J. Horton, B. Evans & T. Skelton (Eds.), *Geographies of Children and Young People* vol 9, *Play, Recreation, Health and Wellbeing*. Springer, Singapore: 1-21.
68. **Collins, D.** & **Tymko, M.** 2015 'Smoke-free cars: Placing children's emotions.' In M. Blazek & P. Kraftl (Eds.), *Children's Emotions in Policy and Practice*, Palgrave-Macmillan: 68-83.
69. **Collins, D.**, Fleuret, S., Huish, R. et Hoyez, A-C. 2011 'Regards croisés sur les géographies de la santé anglophone et francophone.' In S. Fleuret et A-C. Hoyez (Eds.), *Santé et géographie: Nouveaux regards*. Economica-Anthropos Presses: 73-100.
70. Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2010 'Health geography.' In T. Brown, S. McLafferty & G. Moon (Eds.), *Companion to Health and Medical Geography*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford: 15-32.
71. **Collins, D.**, Bean, C., & Kearns, R. 2009 "'Mind that child'": Childhood, traffic and walking in automobilized space.' In J. Conley & A. McLaren (Eds.), *Car Troubles: Critical Studies of Automobility*. Ashgate, London: 127-143.
72. **Collins, D.** 2009 'Private/public divide'. In R. Kitchen & N. Thrift (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Elsevier, vol. 8, 437-441.
73. **Collins, D.** & Shantz, B-M. 2009 'Public spaces, Urban'. In R. Kitchen & N. Thrift (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Elsevier, vol. 8, 517-522.
74. **Collins, D.** & Kearns, R. 2007 'Ambiguous landscapes: Sun, risk and recreation on New Zealand beaches.' In A. Williams (Ed.), *Therapeutic Landscapes*. Ashgate, London: 15-31.
75. Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2006 'Children in the intensifying city: Lessons from Auckland's walking school buses.' In B. Gleeson & N. Sipe (Eds.), *Creating Child-Friendly Cities: Reinstating Kids in the City*. Routledge, London: 105-120.
76. **Collins, D.** & Blomley, N. 2003 'Private needs & public space: Politics, poverty and anti-panhandling by-laws in Canadian cities.' In Law Commission of Canada (Ed.), *New Perspectives on the Public Private Divide*. University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver: 40-67.

### **Proceedings**

77. Kearns, R., **Collins, D.** & Bean, C. 2005 'Children's freedoms and promoting the "active city" in Auckland neighbourhoods.' Proceedings of the 2nd State of Australian Cities Conference. Griffith University, Brisbane, Social Cities Ch. 4, 1-15.

## **OTHER PUBLICATIONS**

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### **Book Reviews**

1. **Collins, D.** 2010 'Gentrification (L. Lees, T. Slater & E. Wyly, 2008).' *Geographical Research*, 48(3): 334-336.
2. **Collins, D.** 2010 'Schooling Passions: Nation, History, and Language in Contemporary Western India (V. Benei, 2008).' *Social & Cultural Geography*, 11(1): 100-102.
3. **Collins, D.** 2010 'Castles in the Sand: What's Happening to the New Zealand Coast? (R. Peart, 2009).' *New Zealand Geographer*, 66(1): 89-90.
4. **Collins, D.** 2006 'Good Government? Good Citizens? Courts, Politics and Markets in a Changing Canada (W.A. Bogart, 2005).' *Public Law Review*, 17, 60-63.

## **Journal Editorials**

5. Kearns, R. & **Collins, D.** 2016 ‘Aotearoa’s Archipelago: Re-imagining New Zealand’s island geographies.’ *New Zealand Geographer* 72(3), 165-168.
6. Kearns, R., Wiles, J. & **Collins, D.** 2007 ‘Towards healthier environments.’ *New Zealand Geographer*, 63(2): 79-80.

## **Technical Papers**

7. **Collins, D.** & Kearns, R. 2010 ‘Ngunguru sandspit: Values, community and property on the Northland Coast.’ Working Paper #40, School of Environment, The University of Auckland. (62pp) ISBN: 978-0-9582805-7-0
8. **Collins, D.** & Kearns, R. 2007 ‘Property development and the transformation of New Zealand’s coastal landscapes: A case study of Ocean Beach, Hawke’s Bay.’ The BRCSS Network, Auckland Uniservices Ltd. (61pp)

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH, MEDIA APPEARANCES, EXPERT COMMENTARIES, ETC.**

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1. 630 CHED, 2023 (Jan 12). Homelessness in downtown Edmonton. Interview – radio.
2. CBC Edmonton, 2023 (Jan 11). ‘[Frostbite amputations hit 10-year high in Edmonton last winter, new data show.](#)’ Article with interview.  
CBC The National ‘[Frostbite amputations in Edmonton see 10-year high.](#)’ Interview – video.
3. University of Alberta Sustainability Council, 2022. ‘[Grad student’s research tackles rising housing prices in rural hometown.](#)’ Article with interview –with E. Cizek.
4. CBC Saint John, 2022 (Nov 22). ‘[The right to a roof overhead](#)’. Interview – radio.
5. 630 CHED, 2022 (Nov 10). Northlands redevelopment discussion. Interview – radio.
6. CBC Edmonton, 2022 (Nov 8). ‘[Demolition date for Northlands Coliseum still up in the air, almost 5 years after it closed.](#)’ Article with interview (including audio and video).
7. The Best Evidence Podcast, 2021. ‘[Preventing Evictions in Community Housing.](#)’ Interview – podcast (42 minutes).
8. Affordable Housing Solutions Lab, 2020. ‘[The Human Right to Adequate Housing.](#)’ Blogpost – with S.L. Stadler.
9. Homeless Hub, 2019. ‘[Housing First in Practice: Challenges and Adaptations in Alberta.](#)’ Blogpost – with J.T. Anderson-Baron.

## RESEACH FUNDING

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*Note: All Canadian grants are exclusive of salaries and overheads.*

### **Currently Funded Projects**

2020-2025 SSHRC-CMHC Collaborative Housing Research Network Initiative – Partnership Grant: ‘Community Housing Canada: Partners in Resilience.’ Role: Project Director / Principal Investigator (CAD1,371,000) (additional CAD1,675,000 cash and in-kind support from partner organizations).

### **Completed Projects**

2022 Mitacs Business Strategy Internship: ‘Social and Economic Governance in Alberta's seniors and community housing sector.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD15,000).

2019-2020 SSHRC-CMHC Collaborative Housing Research Network Initiative – Partnership Development Grant: ‘Building a resilient community housing sector in Canada.’ Role: Project Director / Principal Investigator (CAD77,700) (additional CAD26,300 cash and in-kind support from partner organizations).

2019-2020 Killam Cornerstone Grant: ‘Liveable for whom? Placing homelessness in winter cities.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD20,000).

2018-2019 Capital Region Housing Corporation, Collaborative Research Agreement: ‘Eviction prevention in social and affordable housing: Identifying best practices for Edmonton.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD8,700).

2018-2019 Mitacs Accelerate Grant: ‘Activating Empty Storefronts Through Social Innovation.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD15,000).

2016-2019 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Insight Development Grant: ‘Does Housing First in Alberta provide a right to housing?’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD63,400).

2017-2018 REACH Edmonton, Collaborative Research Agreement: ‘Creating community wellness services for vulnerable persons with complex needs.’ Role: Co-Investigator (CAD25,300).

2017 University of Alberta, International Research Internship: ‘Charting the local in homelessness policy.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD4,000).

2016-2017 Athabasca University Research Grant: ‘Urban renewal and the resilience of inner-city social services: Exploring the impacts of Edmonton’s Ice District on the city’s homeless services hub.’ Role: Co-Investigator (CAD3,200).

2015 School of Environment, University of Auckland PBRF grant: ‘Aotearoa’s Archipelago: Rethinking New Zealand’s islands.’ Role: Associate Investigator (NZD4,100).

2014-2015 Killam Research Fund, Research Operating Grant: ‘Housing First and homelessness in

- Alberta.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD6,600).
- 2014 School of Environment, University of Auckland PBRF grant: ‘Boundary crossing at the coast: Freedom camping in New Zealand’ Role: Associate Investigator (NZD5,000).
- 2013-2015 University of Alberta VP Research, SSHRC Award: ‘Policies for smoke-free places: Edmonton case studies.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD7,500).
- 2012 Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, Seed Grant: ‘Child Care Policy and the Experiences of Employed Albertan Families with Pre-school Children.’ Role: Co-Investigator (CAD10,000).
- 2011-2013 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Standard Research Grant: ‘The spatiality of tobacco control: Smoking bans and the public/private distinction.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD24,800).
- 2007-2009 University of Auckland Research Office: ‘Coastal property: Northland case studies.’ Role: Principal Investigator (NZD8,500).
- 2007-2008 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Faculty Research Grant: ‘Homelessness policy in Canada and New Zealand: A comparative perspective.’ Role: Principal Investigator (CAD4,800).
- 2006-2007 Building Research Capability in the Social Sciences (BRCSS): ‘Postdoctoral Research Award.’ Role: Principal Investigator (NZD10,000).
- Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA): ‘Walking school buses: Status, development and achievements.’ Role: Co-Principal Investigator (NZD17,000).
- 2005-2006 Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA): ‘Walking school buses in the Auckland region: Development and status in 2005.’ Role: Co-Principal Investigator (NZD11,250).
- 2002-2003 Auckland Regional Council: ‘Auckland region walking bus survey.’ (NZD6,800).
- 2001 Law Commission of Canada. Annual Legal Dimensions Initiative: ‘Social relationships: Refocusing the public/private divide’. Role: Co-Principal Investigator (CAD3,000).

## CONFERENCE AND SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS (Last 6 years only)

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1. **Collins, D.** (2023). Convenor and Moderator – Panel Session: Building a Just City. 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual City Building at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Mar 30.
2. **Collins, D.** (2022). New Brunswick Housing Summit – Keynote Address. Saint John, NB, Nov 22.
3. **Collins, D.** (2022). How did we get in this mess? Canada’s housing affordability nightmare. Habitat for Humanity Canada Annual Conference, London, ON, May 12.
4. **Collins, D.** (2022). Eviction prevention in social and affordable housing. Alberta Seniors & Community Housing Association (ASCHA) Convention & Trade Show, Calgary, AB, Apr 13.
5. **Collins, D.** (2022). The role of community housing in successful city building. City Building at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Mar 24.
6. **Collins, D.** & Swanson, B. (2020) Workshopping your own definition of sustainability. Student Sustainability Summit, Edmonton, AB, Feb 1.
7. Stadler, S.L. & **Collins, D.** (2019) Does Housing First in Alberta provide a right to housing? Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, Apr 6.
8. **Collins, D.** (2018) Graduation: Not a forever model. 7 Cities Conference on Housing First and Homelessness, Red Deer, AB, Jun 12.
9. **Collins, D.** (2018) Settler colonialism at the Legislature: Views from Alberta, Canada. Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Apr 14.
10. **Collins, D.** (2018) The Reformation Revisited: Robin Kearns’ “Place and Health” at 25. Panel Organizer and Discussant. Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, Apr 12.
11. **Collins, D.** (2017) The impoverished rights discourse of Housing First. 17th International Medical Geography Symposium, Angers, France, Jul 6.
12. **Collins, D.** (2017) Considering the camp: Ambivalent geographies of mobile dwelling. Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, Apr 5.
13. **Collins, D.** (2017) Rethinking the street: Complete streets in a sustainable YEG. Sustain X: Creating a Sustainable YEG, Edmonton, AB, Mar 4.

## STUDENT SUPERVISION AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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### Graduate Students (Current)

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|-------|--|
| 2022- | B. Kapatsila, PhD, University of Alberta ( <i>acting</i> )<br>M. Miller, MA, University of Alberta (co-supervised) |
| 2021- | E. Cizek, MA, University of Alberta<br>P. A. Wikander, PhD, University of Alberta                                  |
| 2019- | L. Bates, PhD, University of Alberta   |

## **Graduate Students (Completed)**

- 2023 Z. Azarm, MSc, University of Alberta  
Major Research Project: Towards a Climate Change Adaptation Framework for Heatwaves Through Open Space Transformation.
- 2022 K. McDowell, MA, University of Alberta  
Thesis: At Home Here?: LGBTQ Refugees' Housing Experiences in Canada
- 2021 M. Stout, MA, University of Alberta (co-supervised)  
Thesis: "We Embrace Winter Here": Place and Placemaking in Winter Cities
- A. MacDonald, MA, University of Alberta (co-supervised)  
Thesis: Cultural Planning and the Phantasmagoria of Public Art in Edmonton
- 2020 D. Reynard, PhD, University of Alberta (co-supervised)  
Dissertation: Carbon Pricing and its Effect on Mobility and Social Exclusion in Canada
- 2019 S.L. Stadler, MA, University of Alberta  
Thesis: Housing First Programs in Alberta and the Right to Housing
- S. Gross, MSc, University of Alberta  
Major Research Project: Activating Empty Storefronts with Arts-Based Activities.
- 2018 R. Soans, MA, University of Alberta (co-supervised)  
Thesis: Towards Vibrancy: Overcoming Path Dependence to Revitalize Traditional Retail Areas in Edmonton
- 2016 J.T. Anderson, MA, University of Alberta  
Thesis: Housing First, Affordable Housing and Ending Homelessness in Alberta
- 2014 J. Li, MA, University of Alberta  
Thesis: Smoking Environments in Transition: Experiences of Chinese Migrants to Edmonton
- 2013 M. Tymko, MA, University of Alberta  
Thesis: When You Smoke, They Smoke: Children's Rights and Opinions about Vehicular Smoking Bans
- 2012 M. Dance, MA, University of Alberta (co-supervised)  
Thesis: Crowdsourcing Edmonton's Ribbon of Green: A Case Study of Neogeography in Edmonton's River Valley
- 2011 A. McLellan, MA, University of Alberta  
Thesis: The Role of Place Promotion and Urban Image in the Development and Marketing of Rapid Mass Transit Systems (RMT)



- A. Proctor, MA, University of Alberta  
Thesis: De-Normalizing Tobacco on Campus: The Spatial Regulation of Smoking in Three Canadian University Environments
- 2007 D. Lang, MSc, University of Auckland (co-supervised)  
Thesis: To Drive or To Walk: Examining School Travel Behaviour
- 2005 E. Dolan, MA, University of Otago  
Thesis: Automobile Dependence in Wellington and Dunedin: The Potential for Transport Demand Management to Address this Problem
- P. Laurenson, MPlan, University of Otago  
Thesis: Public Space and Anti-Homeless Regulations: Local Government Responses to Homelessness in Three New Zealand Cities
- 2004 M. Day, MPlan, University of Otago (co-supervised)  
Major Research Project: Planning for Supported Accommodation: Planning Implications of Providing Supported Accommodation in Dunedin
- A. Templeton, MPlan, University of Otago (co-supervised)  
Major Research Project: Revitalizing the Heart of New Zealand's Urban Centres: An Examination of Residential Space in Cities

#### **Undergraduate Students (Completed)**

- 2017 A. MacDonald, BA (Hons), University of Alberta  
Thesis: The Alberta Legislature: A Cultural Landscape Analysis
- 2007 C. A. de Freitas, BA (Hons), University of Auckland  
Thesis: Locating the Digital in Urban Public Space

#### **Research Internships (Completed)**

- 2017 S.L. Stadler, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

#### **Undergraduate Project Students (Completed)**

- 2023 C. Hirny Potter, University of Alberta
- 2021 S. Preisler, BA, University of Alberta
- 2017 C-A. Chai, BA, University of Alberta  
M. Severson, BA, University of Alberta  
M. Stout, BA, University of Alberta (2)
- 2016 B. Hoeven, BA, University of Alberta  
J. Goodhart, BA, University of Alberta

- 2015 J. Ames, BA, University of Alberta
- 2013 A. McIntosh, BA, University of Alberta
- 2012 J.T. Anderson, BA, University of Alberta  
L-D. Ndemeye, BA, University of Alberta

**Committee Membership (Completed)**

- 2022 C. McMinn, PhD, Waikato University  
R. Maggay, M.Arch, Laurentian University
- 2021 C. Askin, MA, University of Alberta  
R. Shum, PhD, Waikato University
- 2020 A. Khalafzai, PhD, University of Alberta  
K. Borth, PhD, University of Alberta
- 2017 K. Mottershead, MA, University of Alberta
- 2015 L. Labossiere, MA, University of Alberta
- 2013 J. Baker, MA, University of Alberta  
F. Rao, MA, University of Alberta
-

### **Thesis Examinations - External**

- 2023 F. van Beusekom, MA thesis, School of Geography, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
- 2022 J. C. King, PhD dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
- 2021 M. Rafiepourgatabi, PhD dissertation, Health Sciences, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
- 2019 L. Nava Jiménez, PhD dissertation, Department of Tourism, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.  
E. James, MA thesis, School of Environment, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
- 2017 J. Rankin, MSc thesis, School of Environment, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
- 2016 M. O'Neill, MPlan project, School of Urban Planning, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada.  
K. Wati, PhD dissertation, School of Environment, Griffith University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia.
- 2014 S. Bird, PhD dissertation, College of Law & Justice, Victoria University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia.  
C. Babb, PhD dissertation, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Curtin University, Perth, WA, Australia
- 2012 M. Russell, PhD dissertation, Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand
- 2011 M. Des Forges, MA thesis, School of Geography, Environment & Earth Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.

### **Thesis Examinations – Internal**

- 2022 D. Epperson, MA thesis, Human Geography, University of Alberta.
- 2021 A. Thompson, MFA exhibition, Department of Art & Design, University of Alberta.
- 2019 E. Aliasl, MDes thesis, Department of Industrial Design, University of Alberta.  
V. Zemba, MA thesis, Department of Human Ecology,

University of Alberta.

2017 K. Lopston, PhD dissertation, Department of Political Science,  
University of Alberta.

## **EDITING AND REVIEWING**

---

### **Journal Editorial Roles**

2022 North American Editor, *Housing Studies*

2015-2020 Editor, *Geography Compass – Social*

2014- Editorial Board Member, *Health & Place*

2006-2015 &  
2021- Editorial Board Member, *Geography Compass – Social*

2021- Editorial Board Member, *Housing Studies*

### **Guest Editor**

2016 *New Zealand Geographer* 72(3) [SI: Aotearoa's Archipelago], with R. Kearns.

2007 *New Zealand Geographer* 63(2) [SI: Towards Healthier Environments], with J. Wiles & R. Kearns

### **External Assessor – Research Grants**

2023 SSHRC – Insight Grant

2022 German Research Foundation / Arts and Humanities Research Council – UK  
Mitacs – Accelerate Grant

2021 SSHRC – Insight Grant  
Mitacs – Accelerate Grant

2017 SSHRC – Insight Grant

2016 SSHRC – Insight Grant

2012 SSHRC – Insight Grant  
Wellcome Trust (UK) – Medical Humanities Fellowship

2009 National Heart Foundation of New Zealand

- 2008 Health Research Council of New Zealand
- 2004 Health Research Council of New Zealand

**Reviewer – Tenure & Promotion Applications**

- 2020 School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen’s University
- 2017 Department of Geography & Planning, Concordia University
- 2021 Department of Geography, University of Otago

**Reviewer – Research Chairs**

- 2022 Canada Excellence Research Chair, NSERC

**Reviewer – Book manuscripts & proposals**

- 2019 *Canadian Cities in Transition, 6e*, Oxford University Press
- 2015 *Urban Fragmentations*, Routledge

**Reviewer – Major Research Projects**

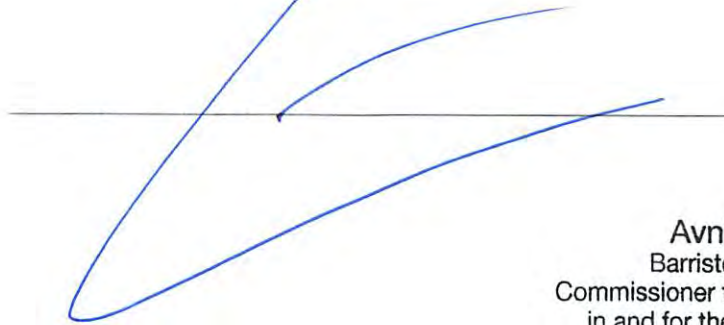
- 2015 “Mixed Fortunes: The Geography of Advantage and Disadvantage in New Zealand” for Salvation Army (Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit).

**Reviewer – Journal Manuscripts (Last 6 Years Only)**

- 2022 American Review of Canadian Studies; BMC Public Health; Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research; Canadian Journal of Urban Research; Geoforum; Health & Place (2); Health & Social Care in the Community (2); Housing Studies (2).
- 2021 Canadian Review of Sociology; Geoforum (2); Health & Place; Housing Studies (2); Health & Social Care in the Community; Journal of Community Practice
- 2020 Annals of Leisure Research; Area; Canadian J. of Law & Society; Health & Place; Health & Social Care in the Community; Housing Policy Debate; Housing Studies (2); Preventive Medicine; Social & Cultural Geography; The Canadian Geographer; Tourism Geographies; Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting.
- 2019 Health & Place (3); Health & Social Care in the Community (2); Housing Studies; Kotuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online; Social Policy & Administration; Tourism Geographies
- 2018 Applied Mobilities; Children’s Geographies; Health & Place (4); Health & Social Care in the Community; Housing, Theory & Society; J. Planning, Education & Research; Land Use Policy; New Zealand Geographer; Preventive Medicine; Social & Cultural Geography (2).

2017 Canadian Geographer; Geographical Research; Health & Place; Health & Social Care in the Community (2); Health Education Res.; J. Policy Res. in Tourism, Leisure & Events; Tobacco Induced Diseases.

This is Exhibit "2" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

**Avnish Nanda**  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

## State of Emergency Declaration

### An Urgent Call For Emergency Humanitarian Relief & Prevention Measures Toronto Disaster Relief Committee

#### Contents

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*all human rights for all*

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**1948-1998**

*"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being for himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."* Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25,

proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948.

*"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living ..., including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right."* International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966. Ratified by Canada and entry into force in Canada on 19 August 1976. *"Inadequate shelter and homelessness are growing plights in many countries, threatening standards of health, security and even life itself. Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing, housing, water and sanitation, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions."* Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda, United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), June 1996

*"[P]overty is a serious breach of equality rights which I believe has no place in a country as prosperous as ours. Experience suggests that it is largely those who are most vulnerable in our society by virtue of the various prohibited grounds of discrimination ... who are also more likely to be poor.... It is now time to recognize poverty as a human rights issue."* Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay, Chair, Canadian Human Rights Commission, Introduction to the 1997 Annual Report of the Commission, March 1998. *"Homelessness is the predictable result of private and public-sector policies that exclude the poor from participating in the economic revolution, while safety nets are slashed in the name of 'global competitiveness'. Moreover, the situation is perpetuated by a deep reluctance to tackle the roots of the problem..."*

*The principles of economic and social rights – an integral part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... – are trampled without regard or regret.*

Philip Alston, Chair, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Geneva in "Hardship in the Midst of Plenty," *The Progress of Nations 1998*, NY: UNICEF. *"The Committee notes the omission from the [Canadian] Government's written report and oral presentation of any mention of the problems of homelessness."*

*Given the evidence of homelessness and inadequate living conditions, the Committee is surprised that expenditures on social housing are as low as 1.3 percent of Government expenditures."*

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Geneva From a 1992 Report Critical of Canada's Human Rights Record

## 1. It Is Time to Act:



# Homelessness is Unacceptable

When a few people in a community have no housing due to a fire or some other tragic event, or when hundreds of people become displaced because of some disaster, the community mobilizes. To do otherwise is unthinkable.

When many people are unhoused we have a community-wide crisis. When the numbers are allowed to grow, and when all reasonable analyses point to even more homeless people everyday, we have a disaster – a situation requiring emergency relief and prevention measures – in the same way as when a flood or a storm leaves many people homeless. All people must be protected from becoming homeless, from having inadequate food, and from being exposed to life and health-threatening circumstances.

When enough people care to learn about the nature and extent of the current disaster they will see that there is a single fundamental fact about all of the homeless: the very large gap between the cost of adequate housing and the money available to pay for it. This is the beginning and the end of the story about a key common feature of all the diverse individuals we label 'the homeless.' They are people who once had housing but, for a variety of reasons, are now unhoused.

As one of the most economically prosperous nations on earth, Canada is a country with an enviable human rights record, including some of the social and economic rights (health care, education, old age security). But our public and private institutions are organized in such a manner that one of the now 'normal' outcomes is that a growing number of people are excluded from having an adequate and secure place to live. For some this is a temporary situation, for some an occasional situation, for others it is a long term reality.

Having no place to live means being excluded from all that is associated with having a home, a surrounding neighbourhood and a set of established community networks. It means being exiled from the mainstream patterns of day-to-day life. Without a physical place to call 'home' in the social, psychological and emotional sense, the hour-to-hour struggle for physical survival replaces all other possible activities. Without an address it is virtually impossible to access some essential social services and it is very difficult to get a job.

People with no place to live, those who have no physical and psychological place of their own to call home, are the most completely *excluded* group of people in society. On becoming homeless, people enter a different world from the rest of society. Survival is the main goal. It is a nightmare world completely apart from the normal day-to-day pattern of living.

Most who find themselves in this situation migrate to the centre of larger urban areas where some emergency survival services for people without housing are available. Most roam from place-to-place and from service-to-service to ensure their physical survival. The 'dehousing' processes operating in society are producing a diaspora of the excluded, struggling to survive without a place to call home.

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## 2. State of Emergency Declaration

### Homelessness: A National Disaster

***We call on all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster requiring emergency humanitarian relief. We urge that they immediately develop and implement a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy using disaster relief funds both to provide the homeless with immediate health protection and housing and to prevent further homelessness. Canada has signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing everyone's right to "an adequate standard of living ... including adequate food, clothing and housing." Homeless people have no decent standard of living; our governments are violating these Human Rights. Despite Canada's reputation for providing relief to people made temporarily homeless by natural disasters, our governments are unwilling to help the scores of thousands of people in Canada condemned to homelessness. Morally, economically, socially, and legally, we cannot allow homelessness to become "normal" in Canadian life. Inaction betrays many thousands of us to a miserable existence and harms our society for years to come.***

### WHY DECLARE AN EMERGENCY?

#### Disaster Now

- Crisis facilities are already overcrowded. People are ending up in the streets, parks, and alleyways
- Youth and families with children are the fastest growing population in shelters
- Major cities search far beyond their boundaries for temporary housing for homeless families
- Homeless people face poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and increased risk of violence, communicable diseases and compulsive drug use
- Homelessness causes psychological and emotional pain that can exacerbate or precipitate agonizing deterioration of mental health
- Prolonged homelessness permanently harms people; ultimately, it can kill them by exposure, illness, violence or suicide
- Homelessness prevents people from maintaining their health, finding and keeping work, attending school and exercising their rights as citizens
- Conservative estimates concur that about 200,000 Canadians are homeless

#### Worse To Come

- Shelters and other temporary measures provide at best a stopgap. Crowding, insecurity and the risk of disease or violence means prolonged stays harm people
- Homelessness is contributing to a developing toxic brew of disease including HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, hepatitis, sexually transmitted diseases, and other communicable infections
- Prolonged homelessness for children harms them for life
- Twenty years of research has shown a continual rise in homelessness, linked to unemployment, reductions to social assistance, cuts to public housing and inadequate tenant protection
- Repeated government task forces, other studies, inquests and recommendations have produced little action, though documenting that the situation worsens yearly

### ***Declaring an Emergency***

We urge all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster now, as a first step in implementing a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy, both short- and long-term.

### ***Immediate Short Term Measures***

- Governments should reopen and maintain services for the homeless
- All governments should immediately reinstate or establish adequate social assistance benefits
- All governments should make suitable public buildings available as emergency shelters or hostels.
- Even parks can serve as temporary refuges with mobile homes, tents, bath houses and toilets
- Governments should concertedly provide emergency medical relief, including clinics, outreach, infirmaries, screening and immunization, and public nutrition and hygiene programs
- Health strategies should especially treat the relationship between homelessness and severe infectious or communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, and hepatitis
- Governments should grant immediate emergency funding to non-governmental organizations (churches, charities, non-profit groups, etc.)

### ***Long-term Measures to be Implemented Now***

- Governments should implement a "1 per cent solution": All levels of government now spend an average 1 per cent of their total budgets on housing. Adding another 1 per cent, and henceforth devoting the total 2% to long-term housing, would take the single largest step towards eliminating homelessness.
- Governments should maintain and fund social benefits and services on a stable, long-term basis
- Crisis shelters and aid agencies should receive stable, long-term funding until the homeless are housed

**The homeless situation is worsening daily at an alarming rate, as the factors creating it remain unchecked. Any delay in firmly and massively responding will only contribute to compounding the present crisis of suffering and death which is already an epidemic which no civilized society can tolerate.**

## **3. The Scale of the Disaster**

*"Based on the findings of the study, homelessness is an increasing problem in Metropolitan Toronto, affected by multiple causes interacting with each other, i.e., a decline in affordable rental stock (especially rooming houses) in centrally located areas, low vacancy rates in the rental market, high levels of unemployment, and provincial policies regarding de-institutionalization."*

This was not written last week or last year. It is from a 1982 Metro Toronto Government study:

*No Place to Go – A Study of Homelessness in Metropolitan Toronto: Characteristics, Trends and Potential Solutions, 1982.*

In 1982 there were 1,500 emergency hostel beds in Metro. Now there are about 5,000.

### **Incomes of Renters – DECREASING**

### **Amount Spent on Rent – INCREASING**

Information collected during the 1996 Census helps explain why more tenants are having trouble paying their rent. Renters in Canada have less real income than five years ago and they are spending more on housing as percent of their household income. As a group, renters have about half the household income of homeowners.

- In 1996 32% of all 1.5 million households in the greater Toronto area (the 'Toronto CMA') were paying more than 30% of their household income on housing; up from 27% in 1991.
- In 1996 44% of all 615,000 renters in greater Toronto were paying more than 30%; up from 33% in 1991.
- The average income of the households spending over 30% on housing in greater Toronto fell 23% in constant (inflation adjusted) dollars, from \$35,000 in 1991 to \$27,000 in 1996.

- The gap between the average household income of owners and renters is very large and continues to grow. For Ontario's households in 1996: Owners, \$66,000; Renters, \$33,600.

With such a large gap between the incomes of owner and renter households the private sector cannot build more housing for most renters *and* make money. There is no *effective market demand* for new rental housing. There is tremendous *social need* for more adequate, appropriate and affordable rental housing. Without a significant government role, no new rental housing will be built for those most in need.

### **Rental Housing Starts – Near ZERO**

### **Social Housing Starts – ZERO**

Housing starts in the greater Toronto area, as monitored by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, demonstrate the inability of the housing market to supply rental housing. In 1996 the last of Ontario's social housing units were built, 782 units out of a total of 19,000 housing starts that year. The private sector built only 146 rental units in 1996. Virtually all the starts were for owner occupiers – who have sufficient income to pay for new housing.

Last year was a much better year for housing construction in the greater Toronto area. There were a total of 25,600 housing starts. However, there were zero social housing starts and only 252 private sector rental housing starts. 99% of house construction was for the ownership sector.

### **Poverty in Canada – INCREASING**

*Poverty Profile 1996* is the latest in a series of reports on poverty in Canada by the National Council of Welfare based on data collected by Statistics Canada.

In 1996, five years after the last recession, 5.1 million Canadian children, women and men lived in poverty. While the rest of the economy enjoyed modest growth year after year, the overall poverty rate reached 17.6 percent. In 1989 the House of Commons resolved to eradicate child poverty by 2000. Only four years before that target date, child poverty had risen to 20.9 percent, the highest in 17 years.

A comparison of poverty rates for renters and homeowners in 1996 finds almost 40% of all renters in poverty and about 20% of all homeowners.

In terms of the actual dollars that poor people had to live on, a total of 268,000 families and 423,000 unattached people had 1996 incomes that amounted to less than half the poverty line.

The United Nations designated 1996 the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. The Council notes that: "Sadly, poverty statistics for 1996 show that Canada came no where near to meeting that goal."

The report also noted that "winning the war on poverty is not an unrealistic goal."

*"Statistics Canada estimates that the cost of bringing all poor people out of poverty in 1996 would have been \$17.8 billion. That's a huge, but not outrageous amount of money in a country where the federal, provincial and territorial governments spent \$386 billion in 1996 and where the value of all goods and services produced was \$820 billion."*

### **Shelter Use in Toronto – INCREASING**

- On any given day in 1996, about 3,100 different individuals used Toronto's emergency shelters. This is an increase from 2,600 in 1994 and 2,100 in 1988.
- In 1996, almost 26,000 different people used Toronto's emergency shelter system.
- Families accounted for 13 percent of shelter *cases* in 1996 but represented 46 percent of the *people* using shelter beds in that year.
- In 1996, 19 percent of the people using shelters – 5,300 – were children.
- More than 80,000 people (about 4% Toronto's population) are at risk of becoming homeless (people spending over 50% of their income on rent or living in extremely precarious situations).
- On any given night in Toronto
  - over 3,000 men, women and children are staying in an emergency shelter,
  - about 37,000 qualified applicants are on a waiting list for subsidized housing, and
  - about 40,000 additional people are precariously housed – some of whom will become homeless.

### **Assistance for Toronto's Poor & Unemployed – DECREASING**

- In 1996 36% of Toronto's renter households lived in poverty – an increase since the early 1990s recession ended (poverty among homeowners was 7.2% in 1996).
- Renters' incomes fell by 12 percent in real terms between 1990 and 1995 (homeowners' incomes fell by 5 percent).
- In the late 1980s, only 3% of the City's population received social assistance; at the end of 1996, 8% (compared to 3% in the rest of the GTA)
- Changes in the federal unemployment system mean that only 40% of the unemployed in the Greater Toronto Area received benefits, compared to 68% in 1993.

- Changes in provincial social assistance mean that fewer people are eligible and benefits were cut by 21.6% in 1995. Medical and drug benefits that were available for the working poor have been eliminated, as has the \$37-a-month pregnancy allowance. Fewer disabled people will be eligible for benefits due to a new more restrictive definition of disability.

### **Rental Housing Demand/Need in Toronto – INCREASING**

- Based on normal population increases, an additional 7,500 to 9,500 rental housing units are needed in the GTA each year between 1996 and 2001.
- Rents in licensed rooming houses tend to be about \$450 per month; rent in accessory apartments (often illegal basement conversions) are from \$400 to \$750; the housing allowance component of social assistance for single person is \$325.

### **Rental Housing supply in Toronto – DECREASING**

- Between 1990 and 1995 apartments at the lower end of Toronto's rental market have been lost:
- 4,500 bachelor apartments renting under \$500 per month;
- 27,600 one-bedroom apartments renting for under \$600 per month;
- 22,200 two-bedroom apartments renting for under \$700 per month; and
- 4,100 three-bedroom apartments renting for under \$800 per month.
- There are many hundreds of illegal, unlicensed and often unsafe rooming houses.
- The number of licensed rooming houses is steadily declining: 603 in 1986; 393 in 1998.
- Subsidized housing is also being lost: since 1992 the Province has canceled rent supplement subsidies for 700 apartments; scattered site detached and semidetached family public housing units are now being sold; CMHC has allowed subsidized private sector apartment building owners to buy their way out of low-rent agreements – a loss of 6,100 low-rent units.
- No new social housing is being built: an average of 2,100 units per year were built in Toronto over the past two decades. The Federal government ended its supply program in 1992; the provincial government did the same in 1995.

## **4. A Life and Death Situation for Some; Serious Long-Term Health Consequences for Most**

*"The relationship between homelessness and health has been clearly demonstrated in numerous studies over the past decade. Homelessness is injurious to people's health and the situations in which homeless people are often compelled to live may be as hazardous to their health as the streets themselves. Homeless people are at increased risk for tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, trauma, major mental illnesses, alcoholism and its sequel, drug abuse and dependence, sexually transmitted diseases, and a host of other relatively minor, but nonetheless impairing, respiratory, dermatological, vascular, nutritional, and psychiatric disorders. What is more, the sick and disabled are often those who become homeless. Homelessness should be recognized as a major public health concern."*

From: "Editorial: It's Time for the Public Health Community to Declare War on Homelessness," *American Journal of Public Health*, Feb. 1997.

Toronto's health care professionals report that the overall health status of Toronto's homeless population is declining due to overcrowding in the hostels, more people who must sleep outside year round, and, due to social agency funding crises, less access to adequate food, transit tokens (to access emergency services), and hygiene supplies.

- there are increasing reports of death related to homelessness
- the longer people homeless, the more likely they are to suffer serious and long term mental and physical health problems
- high rates of infectious disease is now very common, including bronchitis, pneumonia, serious skin infections, gastro-intestinal infections, Hepatitis B and C, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (commonly reported by health care workers and research)
- 38% TB infection rate among Toronto's homeless
- health impacts of drugs and alcohol combined with lack of treatment facilities include higher risk of skin and blood infections, overdoses, cardiac problems, liver disease and cognitive impairment
- malnutrition, hunger, vitamin deficiencies
- 59% of a sample of young street-involved women had been pregnant. Of these one third experienced miscarriage, 23% had pre-term babies and 13% a neonatal death (1997 study by SHOUT)
- high incidence of chronic health problems (diabetes, arthritis, liver disease) which worsen quickly due to state of homelessness
- this past winter and spring lice/scabies infestations of epidemic proportions, directly related to crowded shelter and emergency accommodation conditions and the forced migration between emergency facilities
- access to health care is a major problem for the approximately 40% of Toronto's homeless population who do not have health cards
- high incidence of injury and assault especially in last year

## **5. Our Moral and Legal Obligations: Homelessness is a Serious Human Rights**

## Violation

All human rights violations are acts that disregard human dignity and the rule of law. The moral and ethical codes of the World's religions, international law, the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and federal and provincial human rights legislation, oblige Canadians and Canadian governments to refrain from acts, omissions, or other measures that result in violations of human rights.

The very existence of people who do not have any housing is by itself a most serious human rights violation. Societies with homeless people amidst great prosperity have established and are maintaining homeless-creating processes – day-to-day 'normal' mechanisms which result in people becoming unhoused and remaining unhoused, often for long periods of time. These are dehousing processes.

A household's right to adequate housing is violated under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights when the nation fails to continue making progress towards adequate housing for everyone to the extent that its resources allow. All nations, provincial/state and municipal jurisdictions must set achievable and measurable benchmarks for progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights. These rights must be enjoyed equally, without discrimination.

In 1990, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued a legal opinion which defines when a state is in violation of its obligations relating to the right to adequate housing. One form of violation is a:

*general decline in living and housing conditions, directly attributable to policy and legislative decisions by States parties, and in the absence of accompanying compensatory measures, would be inconsistent with the obligations found in the Covenant.*  
(General Comment No. 4, Paragraph 11)

In a related UN report on actions which constitute housing rights violations, the following five apply to the Canadian and Ontario governments:

- Acts of racial or other forms of discrimination in the housing sphere;
- Adoption of legislation or policies clearly inconsistent with housing rights obligations, particularly when these result in homelessness, greater levels of inadequate housing, the inability of persons to pay for housing and so forth;
- Repealing legislation consistent with, and in support of, housing rights, unless obviously outdated or replaced with equally or more consistent laws;
- Unreasonable reductions in public expenditures on housing and other related areas, in the absence of adequate compensatory measures;
- Overtly prioritizing the housing interests of high-income groups when significant portions of society live without their housing rights having been achieved;

See the Appendix for the recent UN review of Canada's record of human rights compliance.

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## Membership: Toronto Disaster Relief Committee

*The following individuals contributed to the drafting of the State of Emergency Declaration. The places they work or organizations they belong to are provided for identification purposes only.*

- David Hulchanski, Professor of Housing, U of Toronto
- Trevor Gray, AIDS ACTION NOW
- Brent Patterson, AIDS activist
- Beric German, Street Health AIDS outreach
- Maurice Adongo, Street Health mental health outreach
- Paula Dolezal, Street Health mental health outreach
- Peter Rosenthal, lawyer and U of Toronto Professor
- John Andras, co-founder of Project Warmth, Vice-President Research Capital Corp
- Cathy Crowe, RN, Queen West Community Health Centre, street outreach nurse
- Rev. Don (Dan) Heap (Anglican), former MP Trinity Spadina
- Jeannie Loughrey, Anglican priest, Diocese of Toronto
- Frank Showler, Member of Board of St. Claire's Inter-faith Housing
- David Walsh, President Realco Property Ltd
- Sherrie Golden, OCAP
- Sue Osborne, Housing Support Worker, Cornerstone Women's Residence

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## Appendix

### Fact Sheets

[#1. City of Toronto, Council Strategy Committee on People without Homes, Presentation by Cathy Crowe, RN, May, 1998.](#)

[#2. City of Toronto, The Homeless Crisis in Toronto, July 1998.](#)

[#3. United Nations, On Canada's Human Rights Record, 1993 and 1998.](#)

[#4. Ontario Coroner's Office, Verdict of the Inquest into the Freezing Deaths of Three Homeless Men in Toronto, 1996.](#)

[#5. National Legislation for Assisting the Homeless: Canada, US, UK.](#)

[#6. Government Expenditures on Housing Programs.](#)

[#7. Studied to Death: Recent Reports on Toronto's Homeless.](#)

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## Fact Sheet #1

# Toronto

## **Council Strategy Committee on People Without Homes**

May 11, 1998

Presentation to the Committee, Cathy Crowe, RN, on behalf of the City of Toronto's Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today at your first meeting. I'm here today to outline why I believe that you should consider Toronto's crisis of homelessness a disaster for the purpose of receiving emergency federal relief.

In April I brought this concept to the Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons for several reasons.

First, our committee was formed in what I now, in retrospect, consider to have been the early stage of an acute disaster. Disasters, natural or man-made, are not restricted to countries in the tropics, but their consequences are similar. In late 1995-early 1996 our committee heard evidence on the following warning signs of impending crisis: serious overcrowding of our day and overnight shelter system, a 38% tuberculosis infection rate among the homeless, clusters of freezing deaths of homeless people, a rise in overall morbidity including malnutrition and the spread of infectious diseases and a rise in the number of homeless deaths.

Second, after 26 years of nursing in the inner city of Toronto, I now turn to disaster and relief effort literature to inform my nursing practice. For example, the most common health problems I see are related to trauma, tuberculosis transmission, spread of acute respiratory infection, hunger, malnutrition, diarrhea and lice and more serious than any of the above, deprivation of the human spirit. Similar to a refugee camp.

Third, displaced persons suffer physically and emotionally - witness the impact of the emergency shelters on people in Eastern Canada during the ice storm. Although I considered offering assistance during the ice storm I faced a heart wrenching reality, in fact a shocking reminder - that people homeless in this city have been hit by a disaster, and many have been living a disaster for up to ten years. New victims of the disaster, whether it be due to eviction, unemployment or family violence, face dismantled health and social supports, an emergency shelter system that is full and a society that blames them for even being there.

Finally, Council will eventually receive a report from the Golden Task Force. I must ask - does the City have the budgetary capacity to deal with any Task Force recommendations that have a significant cost associated with them? I suspect not. We need external financial relief now.

I believe I speak for many when I say that in early 1998 we have reached a point as a City and as front-line workers where we have to realize that we are failing miserably responding to this disaster. The homeless numbers are growing exponentially. As recently as Friday our committee heard of the expected shortfall of 2000 emergency hostel beds. As of last week, the system is full to capacity and in overflow mode for women and children. The reality is we are not in a position to solve this crisis on our own. Around the world, forced economic migration to large metropolises has led to similar crises around homelessness. In Europe and in the United States, federal funding has been put in place to respond to a national issue that has local ramifications. In Canada, Toronto is clearly in the most serious position with respect to homelessness. I believe that the City should seek emergency federal relief specifically to create low-cost housing and to develop emergency shelter that can adequately meet demands.

I would like to suggest the following recommendations to you.

1. That the committee begin its deliberations from the premise that homelessness has reached crisis proportions in the City of Toronto and is unsolvable without emergency federal or provincial relief.
2. That the committee request a staff report which would include: a) the various pieces of provincial and federal legislation which deal with emergency planning and or disaster relief; b) Canadian precedents whereby government relief was provided for shelter or housing such as the post World War II housing creation; c) analysis of the new City of Toronto Emergency by-law as to whether it provides the means to

respond to the emergency needs (food, safety, shelter and health care) that face a significant proportion of the Toronto public who are homeless.

3. That the committee report to Council with recommendations on how to proceed with discussions with the federal and provincial governments on this matter.

Cathy Crowe, RN

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## Fact Sheet # 2

City of Toronto, Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services

### The Homeless Crisis in Toronto June 1998

From: Appendix II of *Homelessness and Request for a "Declaration of Disaster,"* report from the City of Toronto Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to the Council Strategy Committee for People Without Homes, Toronto, June 29, 1998.

Estimating the number of people who are homeless is difficult although we do know the number is rising. In 1997, about 28,000 people used the emergency shelter system in Toronto. People actually living on the street are growing in number according to street patrol and outreach workers. The number of "hidden homeless" i.e., people doubled up in housing or living in unstable or substandard housing and therefore at risk of becoming homeless, are even more difficult to estimate. At least 100,000 households with incomes below \$20,000 pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent.

Toronto has experienced an increased demand for emergency shelter (usage has more than doubled in the last four years) along with accompanying shortages in supply. The system operates at full capacity most nights throughout the year with many hostels reporting overcrowding. While single adult men continue to comprise the majority of hostel users, trends show that mother-led families and youth are the fastest growing users of Toronto's hostel system.

In October 1997, Toronto's shelter system was unable to accommodate the expected demand for the upcoming winter. In response, several overnight and day shelters were opened, operating at full capacity most nights. These sites were designed as a temporary measure only. The closure of most of these sites and the Out of the Cold winter shelter programs at the end of May 1998, has left the hostel system once again dealing with a bed shortage. Hostel Services Division has made a concerted effort to accommodate for the loss of these beds by enhancing the bed capacity of some shelters and attempting to secure additional motel space.

Toronto's homeless crisis is also characterized by an increased demand for community-based emergency services such as drop-in centres and meal programs along with a proliferation and institutionalization of volunteer based, ad hoc responses such as the Out of the Cold winter shelter program and food banks.

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## Fact Sheet # 3



### UNITED NATIONS: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

#### *Reviewing Canada's Compliance in 1993*

by J.D. Hulchanski

In May 1993 the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights considered Canada's report concerning its compliance with the human rights covered by Articles 10 to 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These articles cover rights associated with the family, women and children, an adequate standard of living, physical and mental health, education, and participation in cultural life.

Considering "Canada's enviable situation" with regard to available resources for the progressive realization of the rights recognized in the treaty, the Committee expressed "concern about the persistence of poverty in Canada" and the fact that there "seems to have been no measurable progress in alleviating poverty over the last decade, nor in alleviating the severity of poverty among a number of particularly vulnerable groups." It noted that "there seems to exist no procedure to ensure that those who must depend entirely on welfare payments do not thereby derive an income which is at or above the poverty line" and that there is widespread "hunger in Canada and the reliance on food banks operated by charitable organizations."

In terms of housing, the Committee noted "the omission from the Government's written report and oral presentation of any mention of the problems of homelessness" and that "the Committee is surprised that expenditures on social housing are as low as 1.3 per cent of Government expenditures." The following are selections from the Committee's 1992 report on Canada.

*On no measurable progress in alleviating poverty:*

12. In view of the obligation arising out of article 2 of the Covenant to apply the maximum of available resources to the progressive realization of the rights recognized in the treaty, and considering Canada's enviable situation with regard to such resources, the Committee expresses concern about the persistence of poverty in Canada. There seems to have been no measurable progress in alleviating poverty over the last decade, nor in alleviating the severity of poverty among a number of particularly vulnerable groups.

*On the welfare rates which are below the poverty line:*

15. The Committee is concerned that there seems to exist no procedure to ensure that those who must depend entirely on welfare payments do not thereby derive an income which is at or above the poverty line.

*On the failure to address widespread housing discrimination:*

18. The Committee learned from non-governmental organizations of widespread discrimination in housing against people with children, people on social assistance, people with low incomes, and people who are indebted. Although prohibited by law in many of Canada's provinces, these forms of discrimination are apparently common. A more concerted effort to eliminate such practices would therefore seem to be in order.

*On the omission of any mention of the problems of homelessness:*

19. The Committee notes the omission from the Government's written report and oral presentation of any mention of the problems of homelessness. The Committee regretted that there were no figures available from the Government on the extent of homelessness, on the numbers of persons evicted annually throughout the country, on the lengths of waiting lists or the percentage of houses accessible to people with disabilities.

### ***Reviewing Canada's Compliance, November 1998***

Compliance with economic, social and cultural rights is reviewed every five years by the UN. In November 1998 Canadian government officials, as well as representatives from Canadian non-governmental organizations, such as the National Anti-poverty Organization (NAPO) and the Centre on Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA), will appear before the Committee again. The Committee has received Canada's 1998 report on compliance and on June 10, 1998, in preparation for the November hearings, sent the federal and provincial governments a long list of additional questions. These include several relating to housing and homelessness.

#### ***Homelessness in Canada: 1998 United Nations Human Rights Questions***

41. Please provide any available data on the extent of homelessness in various cities in Canada. At what point would the Government consider homelessness in Canada to constitute a national emergency?

44. According to information provided to the Committee from Statistics Canada, the percentage of government expenditure on housing has declined since 1993. There has been extensive media coverage of a growing crisis of homelessness in Toronto, Vancouver and elsewhere, emphasizing primarily charity-based efforts to address the problems. Is the Government applying the "maximum of available resources" to eliminating homelessness and does it agree that guaranteeing the right to housing is a core responsibility of Governments and a matter of the highest priority?

55. The Committee understands that a high percentage of discharged psychiatric patients are ending up homeless. Please provide as accurate evidence as is available in relation to this problem and explain what is being done to address it.

56. Please provide any information available on the particular health problems of the homeless, including tuberculosis rates, and identify any barriers faced by the homeless in getting access to appropriate health care.

#### ***Housing in Canada: 1998 United Nations Human Rights Questions***

42. Please provide information on any disparities between Aboriginal housing and other housing with respect to piped water, flush toilets, need for repairs and other indicators of adequacy.

43. At paragraph 275, the report states that federal funding for new social housing units was terminated in 1993. How can this be justified when so many households are unable to secure appropriate housing in the private market?

45. Could the Government of Ontario provide information as to how many households have been forced to move out or been evicted for nonpayment of rent because of the cuts to social assistance?

46. The Committee understands that new legislation in Ontario will remove rent control on any apartment which is rented to a new tenant. Does the government of Ontario expect any additional increase in evictions because of this measure?



### **Hunger and Food Banks in Canada: 1998 United Nations Human Rights Questions**

37. The Committee has received information that food bank use has continued to increase in Canada and has approximately doubled over the last 10 years. Can the Government explain why the number and use of food banks has continued to increase? Does the Government consider the need for food banks in so affluent a country as Canada consistent with article 11 of the Covenant?

38. Please provide information as to the number of people paying more than their shelter allowance for housing and indicate whether paying for housing out of money needed for food may lead to hunger in these households.

39. What proportion of children who use food banks go hungry and how often do parents go hungry?

### **Income Assistance in Canada: 1998 United Nations Human Rights Questions**

16. Please indicate whether as a result of the repeal of the Canada Assistance Plan Act (CAP) by Bill C76, people deprived of basic necessities under provincial or territorial social assistance schemes no longer have any legal recourse in federal law under the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST).

17. Why were the standards and entitlements maintained in health care but not in social assistance?

18. Have provinces responded by cutting social assistance rates or entitlements? Please provide information from each province about changes that have occurred from April 1995 to the present day, and any effect on the extent or depth of poverty.

19. To what extent does the revoking of CAP represent a retreat from the idea of financial assistance when in need as a universal entitlement, as described in previous reports to the Committee?

20. With respect to the negotiations by the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Reform and Renewal mentioned in paragraph 86 of the report, are the Federal and provincial Governments committed to restoring legal enforceability of the right to adequate financial assistance?

21. Describe any monitoring procedures established by Governments as well as nongovernmental agencies to measure the effect of the 40 per cent (\$6 billion) cut in the amount of cash transferred by the Federal Government for social assistance, health and postsecondary education between April 1995 and the end of fiscal year 1992/2000. What common effects have become evident throughout Canada?

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#### **Fact Sheet # 4**



**Office of the Chief Coroner  
Verdict of Coroner's Jury  
July 30, 1996**

#### **Inquest Into the Deaths of Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson, and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani**

##### **OPENING REMARKS**

We the jury wish to express our condolences to the families of Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson, and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani. Cognizant of the plight of the three gentlemen who are the focus of this inquest and the many factors which may have contributed to their deaths such as addictions, mental illness, homelessness and cold harsh environment, we the jury have endeavoured to consider the aspects of the evidence presented to us.

We learned from the evidence that there is the growing problem of meeting the needs of a portion of our population who may have similar situations and circumstances as the three gentlemen aforementioned.

We have been admonished to weight the evidence impartially, laying no blame on anyone.

We then hope to present to all concerned our group effort achieved to the best of our ability to arrive at our verdict and recommendations.

Our goal is to bring about a workable solution to prevent further similar deaths if the present situation is allowed to continue.

We urge all levels of government and society at large to make a concerted and serious effort to alleviate the burden of this group of people to allow them to live in dignity.

We present these recommendations to achieve this goal.

**[Over fifty recommendations were made by the Jury. Virtually none of the recommendations relating to provincial and federal responsibilities has been implemented. In the areas of housing and social services there was a virtual denial from the responsible provincial ministers that they need to do anything. Even the provincial Coroner's Office made the minimum response to the jury's recommendation (#23) that a report be issued on the progress of implementation after six months. The Chief Coroner's response came on July 9, 1997, almost six months late. It is a simple summary of letters received. Recommendation #17, calling for an open truly representative process involving all levels of government in developing a plan of action has not been implemented.]**

#### **Inquest Recommendation 17: Housing Plan of Action**

Recommend an advisory committee be struck including representatives from all levels of government, private and non-profit landlords and housing developers, community organizations, tenants and homeless people.

The goal should be to identify successful models of affordable and supportive housing and community supports and develop a plan of action to ensure that the homeless, in particular those with substance abuse and/or mental illness, have access to appropriate housing and support services.

Funding should be provided by the appropriate governmental ministries to carry out this plan.

For the full text of the Verdict of Coroner's Jury, go to: <http://www.raisingtheroof.org/raisetheroof/art1.htm>

#### **Fact Sheet # 5**



## **National Legislation for Assisting the Homeless: A Comparison of Canada, the US and UK**

*From: Questions and Answers about Canada's Homeless.*

by J.D. Hulchanski, Raising the Roof: Solutions for Canada's Homeless, 1998.  
A WWW document at: <http://www.raisingtheroof.org>

Canada does not have a national strategy for addressing the problem of homelessness. Unlike the United States and the United Kingdom, Canada has no national legislation and no national programs addressing the fact that many Canadians find themselves without housing for either short or long periods of time.

In the United States the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act is a major federal legislative response to the problem. It was signed into law by President Reagan in July 1987, during the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. (In contrast, the Canadian government held a conference in Ottawa.) The McKinney Act originally funded fifteen programs providing a range of services, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training, primary health care, education and some permanent housing.

The McKinney Homeless Assistance Act has been amended four times (in 1988, 1990, 1992 and 1994). These amendments have, for the most part, expanded the scope and strengthened the provisions of the original legislation. In 1990, for example, the Shelter Plus Care program was established, which provides housing assistance to homeless people with disabilities, mental illness, AIDS, and drug or alcohol addiction. In 1992 the Rural Homeless Housing Assistance grant program and the Access to Community Care and Effective Services and Support (ACCESS) programs were created. In 1994 Congress amended the Education of the Homeless Children and Youth program and the Surplus Property Program.

Funding for McKinney Homeless Assistance Act programs has increased from US\$350 million in 1987 to \$1.5 billion in 1995. The National Coalition for the Homeless reports that the Act has created valuable programs that have saved lives and helped hundreds of thousands of Americans to regain housing stability. A 1995 evaluation concluded that the programs "have assisted significant numbers of homeless persons to regain independence and permanent housing and at a reasonable cost." All the various evaluations, however, have noted that the resources allocated to the McKinney programs are insufficient to meet demand. In addition, the Act mainly funds emergency measures – a response to the symptoms not the causes.

In the United Kingdom the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act imposed the legal duty on municipal authorities to provide permanent housing for a variety of people in need. The legislation made a distinction between statutorily and non statutorily homeless people.

Statutorily homeless households, following assessment by a municipal authority, qualify for permanent rehousing in public or non-profit social housing. The homeless households that qualify for assistance include people with dependent children, women who are pregnant and single people who are 'vulnerable', in that they cannot be expected to fend for themselves. In the UK, statutorily homeless households often have to wait for permanent social housing to become available. While statutorily homeless people are waiting in temporary accommodation (such as leased accommodation, and bed and breakfast hotels) for their permanent homes, they are still regarded as homeless.

Neither the U.S. nor the U.K. legislation are models for Canada. They are simply examples of the national level of government contributing to the effort to address the problem.

In 1990, when Finance Minister Paul Martin was an opposition Member of Parliament, he co-chaired a National Liberal Caucus Task Force on Housing. The report, *Finding Room: Housing Solutions for the Future* (May 1990), contains many excellent recommendations. One recommendation was the following:

*"The Task Force recommends that the Conservative government immediately convene a National Conference on the Homeless with participation from all levels of government, the non-profit sector and the private sector to set real objectives and policy responses for the eradication of homelessness in Canada. It is vital that the homeless play a significant role in this process. As well, the federal government must initiate discussions with provincial Ministries of Health and/or Community and Social Services to ensure that the immediate and long-term needs of the homeless are addressed."* (page 18)

The press release which accompanied this fine 47 page analysis of Canada's housing problems quotes Mr. Martin as complaining that the "federal government has abandoned its responsibilities with regards to housing problems" and that the "housing crisis is growing at an alarming rate and the government sits there and does nothing." Mr. Martin added that "the lack of affordable housing contributes to and accelerates the cycle of poverty, which is reprehensible in a society as rich as ours."

A number of members of *Raising the Roof* were consulted by Mr. Martin and his co-chair, M.P. Joe Fontana, back in 1990. We agreed with his recommendations back then and we continue to urge that they be implemented. Mr. Fontana, in that same May 14, 1990 press release, defines an appropriate role of the federal government, one which we fully concur with.

*"The federal government's role would be that of a partner working with other levels of government, and private and public housing groups. But leadership must come from one source; and a national vision requires some national direction."*

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## Fact Sheet # 6

# Government Expenditure on Housing Programs:

## About 1% of Total Spending

How much do Canadian governments spend on housing programs? Statistics Canada provides the following information on direct government expenditures on housing. This does not include indirect expenditures through the provision of special tax breaks (i.e., tax expenditures).

The total housing expenditures of the federal, provincial and local governments, as a percentage of all budget expenditures of these governments, in the 1994/95 fiscal year was: 1.07%.

## HOUSING EXPENDITURES AS A % OF:

- **Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government expenditures**

1994/95 = 1.07% (\$358 Billion total expenditures; \$3.83 Billion on housing)

- **Consolidated local government expenditures**

1994 = 0.91% (\$72 Billion total expenditures; \$656 million on housing)

1990 = 0.90%

- **Federal expenditures, 1991 to 1996**

1995-96 = 1.14% (\$178 Billion total expenditures; \$2.03 Billion)

1994-95 = 1.23%

1993-94 = 1.25%

1992-93 = 1.16%

1991-92 = 1.14%

- **Provincial expenditures in 1996-97**
- Ontario 1.20 % Quebec 0.75 %
- Nova Scotia 0.62 % B.C. 0.29 %
- Alberta 0.23 % Sask. 0.22 %
- Manitoba 0.15 % Others 0.00 %

Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM (available at: [www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca))

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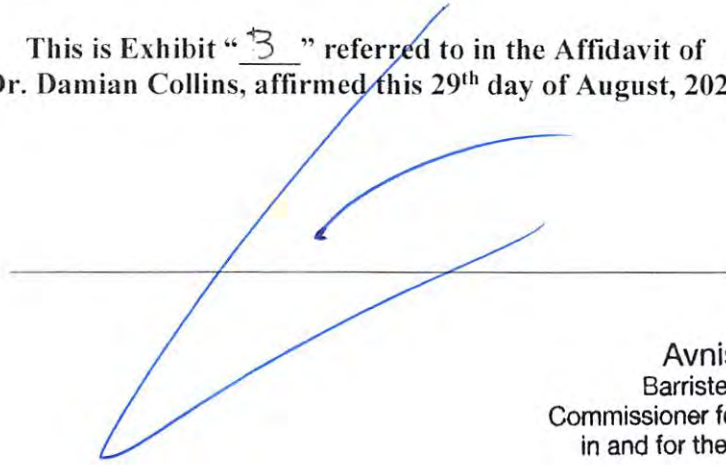
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For more information, contact TDRC at [tdrc@tdrc.net](mailto:tdrc@tdrc.net)

[Back to Reports](#)

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This is Exhibit "3" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023



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Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

# Canadian Definition Of Homelessness

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness<sup>1</sup>

## DEFINITION

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing.

Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized here in a **typology** that includes 1) **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; 2) **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; 3) **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally, 4) **At Risk of Homelessness**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards. It should be noted that for many people homelessness is not a static state but rather a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency.

The problem of homelessness and housing exclusion is the outcome of our broken social contract; the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and supports are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing and the supports they need. The goal of ending homelessness is to ensure housing stability, which means people have a fixed address and housing that is appropriate (affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and suitable in size), and includes required income, services and supports to enhance their well-being and reduce the risk that they will ever become homeless. This means focusing both on prevention and on sustainable exits from homelessness.

In the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the definition of homelessness recognizes the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples (including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) amongst Canadian homeless populations resulting from colonization and cultural genocide. The [Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada](#) highlights the necessity of considering the historical, experiential, and cultural perspectives of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the ongoing experience of colonization and racism as central to understanding and addressing Indigenous homelessness. In addition, numerous populations, such as [youth](#), women, families, people with mental health and/or addictions issues, people impacted by violence, seniors, veterans, immigrants, refugees, ethno-racial and racialized people, and members of LGBTQ2S communities experience homelessness due to a unique constellation of circumstances and as such the appropriateness of community responses has to take into account such diversity.

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1. In 2012, the COH (formerly the Canadian Homelessness Research Network) established a working group with leaders from the areas of research, policy and practice, to develop, refine and test a new definition. The COH Working Group included: Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Director, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University; Carolann Barr, Executive Director, Raising the Roof; Anita Friesen, Senior Policy Advisor, Program Policy and Planning, Family Violence Prevention and Homeless Supports, Alberta Human Services; Bradley Harris, Social Services Consultant, The Salvation Army; Charlie Hill, Executive Director, National Aboriginal Housing Association; Dr. Kathy Kovacs-Burns, Associate Director, Health Sciences Council, University of Alberta; Dr. Bernie Pauly, Associate Professor, School of Nursing, University of Victoria; Bruce Pearce, President, Canadian Housing Renewal Association; Alina Turner, VP Strategy, Calgary Homeless Foundation; Allyson Marsolais, Project Manager, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Based on national consultation, the definition was revised in 2017.

# TPOLOGY

The typology describes the range of accommodations that people without appropriate, stable, and permanent housing may experience. Those without acceptable housing experience a range of different types of homelessness, from being unsheltered to having housing that is insecure or inappropriate. As homelessness is not one single event or state of being, it is important to recognize that at different points in time people may find themselves experiencing different types of homelessness.

## 1) Unsheltered

This includes people who lack housing and are not accessing emergency shelters or accommodation, except during extreme weather conditions. In most cases, people are staying in places that are not designed for or fit for human habitation.

### 1.1 PEOPLE LIVING IN PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SPACES WITHOUT CONSENT OR CONTRACT

- **Public space, such as sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, etc.**
- **Private space and vacant buildings (squatting)**

### 1.2 PEOPLE LIVING IN PLACES NOT INTENDED FOR PERMANENT HUMAN HABITATION

- **Living in cars or other vehicles**
- **Living in garages, attics, closets or buildings not designed for habitation**
- **People in makeshift shelters, shacks or tents**

## 2) Emergency Sheltered

This refers to people who, because they cannot secure permanent housing, are accessing emergency shelter and system supports, generally provided at no cost or minimal cost to the user. Such accommodation represents a stop-gap institutional response to homelessness provided by government, non-profit, faith based organizations and/or volunteers.

### 2.1 EMERGENCY OVERNIGHT SHELTERS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS

These facilities are designed to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. Such short-term emergency shelters may target specific sub-populations, including women, families, youth or Aboriginal persons, for instance. These shelters typically have minimal eligibility criteria, offer shared sleeping facilities and amenities, and often expect clients to leave in the morning. They may or may not offer food, clothing or other services. Some emergency shelters allow people to stay on an ongoing basis while others are short term and are set up to respond to special circumstances, such as extreme weather.

### 2.2 SHELTERS FOR INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES IMPACTED BY FAMILY VIOLENCE

These shelters provide basic emergency and crisis services including safe accommodation, meals, information, and referral. They provide a high security environment for women (and sometimes men) and children fleeing family violence or other crisis situations. Residents are not required to leave during the day. These facilities offer private rooms for families and a range of supports to help residents rebuild their lives.

### 2.3 EMERGENCY SHELTER FOR PEOPLE FLEEING A NATURAL DISASTER OR DESTRUCTION OF ACCOMMODATION DUE TO FIRES, FLOODS, ETC.



### 3) Provisionally Accommodated

This describes situations in which people, who are technically homeless and without permanent shelter, access accommodation that offers no prospect of permanence. Those who are provisionally accommodated may be accessing temporary housing provided by government or the non-profit sector, or may have independently made arrangements for short-term accommodation.

#### 3.1 INTERIM HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS

Interim housing is a systems-supported form of housing that is meant to bridge the gap between unsheltered homelessness or emergency accommodation and permanent housing. In some cases referred to as 'transitional housing', this form of accommodation typically provides services beyond basic needs, offers residents more privacy, and places greater emphasis on participation and social engagement. Interim housing targets those who would benefit from structure, support and skill-building prior to moving to long term housing stability, with the ultimate goal of preventing a return to homelessness. In the case of second-stage housing for those impacted by family violence, the key characteristics of this housing are the safety and security it provides, trauma recovery supports, along with the ultimate goal of preventing revictimization. Interim housing has time limitations on residency, but generally allows for a longer stay (in some cases up to three years) compared to emergency shelters.

#### 3.2 PEOPLE LIVING TEMPORARILY WITH OTHERS, BUT WITHOUT GUARANTEE OF CONTINUED RESIDENCY OR IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS FOR ACCESSING PERMANENT HOUSING

Often referred to as 'couch surfers' or the 'hidden homeless', this describes people who stay with friends, family, or even strangers. They are typically not paying rent, their duration of stay is unsustainable in the long term, and they do not have the means to secure their own permanent housing in the future. They differ from those who are staying with friends or family out of choice in anticipation of prearranged accommodation, whether in their current hometown or an altogether new community. This living situation is understood by both parties to be temporary, and the assumption is that it will not become permanent.

#### 3.3 PEOPLE ACCESSING SHORT TERM, TEMPORARY RENTAL ACCOMMODATIONS WITHOUT SECURITY OF TENURE

In some cases people who are homeless make temporary rental arrangements, such as staying in motels, hostels, rooming houses, etc. Although occupants pay rent, the accommodation does not offer the possibility of permanency. People living in these situations are often considered to be part of the 'hidden homeless' population.

#### 3.4 PEOPLE IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE WHO LACK PERMANENT HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS

Individuals are considered to be provisionally accommodated and 'at risk' of homelessness if there are no arrangements in place to ensure they move into safe, permanent housing upon release from institutional care. This includes individuals who:

- a) were homeless prior to admittance (where their stay may be short-term or long-term) and who have no plan for permanent accommodation after release; or
- b) had housing prior to admittance, but lost their housing while in institutional care; or
- c) had housing prior to admittance, but cannot go back due to changes in their needs.

In either case, without adequate discharge planning and support, which includes arrangements for safe and reliable housing (and necessary aftercare or community-based services), there is a likelihood that these individuals may transition into homelessness following their release. Institutional care includes:

- Penal institutions
- Medical/mental health institutions
- Residential treatment programs or withdrawal management centers
- Children's institutions/group homes

#### 3.5 ACCOMMODATION/RECEPTION CENTERS FOR RECENTLY ARRIVED IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Prior to securing their own housing, recently arrived immigrants and refugees may be temporarily housed while receiving settlement support and orientation to life in Canada. They are considered to be homeless if they have no means or prospects of securing permanent housing.

## 4) At Risk of Homelessness

Although not technically homeless, this includes individuals or families whose current housing situations are dangerously lacking security or stability, and so are considered **to be at risk of homelessness**. They are living in housing that is intended for permanent human habitation, and could potentially be permanent (as opposed to those who are provisionally accommodated). However, as a result of external hardship, poverty, personal crisis, discrimination, a lack of other available and affordable housing, insecurity of tenure and / or the inappropriateness of their current housing (which may be overcrowded or does not meet public health and safety standards) residents may be “at risk” of homelessness.

An important distinction to make is between those who are at “imminent risk” of becoming homeless and those who are “precariously housed”.

No matter the level of probability, all who can be categorized as being “at risk” of homelessness possess a shared vulnerability; for them, a single event, unexpected expense, crisis, or trigger is all it may take for them to lose their housing. As the risk factors mount and compound, so too does the possibility of becoming homeless.

### 4.1 PEOPLE AT IMMINENT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

Many factors can contribute to individuals and families being at imminent risk of homelessness. Though in some cases individual factors (such as those listed below) may be most significant, in most cases it is the interaction of structural and individual risk that, in the context of a crisis, influence pathways into homelessness. In other words, what separates those who are at risk of homelessness due to *precarious housing* from those who are at *imminent risk*, is the onset of a crisis, a turn in events, or the increase in acuity of one or more underlying risk factors. Factors that may contribute (as singular or co-occurring factors) include:

- **Precarious employment.** Many people have unstable employment and live pay cheque to pay cheque. Precarious employment describes non-standard employment that does not meet basic needs, is poorly paid, part time (when full time work is desired), temporary, and/or insecure and unprotected. An unanticipated expense, increases in cost of living or a change in employment status may undermine their ability to maintain housing.
- **Sudden unemployment** with few prospects and little to no financial savings or assets, or social supports to turn to for assistance.
- **Supported housing with supports that are about to be discontinued.** Some Housing First models provide supports, but on a time-limited basis. If such resources (aftercare, services) are withdrawn but are still needed, individuals and families may be at imminent risk of re-entering homelessness.
- **Households facing eviction**, lacking the resources needed to afford other housing including social supports, or living in areas with low availability of affordable housing.
- **Severe and persistent mental illness, active addictions, substance use and/or behavioural issues.**
- **Division of Household** – caused by situations (such as separation, divorce, conflicts between caregivers and children, or roommates moving out) where the affected do not have the resources to keep the existing housing or secure other stable housing.
- **Violence / abuse (or direct fear of) in current housing situations**, including:
  - People facing family/gender violence and abuse
  - Children and youth experiencing neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
  - Seniors facing abuse
  - People facing abuse or discrimination caused by racism or homophobia or misogyny
- **Institutional care that is inadequate or unsuited** to the needs of the individual or family.

## 4.2 INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WHO ARE PRECARIOUSLY HOUSED

Many individuals and families experience severe housing affordability problems, due to their income, the local economy and / or the lack of availability of affordable housing that meets their needs in the local market. The income of these households is not sufficient to cover the household's basic shelter and non-shelter costs. This includes people who are on government benefits but who do not have sufficient funds to pay for basic needs.

The greater the shortfall of income in covering basic costs, the more at risk of homelessness the household is. Those classified as "precariously housed" face challenges that may or may not leave them homeless in the immediate or near future (in the absence of an intervention). Those who manage to retain their housing in such circumstances often do so at the expense of meeting their nutritional needs, heating their homes, providing proper child care and other expenses that contribute to health and well-being.

Precarious and inadequate housing not only relate to household income and the physical structure of the dwelling, but also to lack of access to necessary supports and opportunities, including employment, health care services, clean water and sanitation, schools, child care centres and other social supports and facilities. Housing that is not culturally appropriate in the way it is constructed, the building materials used, and the policies that support it is also considered inadequate.

CMHC defines a household as being in core housing need if its housing: "falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards)." (CMHC, 2012)

- **Adequate** housing is reported by residents as not requiring any major repairs. Housing that is inadequate may have excessive mold, inadequate heating or water supply, significant damage, etc.
- **Affordable** dwelling costs less than 30% of total before-tax household income. Those in extreme core housing need pay 50% or more of their income on housing. It should be noted that the lower the household income, the more onerous this expense becomes.
- **Suitable** housing has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the resident household, according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.

### HOW TO CITE THE CANADIAN DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS:

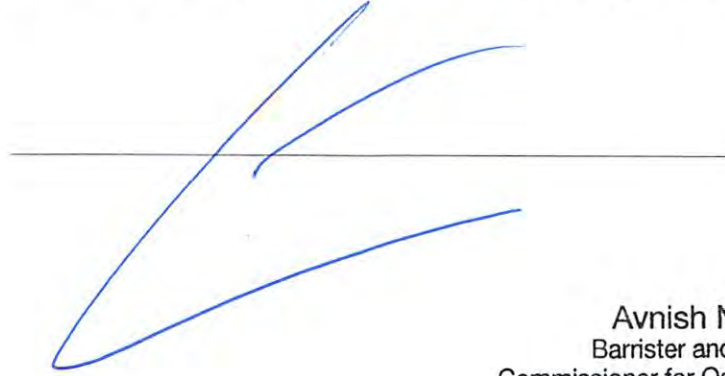
Gaetz, S.; Barr, C.; Friesen, A.; Harris, B.; Hill, C.; Kovacs-Burns, K.; Pauly, B.; Pearce, B.; Turner, A.; Marsolais, A. (2012) *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.



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This is Exhibit "4" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

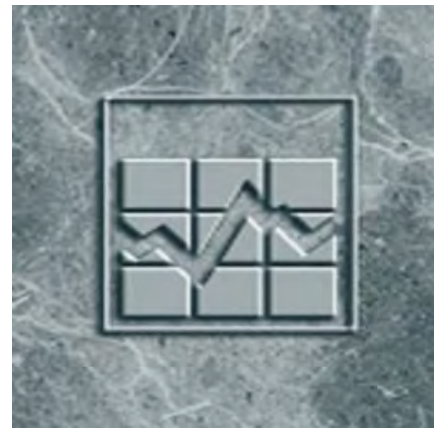
Catalogue no. 75F0002M  
ISSN 1707-2840  
ISBN 978-0-660-47283-6

## Income Research Paper Series

# A review of Canadian homelessness data, 2023

by Marc-Antoine Dionne, Christine Laporte, Jonathan Loeppky  
and Alexander Miller

Release date: June 16, 2023



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# A review of Canadian homelessness data, 2023

by **Marc-Antoine Dionne, Christine Laporte, Jonathan Loeppky and Alexander Miller**

## Summary

This paper reviews the various data sources available for measuring the population that is experiencing or has experienced episodes of homelessness. It focuses on data that has been collected by Statistics Canada and Infrastructure Canada and draws lessons from the Australian census to improve the data landscape in Canada. This environmental scan identifies gaps in the current data collection strategies and proposes solutions to start filling them. Working with partners, integrating data sets and strengthening the conceptual definitions could contribute to better information on homelessness in Canada and better direct supports to the homeless population.

## 1. Introduction

On a single day in 2018, more than 25,216 individuals across 61 communities lived in a situation of homelessness, in a shelter or not (ESDC, 2018).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, it is estimated that an average of 235,000 people in Canada experience one of the many types of homelessness each year (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2014). These estimates are a best guess as studying homeless remains quite difficult. The purpose of this document is to start providing solutions to this difficulty and to build on the previous work by enumerating and classifying the available data on homelessness, by identifying existing data gaps and by proposing solutions to fill those gaps.

Over the past decade, the above estimate has been frequently referenced in numerous publications regarding homelessness. The proposed figure is intended to be an aggregate of different estimates of unsheltered individuals, those sheltered and those provisionally accommodated. It calls for the use of more precise data sources.

Homelessness is defined here as, “the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it” (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2017). It encompasses several types of homelessness. Not all individuals or socio-demographic groups experience homelessness in the same way or at the same rate. The groups more likely to have an episode of homelessness are: single adult males, youth, women, indigenous people, and families. In addition to these groups, personal circumstances play a role in what lead people to become homeless. These can include family break up, family violence, loss of employment, substance use, a history of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and involvement in the child welfare system.

Four main data sources are used to measure homelessness in Canada. Each of them measures a very specific aspect of homelessness. Point-in-time enumeration is used to count the number of people experiencing homelessness on a specific day and in defined communities. The census of population, on the other hand, measures the number of people living in shelters or other collective dwellings on census day, every five years. Survey data measures past experiences of homelessness as well as present or past risks of experiencing homelessness. Finally, administrative data measures, among other things, the number of people living in shelters for victims of violence and how many interactions homeless people have with the health system.

Although several data sources exist, some challenges are inherent to the homeless population and make data collection difficult. First, homeless people rarely have a fixed address, therefore are difficult to count and are often outside the scope of surveys. This also makes them difficult to identify in administrative data. Second, stigma and prejudice towards people experiencing homelessness can hinder self-identification. Third, given the transitional nature of homelessness, it is difficult to observe/count each individual at the moment they are experiencing homelessness. Finally, while field collection can represent a solution, it often remains difficult and is limited to a few communities.

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1. Research on homelessness and Reaching Home: Canada's homelessness reduction strategy was transferred from ESDC in 2021 to Infrastructure Canada including the Homelessness Policy Directorate. More information can be found in an auditor general report: [Report 5—Chronic Homelessness \(oag-bvg.gc.ca\)](#).



To better understand the challenges facing Canadian communities, and specifically those experiencing homelessness, robust data from different sources remains essential. Statistics Canada, as well as several partners, including Infrastructure Canada through the Homelessness Policy Directorate can take stock of the existing data in addition to identifying the gaps to be filled at this level. By using different methods and definitions, several organizations at the community, municipal, provincial and federal level, as well as at the academic level have attempted to measure and identify different facets of the homeless population.

The main objective of this document is to review the various data sources that provide information on the population that is experiencing or has experienced episodes of homelessness. It focuses on data available at Statistics Canada and Infrastructure Canada<sup>2</sup> where the Housing Policy Directorate is housed. It also presents the case of the Australian census, which has developed a methodology to obtain a portrait of homelessness in Australia. Specificities of each of the data sources and tables of basic descriptive statistics on respondents who have experienced homelessness in various surveys are provided.

Finally, recommendations are offered on potential data developments such as data linkage, modeling, or changes to the census. In addition, important considerations when measuring the homeless population are elaborated on.

The paper proceeds as follows, section 2 presents the conceptual aspects and definitions of homelessness. It also portrays Canadian housing needs through the introduction of the housing continuum model and briefly describes the different policies and frameworks that were established to address the different housing needs across Canada. Sections 3 and 4 describe the different data sources, surveys and administrative data hosted at Statistics Canada and Infrastructure Canada. Section 5 addresses the Australian example of estimating homelessness with Census data. Section 6 discusses the potential data development and other data development considerations.

## 2. Homelessness definitions and the housing continuum

The framework used here is from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), which conceptualizes housing needs through the housing continuum model (CMHC, 2018). As shown in Figure 1, this model follows the progression of housing needs from homeless to market home ownership and identifies the different possible housing situations in-between. It intends to portray the multiplicity and fluidity of the line that can separate individuals experiencing homelessness and the rest of the population.

**Figure 1**  
**Housing continuum**



Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2018.

The continuum starts with different types of homelessness as described above and progresses towards shelters and transitional housing geared toward the homeless population as well as different social and affordable housing programs. The continuum ends with market rental or homeownership. Throughout this paper, the focus will be on the homelessness aspects of each category, while only touching upon emergency shelters through social housing. This continuum necessitates a definition broad enough to capture the multiple different types of homelessness.

2. Previously, Infrastructure Canada responsibilities were held by Employment and Social Development Canada.

## Definition of homelessness<sup>3</sup>

The definition by Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2017) is widely used and defines **homelessness** as “the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.” This definition is used by Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy.

Homelessness is a unique experience for everyone, taking on many forms and effecting disparate groups differently. It’s not a choice and its cause should not be perceived strictly as an issue of housing instability, but rather as a multifaceted issue that may intersect with a variety of structural, societal, and individual problems including unemployment, discrimination, domestic violence, mental health and addiction. Still, the multitude of experiences relating to an episode of homelessness can be categorized in four ways: unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at risk of homelessness.

**Unsheltered or absolute homelessness** is the type of homelessness that is generally thought of when talking about homelessness. It is a narrow concept that includes individuals that are living in public or private spaces without consent, as well as those living in places not fit for permanent human habitation (i.e. tents or shacks).

**Emergency sheltered homelessness** includes individuals that are currently living in shelters that are specifically designed to temporarily accommodate people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes homeless shelters, shelters designed to house those fleeing domestic violence or emergency shelters for those impacted by natural disasters.

The **provisionally accommodated** category of homelessness includes what is commonly referred to as those experiencing **hidden homelessness**. It includes individuals that are living in transitional housing, individuals that were in the two previous categories, individuals without housing that are temporarily living with relatives or friends, individuals without housing living in hotels or motels, individuals that are in institutional care and lack permanent housing, and recent immigrants or refugees staying in transitional facilities.

The last category includes those **at risk of being homeless or relative homelessness**. This category is not in itself considered as being homeless but must be defined to understand the cycle of homelessness. It includes individuals that are experiencing a serious imminent risk of homelessness due to unemployment, domestic violence, or a specific housing situation but are not yet considered homeless. It also includes all individuals that could be considered as precariously housed. This refers to individuals belonging to households that are in core housing need. Households that are experiencing core housing needs, as defined by the CMHC, are households that are either spending more than 30% of their before tax household income on housing (affordable), living in housing without enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household (suitable) or living in housing that would require significant repairs (adequate).<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the previous categories, special attention needs to be paid to the episodic nature of homelessness. Episodes of homelessness are usually characterized by individuals or families that belong to multiple categories of homelessness at some point in their lives, until they find a way to fulfill their housing needs and progress to the next step of the housing continuum.

Homelessness episodes can be classified as chronic, cyclical, or temporary depending on their duration. According to Employment and Social Development Canada’s (ESDC) *Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy Directives* (Infrastructure Canada, 2019), **chronic homelessness** episodes are defined as long term or repeated episodes of homelessness. To be considered as chronically homeless, an individual must have spent a total of at least six months (180 days) as homeless over the past year or have had recurrent episodes in the past three years with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months staying in unsheltered locations, in emergency shelters, or staying temporarily with friends or family members.

3. Most definitions in this section come from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Please refer to Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2017) for more details.

4. To account for the households with higher income that would purposefully choose to spend more on housing, the core housing need identifies if each household could afford spending less than 30% of their income to secure alternative local housing that would be adequate and suitable for their needs.

**Cyclical or episodic homelessness** is used to designate a type of episode where an individual is moving in and out of homelessness as a result of changes of circumstances. Such as, having been released from an institution, changes in employment status, changes in the family structure resulting from a divorce or domestic violence, losses to income or unanticipated changes to the housing situation (Echenberg and Munn-Rivard, 2020). Finally, relatively short and unrepeated episodes of homelessness such as those that could result from natural disasters, abrupt changes in housing, house fires are categorized as **temporary homelessness**.

A special distinction is made addressing and understanding episodes of homelessness experienced by the Indigenous communities across Canada. Thistle (2017) describes the experience of **Indigenous homelessness** as "...something that isn't about being without a structure of habitation or brick and mortar home...rather, is about something much deeper: existing in the world without a meaningful sense of home or identity." The definition used by Reaching Home captures part of this distinction in defining Indigenous homelessness as:

"Indigenous Peoples who are in the state of having no home due to colonization, trauma and/or whose social, cultural, economic, and political conditions place them in poverty. Having no home includes: those who alternate between shelter and unsheltered, living on the street, couch surfing, using emergency shelters, living in unaffordable, inadequate, substandard and unsafe accommodations or living without the security of tenure; anyone regardless of age, released from facilities (such as hospitals, mental health and addiction treatment centers, prisons, transition houses), fleeing unsafe homes as a result of abuse in all its definitions, and any youth transitioning from all forms of care" ( Infrastructure Canada, 2019).

This distinction is made to measure, understand and address the specific challenges faced by the Indigenous communities across Canada in regard to homelessness.

### Canadian framework

The **National Housing Strategy** (NHS) is a Canadian affordable housing initiative. It is a \$72+ billion, 10 year plan to strengthen the middle class, cut chronic homelessness in half by the 2027 to 2028 fiscal year, and stimulate the economy. It is a partnership between the federal government and the public, private and non-profit sectors to re-establish affordable housing across the country. The strategy uses a mix of funding, grants, and loans to create affordable, stable, diverse and accessible communities.

The NHS housing targets plan to remove 530,000 families from housing need, renovate 300,000 homes, and increase the housing supply by building 160,000 new homes. The NHS prioritises those in greatest housing need. This includes women and children fleeing domestic violence, seniors, Indigenous peoples, homeless people, people with disabilities, people with mental health and addiction issues, veterans, young adults, racialized groups and newcomers to Canada.

The NHS has nine shared outcomes including reducing homelessness year-over-year, increasing affordable and good condition housing, housing that promotes social and economic inclusion, improving housing outcomes year-over-year in the territories, identifying and improving the housing needs of Indigenous peoples, affordable housing that contributes to environmental sustainability, economic growth, building strong partnerships to achieve better outcomes and a more holistic response to housing issues through collaboration across the federal government.

**Reaching Home** is a community focused program designed to prevent and reduce homelessness through the provision of funding and support directly to relevant communities including Indigenous communities, urban centers, territorial communities, and rural and remote communities. Reaching Home supports the NHS outcomes of supporting those in great housing need, providing stable and affordable housing and cutting chronic homelessness in half.

[National Housing Strategy](#) and Reaching Home [Infrastructure Canada - About Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy](#).

### 3. Environmental scan of Statistics Canada data sources

Due to the different types of homelessness and some of the difficulties in measuring it, there are a variety of data sources which investigate different aspects. No single survey at Statistics Canada studies all the individuals who are currently experiencing the four types of homelessness. The goal of this section is to elaborate on each of the data sources and to identify what type of homelessness is measured. Several surveys include questions regarding the experience of absolute or hidden homelessness, shelters, core housing needs and social and affordable housing. Similarly, administrative data, microdata linkages and inventory held by Statistics Canada can help provide information on homelessness and shelters across the country.

Measuring homelessness through the lens of each of the definitions mentioned in Section 2 is not an easy task. Each of the data sources described below only addresses one or two aspects of homelessness at a time. Core housing needs and social and affordable housing follow homelessness on the housing continuum and potentially include those “at risk of being homeless”.

Table 1 gives a summary of the available data, the topics covered, the year of latest release, and the frequency of collection. More specifically, Table A.1 in the Appendix lists all the questions related to homelessness in the datasets described in this section.

**Table 1**  
**List of Statistics Canada's surveys and administrative data related to homelessness**

Survey name	Topic covered			Latest year of data	Data coverage	
	Homelessness	Shelter	Core housing needs and affordable housing		Frequency	Timeframe
Canadian Housing Survey (CHS)	√		√	2021	Every 2 years	Lifetime experience with homelessness
General Social Survey (GSS) – Canadians' Safety (Victimization)	√			2019	Every 5 years	Lifetime experience with homelessness
Census of Population		√	√	2016	Every 5 years	Point-in-time count
Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA) and Transition Home Survey (THS)		√		2021	Every 2 years	One-day snapshot
National Social and Affordable Housing Database (NSAHD)			√	2021	Every year	List
Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey (CCPI)			√	2020	Every 2 years	Inventory

#### Canadian Housing Survey<sup>5</sup>

The Canadian Housing Survey (CHS) is voluntary and will be conducted every two years between 2018 and 2027 for a total of five cycles. It collects information on the various housing experiences of Canadian households such as housing needs, dwelling and neighbourhood satisfaction, housing moves including forced moves (evictions), social and affordable housing and experience of homelessness. Information is also collected on self-assessed health, various dimensions of physical and mental well-being, and various socio-demographic characteristics.

The sampling unit of the CHS is the dwelling. One survey questionnaire is completed per dwelling by the respondent (reference person) who was responsible for housing decisions.

The CHS provides information at the household level. For every household member, information on age, sex, gender, language, ethnocultural characteristics, marital status, education, current employment and veteran status of those over the age of 15 years is collected.

For a subset of variables, information is collected at the individual level.<sup>6</sup> Those variables include information about the individual's dwelling and neighbourhood satisfaction, their perception of economic hardship resulting from housing costs, their perceptions of neighbourhood issues and safety, as well as information on their housing life course which includes their previous accommodation and their intention to move.

5. Please refer to the [Canadian Housing Survey](#) webpage for more details.

6. Information for this subset of variables is collected only for the reference person in the household.

CHS is used to assess **core housing need** across Canada. It also provides detailed statistics on households in the Social and Affordable Housing (SAH) program and its waitlist by oversampling those households.

CHS is collected in all ten provinces and three territories in 2018.<sup>7</sup> Residents of institutions, members of the Canadian Forces living in military camps and people living in First Nations communities are excluded from the population (about 2% of the population in the provinces). People living in collective dwellings are also excluded from the survey. This includes people living in residences for dependent seniors, people permanently in school residences, work camps, etc., and members of religious and other communal colonies. People living in these collective dwellings make up less than 0.5% of the total population. However, they are included in the population estimates used in CHS estimate adjustments.

Data for the 2018 cycle was collected in 2018 and early 2019 for the CHS provincial component and in 2019 for the NWT's Community survey. It covered 65,377 households. The most recent release CHS was cycle 2021, released in summer 2022 and covered the impacts of COVID-19 on some aspects of housing. The homeless module expanded to include reasons for housing loss and a separate module will be included for forced moves (evictions).

### Measurements of homelessness and hidden homelessness

Information on previous experiences with homelessness and hidden homelessness is collected from the CHS at the individual level for the reference person in the household. Six questions regarding previous experiences with homelessness are asked to the reference person.<sup>8</sup> Following the question, "Have you ever been homeless, that is, having to live in a homeless shelter, on the street or in parks, in a makeshift shelter or in an abandoned building?", if answered affirmatively follow-up questions are asked; provide the duration of their longest episode and the length and year of their most recent episode.

The reference person also answers the question, "Have you ever had to temporarily live with family or friends, or anywhere else because you had nowhere else to live?", which explores their experience with hidden homelessness. Those who reported that they had to live with friends or family are then prompted to specify the duration of that episode.

Information provided in the CHS on homelessness and hidden homelessness allows for an overview of people who have experienced homelessness but have broken that spell of homelessness and are now in private dwellings. It allows correlation between past homelessness experience and their current situation regarding housing, access to property, housing conditions, neighbourhood satisfaction, etc. (Randle, Hu and Thurston, 2021).

The survey coverage of the CHS also allows for an interesting level of data disaggregation. The CHS includes information on many of the usual socio-economic factors such as age, gender, marital status and level of education. The CHS also collects data on mental and physical health, financial difficulties, life satisfaction, Indigenous identity, sexual orientation, visible minority group, veteran status, and immigrant status (Uppal, 2022). Table 2 shows the distribution of population with homelessness experience both unsheltered and hidden for selected socio-demographic characteristics. While the sample size for this table is sufficient, the low number of homeless in Canada means that there are limitations to statistics at smaller geographic levels and with certain combinations of socio-demographic categories.

7. More specifically, the first cycle of CHS has two distinct components: (1) the CHS survey that provide information on the household and individuals that reside in the provinces, Yukon and Nunavut, and (2) the Northwest Territories (NWT) Bureau of Statistics' Community Survey which collects similar housing information to the CHS in the Northwest Territories. It is important to note that NWT's Community Survey information collected may differ from the provincial components. For example, the sex at birth of the individuals living in a given private household is not reported in the NWT.

8. See Table A.1 for all questions asked in CHS 2018 and CHS 2021.

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of population with homelessness experience by selected socio-demographic characteristics, Canadian Housing Survey, 2018 and 2021**

	Homelessness <sup>1</sup>		Hidden Homelessness <sup>2</sup>	
	2018	2021	2018	2021
	percent			
<b>Total</b>				
No	97.4	97.3	85.3	89.1
Yes	2.5	2.2	14.5	10.5
<b>Gender</b>				
Men+	54.0	52.0	49.0	48.0
Women+	46.0	48.0	51.0	52.0
<b>Age groups<sup>3</sup></b>				
15 to 34 years old	17.4	13.2	24.0	23.0
35 to 44 years old	22.0	19.6	22.0	25.0
45 to 54 years old	21.0	26.0	20.0	18.6
55 to 64 years old	27.0	24.0	19.0	19.1
65 years old and older	13.2	16.6	15.0	14.1
<b>Region of residence</b>				
Atlantic	5.9	6.6	7.0	7.3
Québec	9.7	11.8	18.8	16.9
Ontario	41.0	39.0	38.0	38.0
Prairies	21.0	19.2	19.1	19.6
British Columbia	21.0	23.0	16.4	17.7
Territories <sup>4</sup>	1.1	0.3	0.5	0.3

1. The full question is: "Have you ever been homeless, that is, having to live in a homeless shelter, on the street or in parks, in a makeshift shelter or in an abandoned building?".

2. The full question is: "Have you ever had to temporarily live with family or friends, or anywhere else because you had nowhere else to live?".

3. Age is at the survey date and not when the individual was experiencing homelessness.

4. Estimates based on the Canadian Housing Survey 2021 territorial data are representative of households in the territorial capitals only.

**Note:** Estimates appearing in these tables were subjected to rounding and as a result subtotals may not add up to the total. The homelessness experience questions are only asked to the person who's responsible for housing decisions in the household.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Canadian Housing Survey, 2018 and 2021.

Statistics on homelessness and hidden homelessness measured in the CHS are collected for the reference person of the household, or more specifically, for the individual that makes housing decisions in the household. Information is not provided for the other members of the household. Measuring only the experience of the reference person may underestimate the experience of other groups that are usually making decisions in the household, for example teenagers or adult children. Additionally, people who are/were chronically homeless may not be well represented given the bias towards people who are no longer homeless.

Also, the CHS cannot be used as a tool to enumerate the number of persons "currently" experiencing homelessness because people living in shelters, in institutions or are on the streets are not in the covered population. Moreover, factors and individual characteristics at the time of the homelessness experience are not measured. For example, the CHS does not include information on how many spells of homelessness occurred, where they occurred, and what the family's employment or earnings characteristics were at the time of the homeless episode.

## General Social Survey<sup>9</sup>

The General Social Survey (GSS) is a voluntary cross-sectional survey designed to gather data on social trends to monitor changes in the living conditions and well-being of Canadians. It collects information on specific social policy issues, as well as a multitude of other socio-demographic characteristics including health, habits, education, identity, housing and family composition. Every GSS focuses on a specific theme recurring every five to seven years. Recent themes include life at work and home; families; caregiving and care receiving; giving, volunteering, and participating; victimization; social identity; and time use.

The GSS collects information on persons aged 15 and over, across the Canadian provinces and territories, excluding full-time residents of institutions. The 2014 (Cycle 28) and 2019 (Cycle 34) GSS are both about Canadian's safety and security and explore the national experience with crime and violence and their impact on daily life. These two waves of GSS include information related to homelessness issues.

9. Please refer to the [General Social Survey](#) website for more details.

More generally, the GSS includes numerous information on other habits, experiences with violence and substance abuse that provide an insight on the individuals that have experienced homelessness. In total, the 2014 GSS had a sample size of 33,120 observations. The 2019 GSS had a sample size of 22,410 observations.

### **Measurements of homelessness and hidden homelessness**

The 2014 and 2019 GSS provide information about individuals that have experienced episodes of homelessness. All survey respondents are asked the question,<sup>10</sup> “Have you ever been homeless; that is, having to live in a shelter, on the street, or in an abandoned building?” Those who reported an experience with homelessness are then prompted to specify the longest period of time they were in that situation.

All respondents are also surveyed on their experience with hidden homelessness with the question: “Have you ever had to temporarily live with family or friends, in your car or anywhere else because you had nowhere else to live?” Those who reported an experience with hidden homelessness are then prompted to specify the longest period of time they were in that situation.

In 2019, an additional question was included to specify if the episode of homelessness they experienced was the result of familial violence or not.

Similar to the CHS, the GSS provides an overview of Canadians who have experienced homelessness and hidden homelessness in the past but have broken that spell and are living in a private dwelling. Correlations with the respondent's situation at the time of the survey, given that they have experienced episodes of homelessness in the past are possible. The GSS provides multiple characteristics including socio-demographic characteristics, experience of victimization, childhood abuse, disabilities and mental health, social environment and substance use. It is important to note that the sample size decreases according to the different type of homelessness.

Table 3 gives an overview of the distribution of the population with homelessness experience by selected socio-demographic characteristics. The number of observations for each type of homelessness is also included. Significant differences can be observed in the rates of individuals that have previously experienced homelessness and hidden homelessness between the GSS and the CHS even though the two surveys ask similar questions because of different target populations. The CHS notably only asks the individuals in charge of the housing decisions in the household, whereas the GSS asks every Canadian aged 15 and over not residing in institutions.

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10. Table A.1 lists all questions regarding homelessness in the GSS.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of population with homelessness experience by selected socio-demographic characteristics, General Social Survey, 2014 and 2019**

	Homelessness <sup>1</sup>		Hidden Homelessness <sup>2</sup>		Hidden homelessness due to domestic violence <sup>3</sup>	
	2014	2019	2014	2019	2014	2019
	percent					
<b>Total<sup>4</sup></b>						
No	98.3	98.3	92.0	91.2	..	66.1
Yes	1.7	1.7	8.0	8.8	..	33.9
<b>Sex</b>						
Men	56.9	50.0	52.6	50.1	..	31.1
Women	43.1	50.0	47.4	49.9	..	68.9
<b>Age groups<sup>5</sup></b>						
15 to 34 years old	28.1	26.9	31.6	32.4	..	x
35 to 44 years old	21.3	17.7	21.6	21.9	..	x
45 to 54 years old	26.2	20.3	21.4	15.3	..	x
55 to 64 years old	13.7	19.1	16.4	16.0	..	x
65 years old and older	10.7	16.1	9.0	14.3	..	x
<b>Region of residence</b>						
Atlantic	6.1	6.4	7.0	7.8	..	x
Québec	13.0	13.8	20.7	19.7	..	x
Ontario	46.8	38.3	38.1	35.3	..	x
Prairies	18.7	24.3	21.2	20.7	..	x
British Columbia	15.4	15.7	13.0	15.7	..	x
Territories	..	1.5	..	0.7	..	x

.. not available for a specific reference period

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act

1. The full question is: "Have you ever been homeless; that is, having to live in a shelter, on the street, or in an abandoned building?"

2. The full question is: "Have you ever had to temporarily live with family or friends, in your car or anywhere else because you had nowhere else to live?"

3. The full question is: "Were you temporarily living with family, friends or somewhere else as a result of the emotional or financial abuse/abuse by your current spouse or partner/former spouse or partner/current or former spouse or partner you experienced during the past five years?"

4. Those who answered "don't know" or did not want to answer the question are excluded from the total.

5. Age is at the survey date and not when the individual was experiencing homelessness.

**Note:** While the sample size for this table is sufficient, the low number of homeless in Canada means that there are limitations to statistics at smaller geographic levels and certain combinations of socio-demographic categories.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2014 and 2019.

The GSS also provides information on the duration of the longest episode of homelessness. However, it lacks details about the spell of homelessness, such as when it occurred, how long it lasted, how many spells were there, where it occurred. Moreover, it does not provide information about individual or family characteristics at the time of any of their episodes. While correlations can be established between individual characteristics and the likelihood of homelessness episodes (Rodrigue, 2016), it is impossible to determine with certainty which event came first. For example, while an individual may report a history of victimization and homelessness, it is impossible to know which of these two events came first.

Finally, because respondents surveyed are no longer homeless or are out of a homelessness spell, those who are chronically homeless or still in a homelessness episode may not be represented.

## Census of population

The census offers a portrait of Canadians and their place of residence every five years. As place of residence, the census includes two broad types of dwellings: private or collective. The collective dwellings refer to a dwelling of a commercial, institutional or communal nature.<sup>11</sup> They are classified into 10 categories including hospital, nursing homes and/ or residence for senior citizens, correctional facilities, religious establishments and shelters. In 2021, approximately 657,920 Canadians were living in a collective dwelling.<sup>12</sup>

11. For more detail on collective dwelling, please see: [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Collective dwelling \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#).

12. Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021, [Table 98-10-0044-01 Type of collective dwelling and collective dwellings occupied by usual residents and population in collective dwellings: Canada, provinces and territories](#).



Shelters are divided in three categories: (1) shelters for persons without a fixed address (homeless shelters); (2) shelters for abused women and children and transition homes; and (3) other shelters and transition homes. The 2021 Census enumerated people who spent the night of May 11th to May 12th in shelters or similar facilities by using administrative records or census questionnaires with the assistance of administrators. More than 15,185 Canadians were living in shelters on that night.<sup>13</sup> About 70% of these shelter residents were enumerated in homeless shelters, which represents an important part of the absolute homeless population.

The census is one of the sources used to assess the core housing need indicator in Canada, along with the CHS. Core housing need is one of the main indicators of an individual being “at risk of homelessness.” A household is defined as being in core housing need if it fails to meet three housing standards: (1) adequate housing is met if the resident does not report their dwelling as in need of any major repairs; (2) suitability is met if the dwelling has enough bedroom for the size of the resident household according to the National Occupancy Standard; and (3) affordability, which accounts for the majority of households reporting as being in core housing need, is met if the household’s shelter cost is under 30% of their total before-tax income. A distinction is made if the same household were able to pay the median rent of an alternative suitable local dwelling than they are not considered to be in core housing need.<sup>14</sup>

### Measurement of shelter population

The census is not an adequate tool to frequently enumerate the homeless population. However, the census enumerates the homeless population in shelters across the country in real time on Census night, with limited socio-demographic variables.<sup>15</sup> It is also possible to link census data from shelters to tax or administrative data to obtain a larger perspective than what is measured in the census. In the following subsections, some microdata linkages using shelter data from the census will be explored.

13. Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021, [Table 14-10-0353-01 Homeless shelter capacity, bed and shelter counts for emergency shelters, transitional housing and domestic violence shelters for Canada and provinces, Infrastructure Canada](#).

14. For more detail on core housing need, please see: [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Core housing need \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#).

15. Resident of collective dwellings, including shelter residents, do not fill the census long-form questionnaire which provides information on highest level of education completed, immigration status, Indigenous identity for example. Administrative data linkages could however fill these data gaps.

**Table 4**  
**Distribution of shelter residents by province and territory, sex and age, 2021**

	Canada	Atlantic region	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	British Columbia	Territories
	counts						
<b>Both genders</b>							
Total	9,275	225	780	4,060	1,455	2,595	165
Aged 0 to 14 years	550	5	70	315	80	85	0
Aged 15 to 19 years	1,060	30	50	740	135	75	35
Aged 20 to 24 years	895	25	75	530	55	175	40
Aged 25 to 29 years	680	15	55	280	80	235	10
Aged 30 to 34 years	770	15	55	280	120	285	10
Aged 35 to 39 years	860	20	65	230	145	390	5
Aged 40 to 44 years	805	20	65	295	135	285	5
Aged 45 to 49 years	675	20	70	280	105	190	5
Aged 50 to 54 years	710	15	60	270	115	245	5
Aged 55 to 59 years	775	20	80	285	130	250	10
Aged 60 to 64 years	785	15	55	275	190	230	20
Aged 65 years and over	720	15	85	290	160	155	10
<b>Men+</b>							
Total	5,450	140	505	1,940	1,025	1,725	110
Aged 0 to 14 years	370	5	25	205	60	75	0
Aged 15 to 19 years	455	15	15	300	95	15	15
Aged 20 to 24 years	465	20	35	260	45	85	20
Aged 25 to 29 years	410	10	45	135	35	175	10
Aged 30 to 34 years	355	5	25	80	75	165	10
Aged 35 to 39 years	520	15	45	110	100	250	10
Aged 40 to 44 years	545	15	45	185	80	205	10
Aged 45 to 49 years	355	10	55	105	80	100	5
Aged 50 to 54 years	435	10	55	135	95	135	5
Aged 55 to 59 years	515	15	45	140	90	210	10
Aged 60 to 64 years	580	10	55	155	160	180	20
Aged 65 years and over	450	10	60	135	110	130	10
<b>Women+</b>							
Total	3,820	80	275	2,120	425	870	50
Aged 0 to 14 years	180	5	40	110	20	5	0
Aged 15 to 19 years	600	10	35	440	40	60	20
Aged 20 to 24 years	435	5	40	265	10	90	20
Aged 25 to 29 years	270	5	10	140	50	60	0
Aged 30 to 34 years	415	10	35	200	50	125	0
Aged 35 to 39 years	340	5	25	120	50	140	0
Aged 40 to 44 years	260	5	15	105	50	75	0
Aged 45 to 49 years	320	10	15	180	25	85	0
Aged 50 to 54 years	270	0	0	135	15	110	0
Aged 55 to 59 years	260	5	30	145	35	45	0
Aged 60 to 64 years	205	5	5	120	25	50	0
Aged 65 years and over	265	10	25	155	50	30	0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

The census is an enumeration on one specific day every five years, as a result will not measure those who were in shelters at other times of that year and does not represent the total number of homeless people. Some people might be enumerated in other places of residence such as other types of collective dwellings, for example in hospitals, or in private dwellings with friends and families in the case of hidden homelessness. It is important to note that not all homeless people live in shelters and similarly not all people living in shelters are necessarily homeless.

Finally, additional details about shelter residents such as income, are obtained through linking tax and census data. However, McDermott, Harding and Randle (2019) raised concerns about the high imputation rates among usual residents of shelters and the possible impact it might have on the quality of certain variables.

## Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse<sup>16</sup>

The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA), previously The Transition Home Survey, is conducted every two years and provides a portrait of the residential facilities across Canada whose specific mission is to provide lodging for those that have experienced domestic violence. It enumerates the capacity of facilities (short-term or long-term shelters for victims of abuse, transition homes, interim housing and safe home networks) that have been providing services in the last year and conducts a Point-in-Time (PiT) count of the residents of those facilities.

The survey contains socio-demographic information on the residents such as their type of admission, age, geographic location, type of abuse endured, service provided by the shelter, visible minority and indigenous identity status and if the person is accompanying a minor. The latest data was collected from April 12th to August 31st, 2021, and was released on April 12th, 2022.

### Measurements of homelessness and hidden homelessness related to domestic violence

The availability of information on gender, whether the individual is accompanied by a minor and their parental status offers an opportunity to measure homelessness and hidden homelessness experiences of women and how violence affects this group. Variables regarding the service and number of beds available in these types of shelters provide an insight on the service specifically available for this population and how the supply of available beds has evolved over time. This dataset contains a lot of socio-demographic information on the specific population of abuse shelter residents. It has been used to provide a portrait of indigenous victims of abuse across Canada (Maxwell, 2020).

## National Social and Affordable Housing Database

The National Social and Affordable Housing Database (NSAHD) is a list of social and affordable dwellings and housing units across the country maintained by Statistics Canada. More concretely, it is a subgroup of the Statistics Canada address database that lists the dwellings that are dedicated in whole or partially to affordable housing. This subgroup is identified by matching addresses found in administrative data from several CMHC and several provincial/territorial housing authority sources.

The NSAHD includes information such as funding programs, the number of units, the construction period, the end date of an agreement, etc. However, information might not be available in all provinces.

The database does not include information on residents. However, a current project links NSAHD information with T1 Family File (T1FF) and 2016 Census data (linkage number #036-2018) to produce resident profiles related to these SAH units.<sup>17</sup> The linkage of provincial and territorial, social and affordable housing administrative data to T1FF and Census of population data project will be used by Statistics Canada for the production of annual custom tables to data providers of social and affordable housing programs and to the CMHC. The linkage will inform the data providers on additional topics such as demographics, income and characteristics of the dwellings of those living in social and affordable housing.

This dataset can be used to portray a larger variety of social and affordable housing and offer a linkage occasion that other inventory of public housing databases such as Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey might not offer.

## Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey<sup>18</sup>

Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey (CCPI), conducted every two years, collects statistical information on the inventory, condition, performance, and asset management strategies of core public infrastructure assets owned or leased by different levels of the Government of Canada. This includes bridge and tunnel assets; culture, recreation, and sports facilities; potable water assets; public transit assets; road assets; public social and affordable housing assets; solid waste assets; storm water assets; and wastewater assets but, notably, not shelters.

16. More details on the [Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse](#) and [Surveys and statistical programs - Transition Home Survey \(THS\) \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#) webpages.

17. Statistics Canada approved microdata linkage #036-2018.

18. For more details, please refer to the [Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey](#) webpage.

The information collected is used by the public service to better understand the current condition of Canadian public infrastructure. The target population of this survey consists of local, municipal, regional, provincial, and territorial governments that own one or more core public infrastructure asset. The latest data was collected from October 13th to December 22nd, 2021.

This dataset provides a portrait of publicly owned social and affordable housing assets<sup>19</sup> available to the different levels of government to help and assist those that experience episodes of homelessness. The data provides a level of geographical disaggregation that allows users to easily assess infrastructure and evaluate the supply of affordable housing available in each community. Specifically, it can be used to assess the affordable housing available to an Indigenous community or an underserved rural community. The dataset also provides insights on the availability of other infrastructure, like public transit, near affordable housing and that infrastructure expected useful life. This data is an inventory and in so, does not provide insight on whether the asset is currently in use or not.

#### 4. Other sources of data related to homelessness

Outside Statistics Canada, other projects have been put in place to address questions related to homelessness. The National Homelessness Information System (NHIS)<sup>20</sup> is a data monitoring initiative maintained by Infrastructure Canada, formerly maintained by ESDC. The Homeless Individual and Families Information System (HIFIS) is the data management system associated with this initiative. HIFIS allows communities to collect and track information about the people accessing homelessness sector resources in a community-wide coordinated access system. It is a centralized data management system to measure and keep track of all the data gathered by the different initiatives to measure homelessness led by the NHIS and presents interesting development opportunity regarding collaboration with other governmental initiatives. Statistics Canada publishes data from HIFIS<sup>21</sup> on the capacity, bed and shelter counts for different types of shelters in Canada.

The HIFIS notably includes the Point-in-Time (PiT) Count on homelessness enumeration initiative, the Shelter Capacity Report (SCR) and the National Shelter Study (NSS).

##### Point-in-time count<sup>22</sup>

The Point-in-Time (PiT) count is conducted every two years and is considered the benchmark enumeration method to identify individuals who are experiencing homelessness on a single night. Between March and April 2018, a PiT count surveyed the homelessness in 61 participating communities. More than 32,000 individuals were identified as experiencing homelessness or residing in transitional housing. PiT counts were postponed during the pandemic, while some communities were able to conduct counts before COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, others will complete them in 2023. This number includes people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness in unsheltered locations, shelters, transitional housing, staying with others, hotels and motels, health and correctional systems and unknown locations.

The PiT count combines administrative data on shelters and transitional housings with a survey of people observed living on the street. The survey portion is comprised of 14 standardized questions on the different socio-demographic characteristics and service needs of the individual such as immigration status, indigenous identity, gender and reason for housing instability.

Some caveats regarding the PiT count are its limited geographic coverage and its concern for privacy. First, it only provides an estimate of the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in a few designated communities. Seasonal variation and migration between communities mean the PiT count cannot be used to assess cyclical or hidden homelessness. Secondly, the PiT count does not collect identifying information on individuals reported in shelters, which prevents this dataset from being linked to administrative data. However, some information on shelter residents available in the PiT count is linked from other sources (HIFIS for example) when possible.

19. Statistics Canada. [Table 46-10-0001-01 Inventory of publicly owned social and affordable housing assets, Infrastructure Canada \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#).

20. For more details on the HIFIS, please refer to the [Homeless Individuals and Families Information System website](#).

21. Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0353-01 Homeless shelter capacity, bed and shelter counts for emergency shelters, transitional housing and domestic violence shelters for Canada and provinces, Infrastructure Canada](#).

22. For more details see: [Infrastructure Canada - Everyone Counts - Standards for participation in the coordinated count](#).

## National Service Provider List<sup>23</sup>

The National Service Provider List (NSPL) is an annually produced list of the different emergency and transition shelters, and their respective capacity across the country. It collects information by province and city on the shelter, the target clientele, the gender served by the shelter, and the number of beds available in the shelter.

A microdata linkage<sup>24</sup> was recently performed between the NSPL and Statistics Canada's Linkable File Environment (LFE) to produce tables and profiles on financial and other characteristics of homeless shelters in Canada.

## Shelter Capacity Report<sup>25</sup> and National Shelter Study<sup>26</sup>

The Shelter Capacity Report (SCR) is published annually and gathers information on the capacity and characteristics of all emergency homeless shelters including transitional housing and violence against women shelters across the country. The report is prepared using information from the National Service Provider List maintained by Infrastructure Canada. The SCR inventories the number of beds available and the shelter services available to different at-risk groups on a given night in each of the different shelter types.

The National Shelter Study (NSS) is a comprehensive ongoing national-level study of homelessness across Canada. This study is based on data from about 2.5 million shelter stays in 200 of the 401 emergency shelters across Canada from 2005 to 2016. Shelters provide information on stays in their establishment to Infrastructure Canada through the HIFIS and through data sharing agreements with the different regional and municipal housing entities. The NSS provides a portrait of individuals that use emergency shelters on a typical night. It includes the occupancy rates of shelters across the country as well as the length of those stays. This provides a unique hindsight on the demand for emergency shelter services in the different communities across Canada and is used to guide different initiatives in reducing homelessness.

## Alternative data sources: National Ambulatory Care Reporting System metadata

An alternative source of data to assess the number of individual experiencing homelessness across Canada, Strobel et al. (2021) used data maintained by the ICES. An Ontarian non-profit that compiled without consent, the hospital's emergency department visits in Ontario collected in the National Ambulatory Care Reporting System (NACR) and linked them with the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) Registered Persons Database (RPDB). The goal was to examine individuals that experiencing homelessness who visited emergency departments between 2010 and 2017.

The RPDB includes individuals that are covered by OHIP and captures socio-demographic characteristics, notably their address, if they are residents of shelters or if they are reported as experiencing homelessness. During each visit, when the personnel process a new patient, they will register the visit in the NACR and specify the date of admission, their living and housing condition, their gender and age. This information can also be used to assess trends and enumerate the characteristics of those that report experiencing homelessness for the public decision maker to evaluate their public policies (Strobel et al., 2021). Administrative health data are, however, less effective and reliable when portraying hidden homelessness or individuals that are precariously housed (Richard *et al.*, 2019).

Despite the numerous data sources available to study homelessness, it is clear there is still work to be done to develop a harmonized methodology. One country which has a more holistic approach to the study of homelessness is Australia. The next section will compare Australia's approach to Canada's approach and start to draw lessons that may help Canada in the final section providing next steps.

23. The National Service Provider list can be downloaded from [National Service Provider List - Open Government Portal \(canada.ca\)](#).

24. Statistics Canada microdata linkage #006-2021.

25. The latest report was published in 2020 accessible at '<https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/shelter-cap-hebergement-2020-eng.html>'.

26. [Emergency Shelter Use in Canada: 2005 to 2016](#).

## Alternative data sources: Survey of Safety in Public and Private Space (SSPPS)

There are also datasets which have direct relevance to homelessness but do not explicitly report on homelessness itself. An example of this is the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Space (SSPPS) which collects information on Canadians experience with safety in public and private spaces. This includes at home, in the workplace and in public spaces. It is collected every 5 years. Numerous levels of governments, academics and not-for-profits use this survey to investigate gender-based violence in Canada and this could help with policy development surrounding homelessness.

## 5. An international experience: Australia Census Data

Australia's treatment of homelessness is an example that Canada could learn from. The Australian Census of Population and Housing is an international example of a country collecting information on homelessness in their census. Their census is conducted every five years and provides an overview of where and how Australian people live. To maximize the quality of their enumeration, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses a special strategy to enumerate some homeless populations that are difficult to enumerate through standard procedures. Whereas homelessness itself is not a characteristic that is directly collected in the census, estimates can be derived based on observed characteristics and assumptions about how people respond to census questions.

### The ABS (2012a) definition of homelessness

The ABS defines homelessness as the lack of at least one of the following: a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living. Homelessness, therefore, may include those who have a roof over their head, but lack one of the previous elements that represents a home. The ABS statistical definition of homelessness is when a person's current living arrangement is an inadequate dwelling, has limited or no tenure; or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations. People who lack one or more of these elements are to be defined as homeless. However, people who lack one or more of these elements are not necessarily classified as homeless if they have access to accommodation alternatives.

The ABS has developed six homeless operational groups for presenting estimates of homelessness. These groups are:

1. Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out;
2. Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless;
3. Persons staying temporarily with other households;
4. Persons living in boarding houses;
5. Persons in other temporary lodgings; and
6. Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.

These groups reflect the intent and design of the census variables and fall in line with the ABS definition of homelessness. People at the statistical boundary of homelessness are also of interest and can be used to assist policy and prevention services. This includes 'Persons living in other crowded dwellings', 'Persons living in other improvised dwellings' and 'Persons marginally housed in caravan parks'.

### Avoiding misclassification of homelessness and methodology

The six operational groups are used in the estimation of Australia's homeless population. Each group has its own set of rules applied to it to assess accommodation alternatives and avoid misclassifying census respondents. For example, the group '**living in an improvised dwelling, tent, or sleeping out**' may include construction workers whose primary residence are considered to be an improvised dwelling but are not homeless. The ABS looks at everyone who was enumerated in that group and who reported either being at home on census night or having no usual address. They then apply rules that take into consideration tenure, rent and mortgage payments and labour force status. Applying these rules eliminates mobile construction workers and others who should not be classified as homeless. People are assumed to be homeless if these items are 'not stated'.

For the group **‘living in supported accommodation for the homeless’**, the ABS looks at all persons enumerated in dwellings identified as non-private dwellings and classified as ‘hostels for the homeless, night shelter, refuge’ by owners/managers, where the respondent reported their residential status as ‘guest, patient, inmate, other resident’ or not stated. The ABS then includes dwellings flagged as being supported accommodation for the homeless, and removes overseas visitors and ‘owner, proprietor, staff, and family’ enumerated in supported accommodation.

The ABS estimates the homeless population in the group **‘Persons staying temporarily with other households’** by analyzing persons living in private dwellings (except an improvised dwelling, tent, or sleeping out) and who reported having no usual address. This group contains a large range of visitors on census night, including ‘couch surfers’. The ABS then applies rules to determine who were most likely to be homeless on census night. They exclude families moving to new locations for work, people returning to Australia or moving to the country for the first time, and those who have/will not be living in their current property for half a year or more on census year. Other visitors who are likely to have accommodation alternatives include travellers and ‘grey nomads’ (groups of people who are of retirement age touring around Australia together). The ABS identifies that homeless youth, people fleeing domestic violence, and Indigenous peoples (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) are likely to be underestimated in this group.

The next group **‘Persons in boarding houses’** includes persons enumerated in non-private dwellings classified as boarding houses or private hotels. Rules are applied to identify housing that was not classified as boarding housing but, on balance, the characteristics of the people living there suggest they are likely to be boarding houses. The rules applied to determine homelessness include variables for labour force participation, student status, income, tenure type, need for assistance for core activities, religion, and volunteering. The rules exclude student halls that serve multiple schools in the region and ensure retirement villages, nursing homes, homes for people with disabilities, convents/monasteries and other religious institutions are not incorrectly reclassified as homeless boarding homes.

The operational group **‘Persons staying in other temporary lodging’** includes those who reported having no usual address and were living in the non-private dwellings category ‘hotel, motel, bed and breakfast’. Rules are then applied to this group to determine who, on balance, are likely to be homeless. The rules include variables for a weekly income cut off, labour force participation, student status, persons who reported being ‘owner, proprietor, staff, and family’, and overseas visitors.

The last group **‘Persons living in severely crowded dwellings’** is operationalized as those who were enumerated as a usual resident in a private dwelling and the dwelling requires at least four or more bedrooms to accommodate everyone in the household. The ABS accesses overcrowding through the Canadian National Occupancy Standard. Overcrowding is based on the number of bedrooms in a dwelling as well as demographic characteristics including the number of usual residents, their relationship to one another, their age and their sex. Lack of alternative accommodations is assumed as people with other accommodations are not likely to stay in a severely overcrowded household. The ABS then removes all people who have been identified as homeless in the other groups. The ABS assumes that there will be underestimation in this group due to missing information on the households and usual residents not being recorded due to the fear that there are too many residents living in the household than allowed on their lease.

## Published results on estimated homeless population

The ABS published an article on homelessness statistics: estimates of persons who were homeless or marginally housed, calculated from the census of population and housing. ABS finds that of the 23.4 million people living in Australia, just over 116,000 were classified as being homeless on census night (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017, 2018). Table 5 breaks down this estimate by census operational group. The largest increase in homelessness between 2011 and 2016 comes from persons living in ‘severely’ crowded dwellings, an increase from 41,370 in 2011 to 51,088 in 2016. People who were born overseas and arrived in Australia in the last 5 years account for 15% of all persons who were homeless on census night 2016. The rate of homelessness for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 361 for every 10,000 persons. The male homelessness rate increased to 58 males per 10,000 males enumerated, up from 54 in 2011, whereas the rate for females is steady at 41 per 10,000 females.

**Table 5****Estimated number of homeless people in Australia by operational group, Australian Census, 2016**

<b>Operational group</b>	<b>counts</b>
Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out	8,200
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	21,235
Persons staying temporarily with other households	17,725
Persons living in boarding houses	17,503
Persons living in other temporary lodges	678
Persons living in severely crowded dwellings	51,088
<b>Total estimated homeless population</b>	<b>116,427</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2016.

## Underestimated groups in homelessness estimates

The ABS (2018) recognizes that there are a few groups for which census variables provide limited opportunity to estimate those likely to be homeless. They identify three key groups, including youth, homeless people displaced due to domestic violence, and homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Youth homelessness (sometimes referred to as 12 to 18 years or 12 to 24 years old) is likely to be underestimated due to youth who are homeless and couch surfing (no fixed address) but report a usual residence in the census. Their homelessness is masked because their characteristics cannot be distinguished from other youth who are just visiting on census night. Therefore, youth will be underestimated within the group 'persons staying temporarily with other households.'

Another group that are difficult to enumerate are those experiencing homelessness due to domestic and family violence. If the person experiencing violence remains in their unsafe house, this could be considered lack of control of and access to social relations. Due to stigma, some respondents may not identify themselves as having no usual address on the census or have expectations that they may be able to return home in the future and do not see themselves as not having a usual address. Therefore, they cannot be identified as experiencing homelessness on the census. Some respondents may not be enumerated in the census at all, out of fear they may not have themselves recorded on a census form for the dwelling they are staying in.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are under enumerated in the census, and as such estimates of homelessness will be underestimated with census data. There are also different cultural perceptions of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This means that some people may not consider their current living situation as homeless but would be classified as homeless under a statistical measure. These people may not seek out homelessness services yet would be included in the census homelessness estimates. The opposite may also occur. For example, a person sees themselves as homeless due to a disconnection from their country and/or family or community but have an adequate living situation. The ABS is working on improving identification of homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for future censuses.

## Australia's Homelessness Enumeration strategy

To supplement the Census approach, the Homeless Enumeration Strategy (HES) ensures quality enumeration and a high response rate on census night. It targets those who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, hidden homelessness and those staying in supported accommodations for the homeless on census night. The 2016 HES builds off the 2011 HES which uses the experience and knowledge gained from the 1996, 2001, and 2006 censuses.

ABS's (2012b) core strategies of the 2011 HES include:

- Engage with service providers to assist with the identification of 'hot spots' for counting the unsheltered homeless population and recruitment of field/employment staff.
- Standardise training and material for field staff.
- Extend the enumeration period for one week over census night.
- Provide a shortened version of the census form. Allow Census Management Units the flexibility to use long or short census forms to count unsheltered homelessness.



- Increase the accuracy of hidden homelessness count through the promotion of writing ‘None’ in the census question asking about usual place of residence.
- Networking with organizations up to one year prior to the census to assist in operational plans. This allows for early identification of ‘hot spots’, refined estimates of unsheltered homeless population in a particular area, access to valuable knowledge from staff and potential collectors and promotion of the census by word-of-mouth throughout homeless population.
- Engage with providers of supported accommodation for the homeless to allow for confidential counting of people staying in these dwellings.

## 6. Measuring homelessness and potential data development

There are multiple lessons from the Australian example that could help fill data gaps in the current homelessness environment in Canada, these approaches combined with other sources provide a roadmap of potential options for Canada’s next steps. This section looks at the challenges of measuring homelessness, summarizes current data gaps, explores current attempts to fill these gaps, and proposes solutions in terms of developing new data to start addressing some of the data gaps.

Three main challenges should be considered when measuring the homeless population:

**(1) Identifying homeless individuals and families in existing sources either for analysis or constructing a survey frame.** The homeless population is hard to identify through traditional data collection mechanisms, unlike the general population. Identification of the population is the very first step before developing an effective data collection strategy. Statistical and other organizations generally can’t know without contact that a person is experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, those experiencing homelessness represent a relatively small proportion of the population. The cost and effort required to reach each of these people, through traditional methods, by soliciting each household or dwelling would be disproportionate to the target population.

**(2) Developing a collection strategy to effectively connect with homeless individuals and families.** None of the typical methods of data collection, such as telephone, mail or the internet used for the general population, are fully adequate to reach this population. This is true for many types of homelessness, if not all, whether it is a person who sleeps outside of shelters, a person who sleeps at a friend’s house due to lack of housing or a person who lives with their sibling because of an abusive spouse. However, shelter data, such as HIFIS and other regional or local initiatives can help identify a subset of those experiencing certain types of homelessness but not for all types of homelessness. Furthermore, individual demographic characteristics of the homeless are hard to obtain. Linkage to other sources of data such as administrative data may fill this data gap.

**(3) Developing collection methods to safely interview homeless individuals and families while acknowledging the potential trust barrier to overcome.** Since it is difficult to obtain information about homelessness and the characteristics of individuals who are experiencing homelessness, it is often considered essential to supplement surveys with interviews. However, this puts a large burden on the interviewers or resource persons tasked with collecting the data. The desired information is often personal and sensitive making asking questions appropriately difficult. For example, how to ask the right questions to know a person’s gender, indigenous identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.? These are attributes that cannot be observed and which may require asking several questions. Even if several questions are asked, the risk of incorrect interpretation of these questions by the respondents is high. Moreover, finding adequate privacy settings for the interview may be difficult and security for the interviewers is also a consideration.

### Measuring homelessness: data gaps and objectives

Given the challenges of measuring homelessness and considering the homeless population, several data gaps exist. Table 6 lists the information contained in each of the databases mentioned in the article. To start addressing these data gaps several objectives can be considered: (1) defining and measuring concepts of homelessness; (2) collecting the appropriate attributes; (3) timing and frequency of collection; and (4) analyzing and measuring pathways/trajectories.

**Table 6**  
**What we know about homelessness**

	Data resources							
	Canadian Housing Survey	General Social Survey	Census	Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse	National Social and Affordable Housing Database	Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey	Point-in-time count	National Service Provider List
<b>Type of homelessness</b>								
Homelessness	√	√					√	
Unsheltered							√	
Emergency shelter			√	√			√	√
Hidden	√	√		√				
At risk	√		√			√		
<b>Attributes</b>								
At the time of homelessness experience			Very limited	√	With linkage		√	
Retrospective of homelessness experience	√	√						
<b>Time dimensions</b>								
Point-in-time count			√	√			√	
Lifetime experience	√	√						
Duration of the episode	√	√						
Number of episodes								
Chronic homelessness								
<b>Pathways</b>								
Entering homelessness								
Pathways through homelessness								
Exiting homelessness								

**(1) Defining and measuring concepts of homelessness**

Defining the different types of homelessness and the concepts that may be used to measure them is crucial in the measurement of homelessness. Although four types of homelessness are commonly used (see Section 2), it is difficult to define them with precise criteria to ensure their accurate measurement. Other countries, such as Australia, rely on six categories, which allow more precise criteria.

Surveys tend to inform on the generic definition of homelessness by combining the four types of homelessness. Surveys such as GSS and CHS include questions on the specific type of hidden homelessness separately. The latest cycle of GSS also includes a question about any experiences of being homelessness because of domestic violence.

Similarly, the census is not a tool to enumerate all the different types of homelessness. However, it does enumerate the homeless population sleeping in shelters across the country on a specific night. The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (SRFVA) also provides information on those living in emergency shelters. However, these two data sources only provide information on the homeless population in contact with the service providers.

From a different angle, CCPI and NSAH can provide information on infrastructure and shelters or shelter capacity but not necessarily many details on those at risk of being homeless or shelter residents.

The unsheltered/chronic homeless population remains very hard to reach beyond the basic point-in-time count exercises.

**(2) Collecting the appropriate attributes**

From an analytical point of view, measuring homelessness is not only about the counts and the types of homelessness but also about the attributes associated with the individuals experiencing homelessness. The homeless population is hard to identify. Obtaining socio-demographic characteristics directly from a person experiencing homelessness concurrent to the time of the episode of homeless represents a significant challenge.

Matching socio-demographic data to the timing of the homeless experience is critical. Surveys can also provide information on socio-demographics characteristics but only at the time of the survey and not necessarily at the time that homelessness was experienced. The CHS and GSS contain information on individual characteristics such as education, but they are not associated with the timing of experiencing homelessness.

In addition to collecting the appropriate socio-demographics characteristics, a need for disaggregated and regional data is apparent. Different geographic areas such as Toronto or Vancouver don't face the same issues as Calgary. Labour market shocks and/or weather events for example can be highly localized.

Sample size can also be an issue. Homelessness is experienced by a small proportion of the population. In attempting to measure or disaggregate an event that is infrequent, such as homelessness, it is difficult to obtain sufficient sample size from a general-purpose frame to adequately analyze correlated factors. Uppal (2022) has made progress showing the possibility of looking across Canada, at correlation between past experience of homelessness and current characteristics such as belonging to an LGBTQ+ group. Although, cross-tabulations with additional variables can be challenging.

The census provides a larger sample size and includes more socio-demographic characteristics. However, residents of collective dwellings, including shelter residents, are currently not asked to fill in the census long-form questionnaire, which provides information on the highest level of education completed, immigration status or Indigenous identity, for example. Administrative data linkages could start to address some of these data gaps.

### **(3) Timing and frequency of collection**

For the majority, homelessness is not a permanent condition. It commonly presents as a periodic experience and most often of short duration. It fluctuates throughout the year and varies by season. The timing as well as the frequency of the data collections will impact both the population and the type of homelessness being measured.

Accurately measuring the duration of homelessness is important as to not overestimate the number of people experiencing homelessness. It is important to differentiate between hidden, single and short episode homelessness, multi-episode (episodic), and those with long-term uninterrupted homelessness (chronic). A data gap remains as to the measurement of the number of episodes, their duration and chronic homelessness.

There are a variety of reasons household surveys that measure lifetime experience with homelessness, cannot be used as a tool to enumerate the present homeless population, particularly for the unsheltered or those in shelters and for the chronically homeless. The population currently experiencing homelessness, whether living in shelters, on streets or living in institutions, is out of scope of surveys such as GSS and CHS because they are not living in a private household. Also, questions are often only asked to one member of the household as opposed to all members of the household. The persons who had previously experienced or is currently experiencing homelessness may not be this reference person. Furthermore, a disproportionate share of chronically homelessness individuals pass away from exposure, overdose or a variety of other preventable circumstances elsewhere known as deaths of despair and never obtain stable housing.

Census data and PiT counts can measure homelessness and those staying in shelters on a specific day. The SRFVA provides a census on a specific night of the residents of emergency shelters. This begs the question, 'Would the enumeration process be different if the collection was done more frequently?'

Seasonality also needs to be considered. Different timing of collection is expected to yield different results and the seasonality patterns would be influenced by the locale.

### **(4) Analyzing and measuring pathways/trajectories**

Surveys such as GSS and CHS have provided information on past experiences of homelessness. However, trajectories into homelessness or out of homelessness as well as the pathways through homelessness have typically not been documented by the national statistical organizations. Information about encounters with service providers may help obtain such information.

Part of the pathways out can be addressed through interviews, where the retrospective homelessness is described in greater detail. Questions regarding where the homeless incident or spell is described, what happened before, why it occurred, what happened to break the spell could help. GSS and CHS do include retrospective experience of homelessness. However, it is hard to define the right questions and to target a group of the population large enough to produce significant results.

Linkages between social assistance data and homelessness data could provide insightful information.

The diversity of the homeless population makes it difficult to understand the various factors that can lead to homelessness. It must be recognized that any analysis of homelessness must consider the challenges that are specific to each sub-population.

## **Feasibility study and ongoing initiatives to fill data gaps at Statistics Canada**

### **Measurements through linkage: the example of the census shelter data linked to tax data**

While the census offers information on shelters, linkages with other data sources can provide more information on shelter residents. The census shelter resident tax linkage dataset<sup>27</sup> results from a probabilistic linkage that retrieved information for persons who were found in shelters during the 2011 and the 2016 Census from administrative sources such as the T1 – Income Tax and Benefit Return, T1 – Family File, the T4 – Statement of Earnings Paid, the T4E – Statement of Employment Insurance Benefits and Other Benefits and the T5007 – Statement of Benefits. The content from administrative data files currently covers the period between 2001 and 2018.

This project aimed to provide a better understanding of shelter residents, including homeless persons by creating a longitudinal database of the individuals that had experienced homelessness which could be used to construct profiles from before and after their enumeration in a shelter to describe their earnings, employment and benefits received. These before-and-after profiles may be used to explore differences between individuals who were and were not experiencing homelessness and examine certain dimensions of pathways into and out of homelessness.

### **Government of Alberta HMIS Data (Alberta Shelter and tax filing data linkage)**

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is an ongoing project between the Government of Alberta's Community and Social Services Ministry and the homeless shelters in Alberta (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2022). It collects information on individuals who reside in the Alberta shelter system as well as individuals who are part of the Albertan Housing First program. The Housing First programs utilize a variety of housing models, including congregate settings, permanent supportive housing, and abstinence-based approaches to guide individuals experiencing homelessness into permanent and independent housing as quickly as possible while also providing additional services and supports as necessary to keep them housed.

The HMIS collects information on the episodes at the shelters and demographic elements concerning each individual such as their gender, ethnicity, immigration status, language, Indigenous identity, and veteran status. Information is gathered by a shelter's on-site resource person during interviews, assessments, or visits. Using the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) which consists of a list of questions and assessments regarding the assisted person, the resource person establishes the type and level of help they require. It collects information on the daily activities and habits of the person and establishes an index of the potentially at-risk behaviours they might exhibit.

The initial step of this project in development is to link<sup>28</sup> the entries in the HMIS with corresponding administrative data (T1FF, T4, T4E, and T5007). The strength of the Albertan shelter data is that they capture anyone who stayed in a shelter or was accepted in a Housing First program over a nearly 10-year period. This large sample of people who experienced homelessness (although restricted only to Alberta and with some limitations in the available identifiers for linkage) and the time span of the data can be used to produce more detailed profiles for comparison and be associated with different economic events that may have happened over the reference period of the file.

### **New measurement with the census**

A working group at Statistics Canada has been evaluating potential changes to the census regarding homelessness. Their assessment suggests the following: (1) the census is not the appropriate instrument to measure the rough sleeping/unsheltered; (2) a need to developing a standard set of definitions, concepts, and variables that may differentiate all of the forms of homelessness in Canada; (3) data linkage strategies must form part of the development/improvement of data collection strategies; and (4) to further develop the coordination between Statistics Canada and Infrastructure Canada's Homelessness Policy Directorate.

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27. This microdata linkage is available through the Federal Research Data Centers (FRDC). The approved microdata linkage number is [#037-2019](#).

28. This microdata linkage is in progress. Results are not yet available.

## Objectives for the future

Several innovative research avenues could be considered to tackle some of the data gaps mentioned previously. Data linkages between survey, census and administrative data remain one of the best options to further develop data on the subject matter. The two exploratory linkages mentioned above are good examples, but other opportunities of data development could also be explored such as was done in Australia.

Addressing the multiple risk factors that may lead to homelessness can take several forms in terms of data or research developments. These risk factors, whether individual or structural may include (but should not be limited to) mental health, physical health, children out of foster care, criminal behaviour, suicide, correctional facilities discharging but also poverty, racism, homophobia, experiences of violence, etc. As an example, combining social assistance data with other existing data on homelessness could offer new elements to study pathways around homelessness episodes. Specific data from the Canada Revenue Agency such as payments of the children's special allowances (CSA) could be used to identify youth leaving governmental or foster care and provide new insights on their trajectories into and out of homelessness. The unique challenges faced by this group and how they fare later in their life seems notably under-investigated as a pathway to homelessness. Data from victims of abuse or those who report danger and violence through the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces or Uniform Crime Reporting Survey could further paint a picture of the period preceding homelessness. In addition, alternative data sources such as health data and post-secondary education databases such as the Education and Labour Market Longitudinal Platform (ELMLP) or other provincial social assistance repositories such as the Ontario Social Assistance Data Linkage Project could also be used to provide insights on that population.

Simulation models using PiT Count data and the duration of the episode of those with homelessness experience could be considered as an alternative to using unobservable or hard-to-get data such as the flow in and out of homelessness or those that are currently "sleeping rough" (O'Donnell, 2020). Interactions with the health care system, as was investigated by Forchuk, Richard, Hwang et al., (2019) and Strobel et al. (2021) using data maintained by the ICES, are also conceivable research options that have yet to be explored at Statistics Canada.

The housing challenges that exist in Canada and the associated increase in evictions may put specific socio-demographic groups at a higher risk of homelessness and could be a research avenue worth exploring. Notably, municipalities across Canada in partnership with the CMHC have begun investigating rental housing insecurity and how the legislative frameworks around the rental housing market and more specifically evictions are linked to homelessness. They also look at how potential biases against certain demographic groups could result in an accrued risk of eviction. Researchers have begun addressing the different data gaps that exist and the effectiveness of the establishment of eviction prevention measures and tenant supports (Markovich, 2021).

To respond to findings from its foundational research, CMHC has created a new research project, in collaboration with Statistics Canada, to help gain a better understanding of evictions in selected Canadian jurisdictions. This pilot project will integrate evictions-related administrative data with other social domain data to shed light on the characteristics and outcomes of those impacted by evictions. The analysis conducted by CMHC will also consider implications for eviction prevention, housing policy and tenant supports.

Individuals enumerated in shelters for victims of abuse, such as the SFRVA, present a promising research opportunity. Notably the sample sizes are considerable, they provide some socio-demographic characteristics and have the added benefit of listing those that had children in their care. This database could also present opportunities for future linkages to further investigate the specific homelessness that results from domestic violence.

Indigenous homelessness is an under-researched topic and merits more extensive research in partnership with Indigenous communities (Maxwell, 2020).

Finally, and above all, building better partnerships across data custodians, collectors and analysts is primordial. While Infrastructure Canada has a lot of information about shelter residents, with the PiT counts and about shelters, Statistics Canada has vast data holdings and the capability to link data to create robust sets.

The tools exist, but organizations need to work together better to leverage them in the best way within suitable privacy constraints and data custodianship principles.

## What are the next steps?

Housing is now at the centre of the government's priorities with the housing situation said to be critical both in terms of access to affordable housing and access to home ownership. The National Housing Strategy announced in 2017 was one of many steps taken by various levels of government to address housing need and inequities in Canada. The unexpected influence of the pandemic on housing outcomes and prolonged increases in the cost of living and housing affordability has sparked a renewed interest in homelessness research. Building on the above developments the most recent federal budget contained extensive commitments to federal housing policy to combat the above trends and guarantee access to housing. The Reaching Home initiative received \$562.2 million over the next two years, beginning in 2024-25. The objective of this paper was to describe what exists currently and to identify opportunities to implement new methods for measuring homelessness or to improve current methods.

One of the opportunities identified in this paper is to further integrate multiple data sources and to expand data development. This paper lists several data sets that already exist. However, several organizations have additional experience researching homelessness, Employment and Social Development Canada, Statistics Canada, Infrastructure Canada, Federal Housing Advocate and CMHC, just to name a few, that can be leveraged. It is now a matter of joining all these forces and integrating all the available data and knowledge towards the creation of new measures, whether it is using data linkages, the development of methodology for new collections or the development of modelling and prediction models.

Statistics Canada in partnership with Infrastructure Canada through the Homelessness Secretariat is well positioned to provide a clear picture of homelessness measures in Canada. This paper also identifies opportunities to improve indicators and data collection on homelessness.

## 7. Conclusion

Measuring homelessness and considering the challenges faced by the homeless population present substantial difficulties. These challenges include defining measurable concepts of homelessness; separately identifying each of the types of homelessness; collecting the attributes associated to those experiencing homelessness; developing actionable insight into the entry and exit pathways; and using the collected data in a timely manner. All of which need to take into account when measuring homelessness.

This paper aimed to enumerate and describe numerous surveys and administrative datasets providing information on the population that is experiencing or has experienced episodes of homelessness. It briefly described several datasets on social and affordable housing concerning individuals at risk of experiencing homelessness. The data sources presented in this paper include surveys, census and administrative data from Statistics Canada as well as reports, studies and point-in-time counts from Infrastructure Canada.

This paper also presented the case of the Australian census that had developed a methodology to construct their national portrait of homelessness. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' experience in elaborating their strategy provides insights on methods that could be adapted to get in contact with individuals in Canada that are difficult to identify, difficult to reach, and difficult to interview such as the unsheltered homeless population.

Moving forward, several research avenues are currently being developed and explored to better measure homelessness including new questions and other data developments: alternative sources of data and data linkages using survey data and administrative data from a variety of sources. While developing these new possibilities of measurement, collaboration with Indigenous partners, service providers and the different federal, provincial and municipal entities, remains essential.

## Appendix 1: List of questions from Statistics Canada surveys

**Table A.1**  
**List of Statistics Canada's surveys with questions regarding homelessness**

	Data source				Census
	Canadian Housing Survey 2018	Canadian Housing Survey 2021 (summer 2022)	General Social Survey (Cycle 28)	General Social Survey (Cycle 34)	
<b>Question on homelessness</b>					
Have you ever been homeless, that is, having to live in a homeless shelter, on the street or in parks, in a makeshift shelter or in an abandoned building?	√	√	√	√	
What is the longest period of time for which you have been homeless?	√	√	√	√	
In what year did you last experience a period of homelessness?	√	√			
How long were you homeless during this period?	√	√			
Did any of the following situations contribute to your loss of housing when you last experienced homelessness?		√			
Were you homeless in the last 5 years?					√
Were you homeless as a result of the emotional or financial abuse/abuse by your current spouse or partner/former spouse or partner/current or former spouse or partner you experienced during the past five years?					√
<b>Question on hidden homelessness</b>					
Have you ever had to temporarily live with family or friends, or anywhere else because you had nowhere else to live?	√	√	√	√	
What is the longest period of time for which you had to live with family, friends, or anywhere else because you had nowhere else to live?	√	√	√	√	
In what year did you last have to temporarily live with someone else without paying rent for 1 month or more, because you had nowhere else to live?		√			
Did any of the following situations contribute to your loss of housing when you last stayed temporarily with others?		√			
Did you have to live with family, friends, or anywhere else in the last 5 years?					√
Were you temporarily living with family, friends or somewhere else as a result of the emotional or financial abuse/abuse by your current spouse or partner/former spouse or partner/current or former spouse or partner you experienced during the past five years?					√
<b>Question on shelter usage</b>					
Reported residing in an establishments for persons lacking a fixed address or for persons needing transitional shelter or assistance. Included are shelters for persons lacking a fixed address (such as homeless shelters or shelters for street youth), shelters for abused women and children, and transition homes or halfway houses for ex-inmates or persons on conditional release.					√
During the past 5 years, did you ever contact or use any of the following services for help because of the violence (Ex-spouse and current spouse), such as a shelter or transition house?			√	√	
Which of the previously mentioned services did you contact or use in the past 12 months?			√	√	
<b>Information on core housing need</b>					
An household is in core housing need if its housing fails to meet at least one of three standards established for housing adequacy, suitability, and affordability, and if its income before taxes is at or below the appropriate community-and-bedroom-specific income threshold.	√	√			√
Shelter-cost-to-income-ratio refers to the proportion of average total income of household which is spent on shelter costs. The shelter-cost-to-income ratio is calculated by dividing the average monthly shelter costs times 12 by the yearly total household income before-tax.	√	√			√
Critical Need : Which housing standards is not met?	√	√			√
<b>Information on Social and Affordable housing</b>					
Household lives in social and affordable housing	√	√			
Waitlist for SAH - Is any member of your household currently on a waiting list for subsidized housing?	√	√			
Waitlist for SAH - How long has your household been waiting for subsidized housing?	√	√			
In the past 12 months, was anyone in your household offered a subsidized dwelling which was turned down?	√	√			

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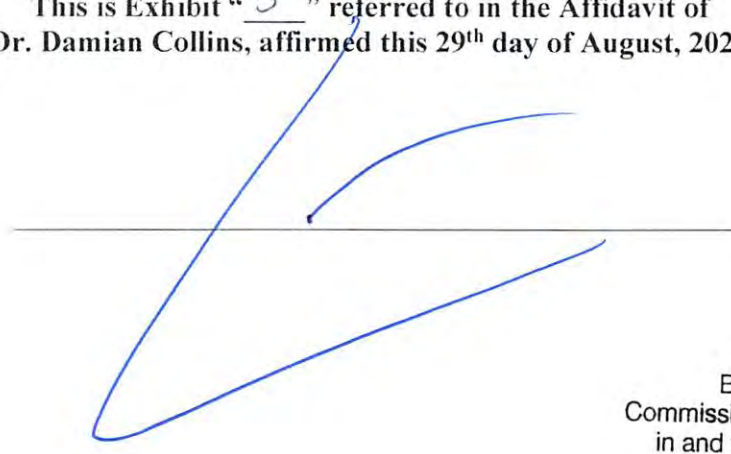


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This is Exhibit "5" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'. The line is a simple horizontal stroke that spans across the width of the signature.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

THE STATE OF  
**HOMELESSNESS**  
*in*  
**CANADA**  
**2016**



**Canadian  
Observatory on  
Homelessness**  
[homelesshub.ca](http://homelesshub.ca)



**Canadian Alliance to  
End Homelessness**

# The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016

Stephen Gaetz, Erin Dej, Tim Richter, Melanie Redman

COH Research Paper #12



ISBN: 978-1-77221-057-6

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## How to cite this document:

Stephen Gaetz, Erin Dej, Tim Richter, & Melanie Redman (2016): *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

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The authors would like to thank Allyson Marsolais, Jesse Donaldson, Jesse Thistle, and Kaitlin Schwan for their contributions to the writing, editing and development of this research paper.



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*Layout & design by:  
Steph Vasko*

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# Executive Summary

Mass homelessness in Canada emerged in the 1980s, following a massive disinvestment in affordable housing, structural shifts in the economy and reduced spending on social supports. Since then, stakeholders across the country have tried and tested solutions to address the issue. These responses, largely based on the provision of emergency services, have prevented meaningful progress. Fortunately, there are many signs that we are entering a new phase – one that will lead to an end to homelessness in Canada.

This next phase is marked by the promising results of the Housing First model across Canada, significant reductions in homelessness in Medicine Hat and Hamilton, federal interest and investment in housing and homelessness, and importantly, the return to a National Housing Strategy – a long overdue conversation in Canada.

We know that ending homelessness in Canada requires partnerships across public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. It means working upstream to prevent homelessness, as well as providing safe, appropriate, and affordable housing with supports for those experiencing homelessness. With support from all orders of government, a commitment to housing as a human right, and evidence-based solutions we can, collectively, prevent and end homelessness.

The *State of Homelessness in Canada 2016* provides a roadmap for the way forward. Including a series of joint recommendations – drafted by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Canadian Alliance to end Homelessness – for the National Housing Strategy.

*“Every segment of our society must be treated with dignity and respect and be given the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution.*

*The face of homelessness is changing and we have to adapt to provide the adequate support to communities to build capacity to help homeless population’s lead valuable lives.”*

- The Honourable Jean-Yves Ducloux,  
Minister of Families, Children and Social  
Development

## How is homelessness changing in Canada?

Historically, individuals experiencing homelessness in Canada were older, single men. The homelessness crisis we see today is much more diverse. More women, families and youth are experiencing homelessness than in the past. With the introduction of the 2016 Coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) Count and the Government of Canada’s recent report on emergency shelter data, we have a clearer picture of who is homeless in Canada and what their experience looks like. This information is important to consider as local, provincial/territorial and national governments build sustainable solutions to end homelessness.


## Here is what we know:

### WHO IS HOMELESS?



**35,000** CANADIANS  
ARE HOMELESS ON A GIVEN NIGHT

at least  
**235,000**  
CANADIANS EXPERIENCE  
HOMELESSNESS IN A YEAR



**27.3%**  
ARE WOMEN



**18.7%**  
ARE YOUTH

THE NUMBER OF  
**OLDER ADULTS (50-64)  
AND SENIORS (65+)**  
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IS GROWING



*making up a combined*  
**24.4% OF SHELTER USERS**



**28-34% OF THE  
SHELTER POPULATION  
IS INDIGENOUS**

**4.3% OF CANADIANS  
ARE INDIGENOUS**



**FAMILIES  
STAY IN SHELTERS  
2X AS LONG  
AS INDIVIDUALS**



*approximately*  
**2,950 VETERANS**  
EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

**2.2% OF SHELTER POPULATION**

*Historically, individuals experiencing homelessness in Canada were older, single men. The homelessness crisis we see today is much more diverse. More women, families and youth are experiencing homelessness than in the past.*

### WHAT DOES HOMELESSNESS LOOK LIKE?

*There has been a steady decline in the number of Canadians using shelters in the last 10 years.*



IN 2014 THERE WERE ALMOST  
**20,000 FEWER  
PEOPLE USING  
EMERGENCY SHELTERS**  
*than in 2005*



*most shelter stays*  
**ARE BRIEF WITH YOUTH  
AND ADULTS STAYING ON  
AVERAGE 10 DAYS**

**BUT FOR ADULTS (50+) AND  
FAMILIES, THE AVERAGE  
LENGTH OF STAY IS  
2X AS LONG**



**THE NATIONAL  
OCCUPANCY RATE**

*- how full shelters are -*

**INCREASED BY  
MORE THAN 10%  
BETWEEN 2005-2014**



## Progress across Canada

Across the country communities are ramping up efforts to prevent and end homelessness. We are seeing new partnerships, innovative solutions, systems-based plans to end homelessness and improved data collection and measurement of the issue. Encouragingly, this work is being supported – in many cases – by local, provincial/territorial and national governments.

For instance, the newly elected federal government has renewed its interest in housing and homelessness by providing valuable short-term funding to reverse the historical disinvestment in affordable housing.

The 2016 federal budget commits \$2.3 billion over two years in affordable housing through various channels, chiefly the reinvestment in the Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS). Other initiatives include:

- Doubling the funding for the Investment in Affordable Housing Initiative over the next two years;
- Short-term investment in social housing where operating agreements are set to expire by March 2018;
- Introducing a new Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund to support new housing models; and
- Building new and repairing existing shelters for victims of violence.

Most importantly, the Government of Canada coupled their investment with a commitment to create a National Housing Strategy (NHS).

Progress has been seen locally and provincially. Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador have launched community and provincial plans to reduce and end homelessness. Further, cities such as Medicine Hat and Hamilton are tracking their progress as they close in on ending homelessness in their communities. With the support of the province, Montreal is working towards an end to chronic homelessness. In the east, St. John's is committed to ending homelessness by 2019 through system coordination and Housing First.

These examples confirm what we know: local leadership, adequate funding and a collective resolve to do more, can have an impact on the prevalence of homelessness in Canada.

## There's no one-size-fits-all solution to preventing and ending homelessness

The more data we gather through PiT Counts, by-name lists, and other data sources, the more we learn that experience of homelessness is not homogenous. In this report we look at the unique needs of three

different groups of people. We must consider the unique causes and consequences of homelessness across demographics if we are to create effective, thus tailored, responses to homelessness. As a result, our recommendations for the National Housing Strategy, found in the conclusion of this report, include recommendations specific to each of these priority populations.

## **YOUTH**

A number of communities and provinces have identified youth homelessness as a key priority. In support of their efforts, A Way Home - a national coalition with the mandate to end youth homelessness in Canada – emerged in 2015. A Way Home provides communities with on the ground supports to build their capacity through Collective Impact, as well as inspire similar coalitions internationally that will have the effect of building collaboration across borders. Through the efforts of A Way Home, its partners and other key players, we are poised to improve our collective responses to youth homelessness through new innovations such as Housing First for Youth.

## **VETERANS**

Recent numbers reveal that 2.2% of the emergency shelter population identified as veterans. Of those, many are episodically and chronically homeless. Housing First models that provide supports specific to the needs of veterans have shown promise. Collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada demonstrates the kind of partnerships needed to have an impact on homelessness at the systems level.

## **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

Indigenous Peoples are overrepresented among people experience homelessness across Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report identified our collective responsibility to apologize for the intergenerational trauma inflicted by residential schools. Now, we must foster healing and work towards stronger partnerships with Indigenous communities. While the report did not mention homelessness specifically, the impact of residential schools can be seen as a direct cause of the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness. The new short-term federal investment in affordable housing for Indigenous Peoples both on and off reserve is only a first step towards improving outcomes for Indigenous Peoples. Further political, social and financial backing is required to end Indigenous homelessness in Canada.

## **What we need in a National Housing Strategy**

In order for the National Housing Strategy to be effective, it needs to prioritize preventing and ending homelessness from coast to coast to coast. The recommendations emphasize the need to work on preventing homelessness in the first place, while urgently moving people into appropriate housing when homelessness does occur. Above all, our recommendations show that it is possible to prevent and end homelessness in Canada, but it will require a major financial investment. One beyond the short-term funding laid out in budget 2016. We call for a federal long-term, 10-year investment in housing and homelessness worth \$43.788 billion. This amounts to an additional annual investment of \$50 per Canadian – that's less than \$1 a week per Canadian to prevent and end homelessness in Canada.

## Addressing Homelessness in Canada

Our recommendations for the national housing strategy are echoed by our partners and other stakeholders across the country and include the following.



### **Recommendation #1: The Government of Canada should adopt a national goal of ending homelessness with clear and measurable outcomes, milestones and criteria**

A commitment to end homelessness should be at the core of the National Housing Strategy. This will require provinces/territories, Indigenous governments and local governments to find effective strategies that meet local needs. To make this goal a reality, the strategy should do the following:

- Adopt a Housing First philosophy
- Emphasize prevention
- Support local leadership
- Prioritize effectively
- Use data in decision making
- Improve local system coordination



### **Recommendation #2: Renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS)**

Effective solutions to preventing and ending homelessness require long-term stable funding. We call for the HPS to be renewed in 2019 for a ten-year period, emphasizing the following mandate:

- A continued commitment to Housing First
- Developing and implementing a Homelessness Prevention Framework
- Renewing a commitment to evidence informed decision making, including an expansion of the National Homelessness Information System, mandatory PiT counts, and program evaluation
- Supporting the 61 Designated Communities in developing integrated systems plans that include co-ordinated service delivery and shared data agreements.



### **Recommendation #3: A new federal/provincial/territorial framework agreement that defines local leadership on homelessness and housing investment**

Clearly defined roles are essential to a comprehensive strategy. The Government of Canada sets out the national direction for preventing and ending homelessness in Canada along with the investment and support required to operationalize the plan. Provinces/territories are responsible for many of the social services that must work in partnership with one another to effectively prevent and end homelessness. Municipalities have the local knowledge needed to implement housing investments that are best suited to their community.



### **Recommendation #4: Targeted strategies to address the needs of priority populations**

The National Housing Strategy should prioritize three homeless populations with specialized interventions:

- Develop a national youth homelessness strategy, including a focus on Housing First for Youth
- Housing options for veterans, with tailored supports and greater access to veteran benefits
- Develop an Indigenous homelessness strategy led by Indigenous communities

## **Addressing Affordable Housing in Canada**



### **Recommendation #5: Retain and expand existing affordable housing stock**

As the federal operating agreements expire the Government of Canada must find ways to keep the affordable housing units we have while building new housing. Our recommendations outline a number of possible solutions to this end, such as removing the funding cap for the mortgage pre-payment program, expanding the Affordable Housing Initiative and investing in new initiatives including the Canadian Housing Finance Authority and a Sector Transformation Initiative.



## **Recommendation #6: Implement a National Housing Benefit**

A National Housing Benefit acts as a monthly cash payment to low-income households, similar to the 'child tax' benefit. The program is a key prevention strategy that would help prevent those at risk of homelessness from losing their housing.



## **Recommendation #7: Affordable housing tax credit**

An affordable housing tax credit will give private equity investors reductions in federal income tax for dollars invested in affordable housing projects. The initiative has the potential to significantly increase Canada's affordable housing stock and will foster partnerships with the private sector to prevent and end homelessness.



## **Recommendation #8: Review and expand investment in affordable housing for Indigenous Peoples**

The National Housing Strategy must address the lack of safe, affordable and appropriate housing on reserve and the unique challenges Indigenous peoples have accessing affordable housing off reserve. We recommend an audit of on reserve housing, to allow us to make well-informed decisions going forward. An Indigenous Innovation Demonstration Fund can invest in new solutions to housing and supports for Indigenous Peoples living on and off reserve.

The recommendations outlined above and unpacked in the body of this report provide us with a roadmap forward. The National Housing Strategy is a significant opportunity. We must do more than react. We must strategize, innovate and invest until we have prevented and ended homelessness. By doing so, we will send a powerful message: No one should experience homelessness.

# 1. The State of Homelessness in Canada - 2016

## Can we prevent and end homelessness in Canada?

This is the central question that guides our work as we move into a new phase of responding to Canadian homelessness. In the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2016*, the third report of this kind produced by the [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness \(COH\)](#) and the [Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness \(CAEH\)](#), we address this question.

This report builds on our previous State of Homelessness in Canada reports. In the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2013*, we provided the first reliable estimates on the nature and scope of homelessness in Canada. In the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*, we explored the relationship between the lack of affordable housing in Canada and the growth of homelessness. We then outlined a cost proposal to address the shortage of affordable housing in Canada.

In this year's State of Homelessness we consider how we might prevent and end homelessness in Canada. This couldn't come at a more opportune time. Our knowledge base about what to do has grown exponentially in recent years. More and more communities are shifting from a crisis response to one that seeks to reduce the incidence of homelessness. Some higher levels of government have made commitments to ending homelessness, many of which have provided communities with the increased funding and policy frameworks to support this work. Finally, the Government of Canada is working to implement a National Housing Strategy that, if properly funded, has the potential to support all communities and orders of government in their efforts to prevent and end homelessness in Canada.

*More and more communities are shifting from a crisis response to one that seeks to reduce the incidence of homelessness.*

As we reimagine our response to homelessness, we are cautiously optimistic that meaningful progress can be made.

# A Short History of Mass Homelessness in Canada

Modern mass homelessness is a relatively recent phenomenon in Canada. If we look back, we can identify two primary responses to homelessness that have developed over time. These responses might be described as occurring in two “phases”.

## PHASE ONE



The first phase began in the late 1980s and proceeded until the mid-2000s. As documented in the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*, homelessness emerged as a problem as a result of a large disinvestment in affordable housing, structural shifts in the economy (resulting in, for example, a rapid decline in full-time, permanent, well-paying jobs) and reduced spending on a range of social and health supports in communities all across the country. In this first phase, homelessness in Canada grew quite dramatically from a small number of largely single men experiencing chronic homelessness to a mass problem with on average at least 235,000 people experiencing homelessness in a given year, and over 35,000 on a given night. Homelessness not only grew in scope but in complexity, as homeless populations in many Canadian communities became more diverse. Youth, families, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, and individuals identifying as LGBTQ2S, all became more likely to become homeless. The visibility of homelessness increased because of the sheer number of individuals on Canadian streets with no home to return to.

*Homelessness emerged as a problem as a result of a large disinvestment in affordable housing, structural shifts in the economy (resulting in, for example, a rapid decline in full-time, permanent, well-paying jobs) and reduced spending on a range of social and health supports in communities all across the country.*

## PHASE TWO



PLANS TO  
END HOMELESSNESS  
*implemented*



ADOPTED HOUSING FIRST  
AS A CRITICAL INTERVENTION



FOCUSED ON PEOPLE EXPERIENCING  
CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS &  
HIGH ACUITY MENTAL HEALTH  
& ADDICTIONS PROBLEMS



HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING  
STRATEGY RENEWED FOR 5 YEARS  
*with* HOUSING FIRST & CHRONIC  
HOMELESSNESS KEY PRIORITIES

2008

2013

During this time, our primary approach to homelessness was to invest in a crisis response by building a large and expensive infrastructure around emergency services and supports, including shelters, day programs, and drop ins. These emergency responses were often coupled with law enforcement efforts that functioned to criminalize homelessness (O'Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011). While emergency supports are an essential component of any response, this approach does little to stem the flow into homelessness or help people exit homelessness quickly.

The second phase of our response, beginning around 2008 and continuing to the present, saw a significant shift from simply managing the crisis through emergency services to attempts to actually reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. Beginning in the Seven Cities in Alberta, and spreading to other parts of Canada, there has been an increased focus on plans to end homelessness.

These plans often prioritize system integration, setting measurable targets towards reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness, and the adoption of Housing First as a critical intervention. Adapting the Pathways to Housing model from the United States, in 2008 Canada embarked on the most ambitious research project on Housing First in the world – the *At Home/Chez Soi* project. *At Home/Chez Soi* persuasively demonstrated that by providing immediate access to housing and necessary supports, people experiencing homelessness will largely remain housed and experience improvements to their health and well-being (Goering et al., 2014). However, in many instances Housing First has been implemented with a narrow focus on the needs of people experiencing chronic homelessness and high acuity mental health and addictions problems.

*During this time, our primary approach to homelessness was to invest in a crisis response by building a large and expensive infrastructure around emergency services and supports, including shelters, day programs, and drop ins.*

This shift away from a crisis response accelerated in 2013 when the Government of Canada renewed the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) for five years, positioning Housing First and chronic homelessness as key priorities.



# The Next Phase: Preventing and Ending Homelessness

Today, we are facing a critical moment in our efforts to tackle modern mass homelessness in Canada. The experience of the last decade has changed the way we think about the problem and shifted our focus to solutions. A number of important shifts, described in this report, signal that we are poised for a new phase, one that may finally lead to ending homelessness. Some of these shifts include:

## TODAY



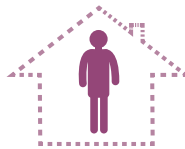
return to the  
NATIONAL HOUSING  
STRATEGY



BUILDING ON  
THE SUCCESS OF  
HOUSING FIRST



ADDRESSING THE  
NEEDS OF KEY  
POPULATIONS



HOMELESSNESS  
PREVENTION  
IS KEY



Shift to  
SYSTEM COORDINATION  
AND REAL-TIME DATA



ACTIVE  
& ENGAGED  
GOVERNMENT

## The return to a National Housing Strategy

Leading scholars such as David Hulchanski (2009) and Cushing Dolbeare (1996) have argued that homelessness is not *only* a housing problem, but is *always* a housing problem. In the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*, we made the case that a withdrawal of federal investment in affordable housing, beginning over 25 years ago, has led to the current affordable housing crisis in Canada and has directly contributed to dramatic rises in homelessness. During that period, federal spending on low-income affordable housing (on a per capita basis) dropped from over \$115 annually, to just over \$60 (adjusted to 2013 dollars).

While innovative solutions to homelessness have developed across Canada and around the world, the viability of these strategies is constrained by the availability of affordable and appropriate housing. If we want to provide people the opportunity to leave homelessness, we need to invest in housing. We are calling for increased investments in housing and homelessness that would only require an additional investment of \$50 per Canadian, per year. That's less than \$1 per week to put an end to homelessness in Canada.

The good news is that the Government of Canada has committed to developing a new National Housing Strategy. In order to be effective, the current government's National Housing Strategy must be matched with funding that will ensure all Canadians have safe, appropriate, and affordable housing. This includes ensuring that the necessary supports are in place for everyone along the homelessness continuum, from unsheltered to at risk of homelessness.

## Building on the success of Housing First

Research has shown that Housing First is very effective (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, 2013). Overwhelming evidence from the *At Home/Chez Soi* project and other research demonstrates the success of the model, and makes Housing First perhaps the only homelessness intervention that can truly be considered a Best Practice.

Housing First is considered both a humane and pragmatic approach to addressing homelessness. Importantly, Housing First does not simply mean putting people into housing and forgetting about them. It means providing people with housing *AND* supports in an effort to enhance recovery, wellness, and community engagement. The core principles of Housing First include:



When adopted on a large scale, Housing First can lead to real reductions in homelessness. As part of the *At Home/Chez Soi* study, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) implemented Housing First in five cities (Moncton, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver) and powerfully demonstrated that it is an effective intervention for chronically homeless populations. In addition, the Seven Cities of Alberta have made major progress in reducing homelessness by implementing Housing First, and other communities across the country are following suit. With the right investment and alignment of resources, we are poised to make considerable progress on this front.

As we move forward, Housing First must remain a key strategy in our efforts to end homelessness in Canada. A few key developments will enhance our efforts:

### Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness – Training and Technical Assistance program

In 2016 the CAEH launched a mission-based, non-profit Training and Technical Assistance Program. The mission of the program is to facilitate and accelerate the shift to Housing First and ending homelessness in Canada by providing high quality, accessible, affordable, evidence-based training and technical assistance to communities and front line workers.

The program design is based on the MHCC's Housing First Training and Technical Assistance program developed for the *At Home/Chez-Soi* project. Experience from that project, the United States, as well as Canada has shown that training and support is key to success in the adoption and successful

implementation of Housing First. In June 2016, the Government of Canada, through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, announced a \$1.8 million investment over 2.5 years to support the CAEH's delivery of Housing First training to HPS designated communities.

## 20,000 Homes Campaign

Spearheaded by the CAEH, the [20,000 Homes Campaign](#) is a national movement of communities working together to house 20,000 of Canada's most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness by July 1, 2018.



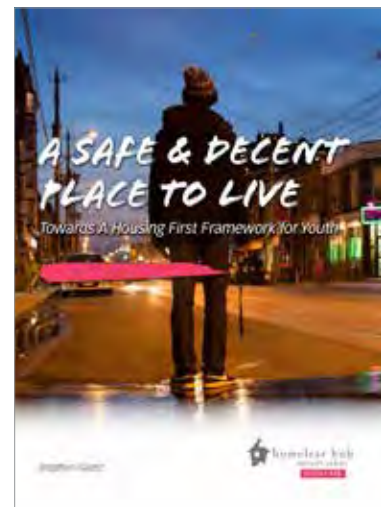
The campaign typically kicks off with a Registry Week – a community-wide effort to identify by name every person experiencing homelessness within the community, assess and document their specific needs, and prioritize them for housing based on their vulnerability. Campaign communities then set ambitious housing targets, turn the Registry Week lists into by-name lists, improve the coordination of their housing and homeless systems, and begin the work of housing people using Housing First.

Presently, there are 38 communities across 8 provinces participating in the campaign. In 2016 a 20,000 Homes campaign pilot community in Hamilton, Ontario reported a 35% reduction in chronic homelessness and an 11% reduction in emergency shelter use in just one year.

## Housing First for Youth

In 2014, the COH released [A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth](#). The development of the framework recognizes and accommodates the unique needs of developing adolescents and young adults. The core principles of Housing First were modified to reflect a 'positive youth development' orientation, expanding the housing options to include youth appropriate models, as well as a range of supports to address youth-specific needs such as educational engagement and family reconnection.

[A Way Home Canada](#), in partnership with the COH, is engaged in an international pilot project to demonstrate the effectiveness of the model in different contexts, including small town and rural communities in Canada, with Indigenous youth, and with young people leaving care. Working with our partners in Europe (FEANTSA) and the United States (USICH, A Way Home America), we plan to develop the knowledge base required to rapidly expand this program in Canada.



*A Safe and Decent Place to Live:  
Towards a Housing First  
Framework for Youth*

## Addressing the needs of key populations is crucial for ending homelessness in Canada

If we truly want to prevent and end homelessness in Canada, we have to address the special needs and circumstances of key populations. In the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2016*, we will focus on three groups where there are emerging signs of progress:



### Indigenous Homelessness

Indigenous Peoples in Canada are significantly overrepresented among homeless populations, disproportionately at risk of becoming homeless, and face significant barriers to housing affordability. Recent research has shown that Indigenous homelessness is increasing rapidly, particularly in urban settings (Belanger, Awosoga, & Weasel Head, 2013), and that 28-34% of the shelter population is Indigenous (EDSC, 2016).

**INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS IS INCREASING RAPIDLY,**  
*particularly in urban settings*



**28-34% OF THE SHELTER POPULATION IS INDIGENOUS**

We cannot speak of ending homelessness in Canada unless we are willing to confront and address the historical roots and ongoing drivers of Indigenous homelessness. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada powerfully demonstrated that the historic, systemic, and ongoing discrimination of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples constitutes a cultural genocide. The Commission identified their final report as a watershed moment where apologies, reparations, and change can begin:

Reconciliation must become a way of life. It will take many years to repair damaged trust and relationships in Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Reconciliation not only requires apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada's national history, and public commemoration, but also needs real social, political, and economic change (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015:238).

Prime Minister Trudeau has promised to fully implement all 94 of the Commission's recommendations, and it is essential that all responses to Indigenous homelessness share that same commitment.

In tackling Indigenous homelessness, our work must also begin with a focus on Indigenous-led understandings and solutions to Indigenous homelessness. Given the shift towards reconciliation, we have the opportunity to build the supports, policy, and infrastructure that are culturally appropriate, community-led, and attentive to the unique dimensions of Indigenous homelessness.

## Homeless Veterans

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on the plight of Armed Forces veterans who experience homelessness. Research has shown that approximately 2,950 veterans are experiencing homelessness, representing 2.2% of the homeless population in Canada (ESDC, 2016). Alcohol and drug addiction are key drivers of veteran homelessness, followed by mental health challenges (including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)), and difficulty transitioning to civilian life. In 2012, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and Veterans Affairs Canada launched *The Canadian Model for Housing and Support for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness*. This two-year pilot project uses different programming models (focused on Housing First) in four Canadian cities (Calgary, London, Toronto and Victoria) in order to identify and develop best practices to address veteran homelessness.

approximately  
**2,950 VETERANS**  
EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS



**VETERANS REPRESENT  
2.2% OF THE HOMELESS  
POPULATION IN CANADA**

It is expected that as part of the National Housing Strategy, collaboration between the HPS and Veterans Affairs Canada will continue and there will be a strategic investment to address veteran homelessness.

## Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness is an urgent issue given that approximately 20% of all Canadians experiencing homelessness are between the ages of 13 and 24. This means that over the course of the year there are 35-40,000 young people who experience homelessness, and on any given night at least 6,000. There are no indications that these numbers are declining. To tackle the problem, we must begin by recognizing that youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness in terms of its causes and solutions.

approximately  
**20% OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING  
HOMELESSNESS ARE BETWEEN THE  
AGES OF 13 AND 24**



**35,000-40,000**  
YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE  
HOMELESSNESS OVER THE YEAR

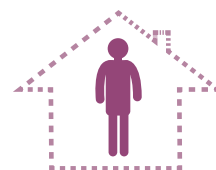
on any given night  
**AT LEAST 6,000**  
YOUNG PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS

For a long time youth homelessness has not been a primary focus for most communities and instead has been a secondary concern to the larger problem of adult and chronic homelessness. Fortunately, there have been positive developments in addressing youth homelessness in recent years. Many communities in Canada have moved toward developing targeted strategies to address youth homelessness, and many more have indicated they would like to. At least two provincial governments (Alberta and Ontario) have declared that youth homelessness is a priority within their provincial strategies to address homelessness.

The emergence of A Way Home Canada has also had a big impact. A Way Home is a coalition of national organizations dedicated to preventing, reducing, and ending youth homelessness in Canada. For A Way Home, ending youth homelessness requires a shift to preventing the problem, rather than managing it, and implementing Housing First for Youth strategies across the country. A Way Home plans to support communities and governments to make this shift by providing the conceptual and on the ground support for effective community planning, service integration, and the alignment of strategies and resources for maximum impact at the national, provincial, territorial, and community levels.

As funders in government and the philanthropic sector come to recognize the importance of addressing youth homelessness, there is a chance to make real progress on this issue.

## Homelessness prevention is key!



There are three things we can do to address homelessness:

- First, we must prevent it by putting in place **mechanisms to stop or greatly reduce the risk that people will become homeless** in the first place.
- Second, we must **continue to provide emergency services** (e.g., shelters, drop ins, day programs) given that, regardless of the strength of our prevention strategies, some people may still lose their housing.
- Third, we must **move people into housing with necessary supports** as rapidly as possible in order to decrease the amount of time they spend without housing.

While we have primarily focused on providing emergency responses, in recent years we have been getting better at moving people out of homelessness through the use of Housing First and community plans. Nonetheless, it has become clear that neither Housing First nor affordable housing are enough, on their own, to end homelessness. We also need to prevent homelessness.

Unlike in Europe and Australia, there has been a resistance in Canada and the United States to address the inflow into homelessness through a comprehensive prevention strategy. While the language of homelessness prevention is sometimes used in policy circles in Canada, it is rarely well conceptualized and in practice has not been a financial or strategic priority in most jurisdictions. As we enter the third phase of our response to homelessness, we need to enhance our focus on prevention.

*“I think it is interesting how the phrase ‘the homeless’ distracts from the fact that homelessness is a symptom of policy failure. I don’t accept the position of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ I don’t accept blaming individuals for giant holes in our safety nets and communities.” - Stasha*

*An excerpt from *Homelessness is Only One Piece of my Puzzle: Implications for Policy and Practice* (2015: 99)*

As a first step, we must develop a clearer understanding of what homelessness prevention is and collect real-time data to target our efforts. Few would disagree that we should prevent homelessness. However, there is often confusion and/or resistance about how to do so.

In response to this, the COH will release a comprehensive framework for homelessness prevention in early 2017. The Homelessness Prevention Framework will guide communities as they move in this direction. The proposed definition of homelessness prevention builds on the public health model of prevention.



- **PRIMARY PREVENTION** addresses structural and systems factors that more broadly contribute to housing precarity and the risk of homelessness. The focus of this work is to reduce the likelihood that anyone becomes homeless in the first place.
- **SECONDARY PREVENTION** refers to a range of strategies and interventions directed at individuals and families who are either at imminent risk of homelessness or who have recently experienced homelessness. This might include early intervention and evictions prevention, for instance. Secondary prevention strategies typically require both an approach to systems integration and coordination (coordinated intake, shared information management systems), as well as specific interventions designed to divert homelessness or reduce the time spent homeless. Finally,
- **TERTIARY PREVENTION** provides access to housing and necessary supports to individuals and families who are chronically homeless and have complex needs, thereby reducing the risk that they will become homeless again.

Importantly, primary, secondary and tertiary prevention do not represent discrete and separate categories. As Culhane (2010) notes: “These prevention classifications should more be seen as ranges in a continuum, with boundaries between them being somewhat indeterminate. And, as shall be shown, in these gray areas lie the most practical intervention points for prevention initiatives” (p. 3).

In addition to articulating these three levels of prevention, The COH Homelessness Prevention Framework includes a formal definition and typology, as outlined on the following page.

## Definition of Homelessness Prevention

Homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness, or for those who have been homeless, reduce the risk of recurrence.

### TYOLOGY OF HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

The different categories in this typology identify, organize, and describe the range of activities that are considered central to homelessness prevention, and include:

#### 1. Structural Prevention:

Structural prevention means working upstream to address structural and systemic factors that contribute to housing precarity and expose individuals and families to the risk of homelessness. The goal is to enhance housing stability by promoting income security, access to appropriate housing, inclusion, safety, wellness, and security of tenure. Structural prevention lies largely in the domain of primary prevention, however it provides a necessary “backbone” of policies, funding mechanisms, and strategies to support secondary and tertiary prevention. It is the work of higher levels of government and requires a degree of systems integration across different jurisdictions within governments.

#### 2. Institutional Transition Support:

Institutional transition support is necessary for individuals transitioning from public systems (e.g., hospital, corrections, child protection) who are considered to be at high risk of homelessness. Institutional transition support requires that key departments of government (e.g., health, justice, child and family services) implement prevention policies and practices to support the rights of all individuals that engage public institutions, and to support communities with the provision of targeted interventions (secondary prevention) for individuals who are considered to be at highest risk of homelessness. Policies and interventions must guarantee that individuals and families have access to effective transitional planning and supports as required.

#### 3. Early intervention strategies:

Early intervention strategies include policies, practices, and interventions that help individuals and families who are at extreme risk of homelessness, or who have recently experienced homelessness, to obtain the supports needed to retain their current housing or rapidly access new and appropriate housing. Early intervention strategies can broadly target vulnerable populations who may not be imminently at risk of homelessness (primary prevention), as well as individuals and families who are at high risk of losing their home or have recently become homeless (secondary prevention).

#### 4. Eviction prevention:

Eviction prevention includes programs and strategies designed to keep individuals and families at risk of eviction in their home and help them avoid homelessness. This includes landlord/tenant legislation and policy, rent controls and supplements, housing education (primary prevention), and crisis supports for people immanently at risk of eviction (secondary prevention).

#### 5. Housing stabilization:

Housing stabilization involves initiatives and supports that help people exit homelessness in a timely way and never experience it again (secondary and tertiary prevention).



## A shift to system coordination and real-time data

Another indication that we are on the precipice of a shift towards more effective responses to homelessness is the embracing of system coordination and the collection of real-time data. Both are required to appropriately target housing and prevention interventions and investments.

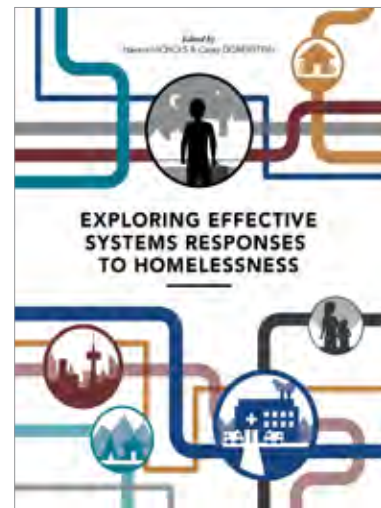


When we examine the jurisdictions in Canada and the United States that have been most effective in addressing homelessness, we see some common practices that have successfully reduced homelessness. These shared practices lay critical groundwork for a shift to prevention. Successful communities appear to be doing these five things differently:

### 1. They focus on systems integration.

Because homelessness is a systemic problem involving numerous sectors, institutions, and agencies, it requires more integrated system responses in terms of governance, policy, and programs. Systems integration is a community-wide, formalized and coordinated approach to planning, service delivery and management. Systems integration aims to align services to avoid duplication, improve information sharing, increase efficiency and performance (e.g., reduce wait-times, improve housing outcomes) and provide a seamless care experience for individuals and families.

Systems integration uses a “**no wrong door**” approach. This means that no matter where a person enters the system, that person can access any service they require. Service-access is not granted on a “first-come, first-served” basis. Rather, streamlined assessment and referral protocols are used to ensure that people receive the services they need and want at any given time.



*Exploring Effective Systems Responses to Homelessness*  
[www.homelesshub.ca/systemsresponses](http://www.homelesshub.ca/systemsresponses)

### 2. They focus their efforts on Housing First.

As we have discussed here and in previous reports, Housing First as a program model has proven extremely effective. The most successful communities have gone further and begun to apply Housing First principles as a system design philosophy. In other words, they begin to refocus their homeless system on ending homelessness, embedding the work in the right to housing, ensuring consumer choice, providing housing first rapidly (without preconditions), as well as providing appropriate and individualized supports that follow a recovery and harm reduction orientation.

### **3. They focus on and pay for the outcomes they want.**

For too long, governments and funders have paid non-profits to deliver services, whether or not those services end people's homelessness. The most successful jurisdictions pay for housing outcomes.

### **4. They gather real-time, person-specific information.**

Successful communities coordinate across their shelters, service providers, and street outreach teams to identify by name every person experiencing homelessness. They then assess and document their specific needs, and follow through with them until they are housed. These real-time, by-name lists matter because as much as 85% of those who experience homelessness in Canada also escape it quickly on their own. Research shows that this group needs far less support than those with complex needs, but without a comprehensive way to account for each person, communities are unable to target their resources effectively. They often end up spending large amounts on people who need only minor help, leaving less money for those with deeper needs. Real-time, by-name data collection allows us to answer these key questions for each community:

1. How many people entered homelessness for the first time last month?
2. Who are they? What do they need? Where did they come from?
3. How many people exited homelessness for permanent housing?
4. How many people did we lose track of or became "inactive"?
5. How many previously inactive people reappeared?
6. What is the total number of people currently experiencing homelessness?

In gathering this information, successful communities begin to not only coordinate their responses, but also to understand who is becoming homeless, why, and the pathways they travel into homelessness.

### **5. They use their by-name lists to drive system coordination.**

In most communities, a complex tangle of agencies and organizations are involved in different pieces of the housing process. The best communities align those groups around a shared, measurable, time-bound goal, and then use a by-name list to drive progress toward that goal every month. Armed with the data from their by-name lists, communities can begin to plan for prevention activities.

## All Hands on Deck – Active and engaged government

We will not solve homelessness in Canada unless all levels of government are engaged and invested in preventing and ending homelessness. Encouragingly, all levels of government are active participants in this next phase of our response to homelessness. The federal government has continued its investment in homelessness since 1999, when it launched the National Homelessness Initiative. Unfortunately the annual expenditure for the renamed Homelessness Partnering Strategy has declined quite dramatically since that time from \$349 million in 1999 (adjusted for inflation) to \$119 million when it was renewed in 2013. Fortunately, in the 2016 budget an additional \$111.8 million was added over the next two years, indicating the new government's commitment to addressing homelessness. Still, there is work to be done as the current Homelessness Partnering Strategy is set to expire in 2019. The forthcoming National Housing Strategy presents an opportunity to integrate an enhanced homelessness strategy and investment with a comprehensive plan to expand our affordable housing supply.

*Fortunately, in the 2016 budget an additional \$111.8 million was added over the next two years, indicating the new government's commitment to addressing homelessness.*

At the provincial and territorial level, there are also big changes afoot. Provincial and territorial governments are key in the fight to end homelessness because their responsibilities extend to so many institutions and systems that impact homelessness, including not only housing and municipalities, but healthcare (e.g. mental health and addictions), income support, child and family services, education, employment and training and justice. Ten years ago not a single province or territory had a focused strategy to address homelessness. Today, four provinces – including Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and Newfoundland/Labrador – have coordinated strategies.

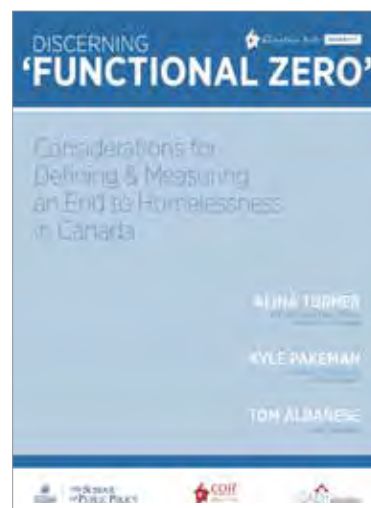
Enhanced collaboration between the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, municipalities, and Indigenous governments opens the door for a more focused and systemic response to homelessness in Canada.

# Is preventing and ending homelessness in Canada possible?

As the notion of ‘ending homelessness’ increasingly shapes public policy debates, there is a need to provide more clarity about exactly what this means. Does it mean that no one will ever experience homelessness? That is a promise that is difficult to keep because in spite of our best prevention efforts, personal circumstances are still likely to result in some individuals and families falling into homelessness.

Many communities have moved in the direction of focusing on ‘functional zero’ as a way of describing an end to homelessness. While there are signs of progress in moving in this direction – Medicine Hat being the first community to likely achieve this in Canada – there still is no international consensus on what an end to homelessness actually involves, and what indicators and targets will be necessary to confirm that we have actually achieved this goal.

To this end, the COH, the University of Calgary’s School of Public Policy (SPP), and the CAEH are currently involved in a collaborative process to develop a national definition of an end to homelessness. Dr. Alina Turner and her associates (Kyle Pakeman & Tom Albanese) released a working paper earlier this year, titled: *[Discerning ‘Functional Zero’ - Considerations for Defining & Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada](#)*. Presently, Turner and the COH are seeking feedback on the working paper from stakeholders across the country.



*Discerning ‘Functional Zero’:  
Considerations for Defining and  
Measuring an End to Homelessness  
in Canada*  
[www.homelesshub.ca/functionalzero](http://www.homelesshub.ca/functionalzero)

This work affirms our argument that we can prevent and end homelessness in Canada. In fact, this work highlights our belief that the homelessness sector alone cannot solve homelessness, nor can we simply wait until people become (chronically) homeless before we address the issue.

“Key public systems, particularly health, corrections, and child protection, are well known to have key roles in mitigating or perpetuating homelessness. Further, broader policies and attitudes in society influence such factors as the supply of housing and migration, which in turn impact inflows and demand at the community level. It is unrealistic to expect that a city’s homeless-serving system can manage such external drivers at the macro-economic level, though it may have the ability to exercise some degree of influence. Nonetheless, an

end to homelessness requires changes across these levels, even if we are limited from a data perspective on local communities' homeless response for now" (Turner et al., 2016:22).

Turner and her colleagues propose a socio-ecological model that will identify three inter-related dimensions for addressing homelessness. Standards and performance measures across all three dimensions will be necessary for communities to declare they have reached functional zero.

## 1. The perspectives of people with lived experience

"First and foremost, an end to homelessness must resonate for those experiencing homeless and housing instability. If the way we define and measure Functional Zero falls short of the on-the-ground realities of those experiencing homelessness, then we are on the wrong track" (Turner et al., 2016:23).

## 2. Homelessness-Serving System

Communities must work towards aligning services and systems to reduce the time anyone experiences homelessness, and the negative consequences that result from that experience. This means a well-functioning crisis response with effective early intervention strategies embedded within a 'system of care' framework. "There is no doubt that a well-functioning system of care focused on ending homelessness, with performance measures and quality assurance standards, can make significant strides towards ending homelessness. Ideally, the lived experience perspective will confirm the trends performance metrics uncover, though this cannot be assumed" (Turner et al., 2016:23).

## 3. Public systems

All orders of government must commit to policies, strategies, and investments that enhance housing stability and provide individuals and families with access to necessary crisis intervention and support when they need it. Higher levels of government must be able to ensure that different ministries work in an integrated way to enhance housing stability for community members, and further to ensure that the homelessness sector is embedded within this systems approach. Key public systems responses (with methods and metrics to assess effectiveness) should include:

- "Adequate supply of safe, appropriate, affordable housing.
- Discharging practices from public systems that promote housing stability.
- Not criminalizing homelessness.
- Alignment of public systems at policy and service delivery levels to identify and effectively intervene with those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- Level of access to appropriate mainstream services by homeless/at risk persons.
- Public systems capacity to develop preventative approaches that mitigate homelessness risk" (Turner et al., 2016:23).

## Conclusion

As we move into a new phase of addressing homelessness in Canada, we go forward with optimism that we can truly prevent and end homelessness across the country. Our collective understanding about how to address homelessness – through Housing First, systems integration, and prevention - is rapidly expanding. Our thinking about how to address the needs of specific populations is not only developing quickly, but we are now implementing these learnings in practice.

Enhancing the knowledge base is not enough. We need commitment and investment to truly turn the corner on homelessness in Canada. Communities are moving towards more effective strategies. We have four provincial governments that are strategically addressing homelessness. Finally, we have a federal government that is committed to addressing the problem.

The new National Housing Strategy provides a crucial opportunity to move the yardsticks on this important problem. The recommendations at the end of this report highlight how we can shape a national strategy in this regard.

**WE CAN END HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA, IF WE WANT TO.**

## 2. What do we know about homelessness in Canada today?

Good data is important for addressing any complex social issue. It helps us understand the nature and nuances of the problem, contributes to effective planning and systems management, and helps measure progress towards a solution. In the past, Canada has struggled in its efforts to address homelessness because of a lack of systematic data gathering. Consequently we've faced an inability to do quality data analysis in many communities, as well as at the local, provincial/territorial and national levels.

However, things have been steadily improving in recent years. Communities are getting better at data gathering, and there is growing recognition that data is beneficial to local efforts to end homelessness. For instance, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' 20,000 Homes campaign has enhanced communities' abilities to gather data in order to prioritize for Housing First. Similarly, the Government of Canada has dramatically improved its Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) – an electronic records management system built for, and in consultation with, community stakeholders. It is free to use and is designed to assist shelters with daily operations, while also enabling communities to collect statistics about the population accessing services for the purposes of local planning. Two other key developments that are helping us better understand homelessness in Canada are Point-in-Time Counts and the National Shelter Survey.

### Point-in-Time Counts

Point-in-Time (PiT) Counts provide a snapshot of homelessness in a community over a set period of time, generally 24 hours. Traditionally, PiT Counts measure absolute homelessness. Absolute homelessness refers to individuals who are staying in unsheltered locations (e.g., parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings), emergency shelters, and fixed-term transitional housing.

In practice, a PiT Count is a community-wide exercise. Volunteers spend several hours surveying people living outdoors or accessing homelessness services, such as emergency shelters. As a result, PiT Counts yield two types of information: (1) the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in a community on a given night (often referred to as “the count”), and (2) information on the population such as demographics, history of homelessness, and service needs. Communities that conduct counts

successively can use the data to measure progress towards ending homelessness and identify important trends (e.g., increases/decreases among certain populations such as Indigenous Peoples, youth, and veterans).

In 2016, the Government of Canada supported Canada's first coordinated PiT Count across provinces and territories. While a handful of communities in Canada – including Toronto, Vancouver and several Albertan cities – had previously conducted counts, the coordinated count marked a major step towards a better understanding of homelessness across Canada.

Over half of the 61 Homelessness Partnering Strategy's (HPS) [Designated Communities](#) participated in the 2016 Coordinated Count. In addition to the data yielded from the count there were several benefits:

- Many communities conducted a PiT Count for the first time. Consequently, through the coordinated count, we saw an increase in our collective capacity to measure homelessness.
- All participating communities adopted a standard survey, referred to as [The Core Questions](#). By doing so, we moved closer to a national picture of who is experiencing homelessness in Canada and why.
- Communities that elected not to participate in the coordinated count (for varying reasons) are now adopting many of the Core Questions, thus improving the consistency of our national data collection.

The HPS has announced a second nationally-coordinated count in 2018. More communities are expected to participate. The 2018 Coordinated Count will build on the successes of the 2016 count, with an increased focus on engaging youth and fostering Indigenous partnerships. With a baseline established in 2016, the 2018 Coordinated Count will provide a significant opportunity to assess our progress towards ending homelessness.

### POINT-IN-TIME COUNT RESOURCES

The COH, in partnership with the HPS, created a number of resources for communities participating in the 2016 Coordinated Count. These resources were designed to complement HPS' [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#). The COH will update the following in preparation for the 2018 Coordinated Count:

- [Point-in-Time Count Toolkit](#)
- [Engaging Youth \[Module\]](#)
- [Fostering Partnerships with Indigenous Peoples \[Module\]](#)
- [PiT Count Discussion Board \[Community Workspace on Homelessness\]](#)

### ST. JOHN'S YOUTH COUNT PILOT

In November 2016, End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ) will lead St. John's first Point-in-Time Count. In partnership with the HPS and the COH, EHSJ will pilot new and innovative approaches to engaging youth in the planning and implementation of the count. It is hoped that better engagement of youth will result in more accurate enumeration of youth experiencing homelessness. The St. John's Youth Count comes just weeks after Kamloops conducted their first youth count on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2016. In 2017, the COH will update its guidance on engaging youth in PiT Counts - including the Youth Count Toolkit funded by the Laidlaw Foundation - based on the findings from St. John's, Kamloops and other communities.



## Highlights from the National Shelter Study 2005-2014

In the fall of 2016, the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) released its second national analysis of homelessness emergency shelter data, which provides important baseline data and defines key characteristics of the homeless population (ESDC, 2016). The first study, conducted in 2012 (Segaert, 2012), covered the period 2005-2009 and contributed to the first reliable estimates of the scale and scope of homelessness in Canada. The results of this study were presented in the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2013* report.

The new report examines emergency shelter data through 2005-2014.<sup>1</sup> Emergency shelter data is a good source of information on homelessness in Canada. There are currently approximately 399 different emergency shelters with 15,429 beds across the country.

### Key Findings:

#### THE NUMBER OF SHELTER USERS IS FALLING

The number of Canadians using emergency shelters in 2014 was 136,865. This represents a drop of almost 20,000 since 2005, and is part of a steady decline since that time. The data on declining shelter use does not tell us what factors may have contributed to this decline. In other words, it is difficult to attribute this decline to changes in the way we approach homelessness, such as the introduction of ten year plans in Alberta between 2007-2010 or Housing First, or the influence of factors external to the sector.

#### MOST SHELTER STAYS ARE INFREQUENT AND SHORT TERM

Between 2010-2014, an estimated 450,000 Canadians used an emergency shelter at least once. Most shelter stays were short term, with around 70% using shelters in only one of five years (2% used shelters every year).

While most shelter stays are quite short (on average less than 10 days for youth and adults) for some groups, the length of stay has increased considerably. In particular seniors (50+) and families stay on average more than 20 days. The length of stay for all types of shelter users increased from 2005 to 2014.



IN 2014 THERE WERE ALMOST  
**20,000 FEWER**  
**PEOPLE USING**  
**EMERGENCY SHELTERS**  
*than in 2005*



*most shelter stays*  
**ARE BRIEF WITH YOUTH**  
**AND ADULTS STAYING ON**  
**AVERAGE 10 DAYS**

**BUT FOR ADULTS (50+) AND**  
**FAMILIES, THE AVERAGE**  
**LENGTH OF STAY IS**  
**2X AS LONG**

1. Methods: The study drew on emergency shelter data from 200 emergency shelters collected between 2005-2014, drawn from HIFIS, BC Housing, the City of Toronto, and the Province of Alberta. The study uses a stratified cluster sample of emergency shelters with eight strata based on the target clientele of shelters, including: male youth, female youth, co-ed youth, male general, female general, co-ed general, women/women with children and family. A few words of caution about the data:

- Violence Against Women shelters and transitional housing are not included.
- The data is dependent upon the existence of emergency shelters. Communities with few or no shelters will not have significant homeless data to report.
- People who are homeless and do not use emergency shelters (unsheltered) are not included.
- Most shelters operate at over 90% capacity, so the data does not record individuals and families who came to shelters but were turned away because there was no space.

**THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE USING SHELTERS HAS DECREASED, BUT THE NUMBER OF BED NIGHTS USED BY INDIVIDUALS IS INCREASING**

It is good news that the number of people using shelters has decreased. However, the flip side is that the number of bed nights used (that is, the number of times an individual or family uses an emergency shelter in a given year) has actually increased between 2010 and 2014. Moreover, the number of stays lasting 30 days or more increased from 9.1% in 2005 to 12% in 2014. Finally, the national occupancy rate – the percentage of shelter beds that are being used on a given night - has increased between 2005 (82% of beds full) and 2014 (92.4% of beds full).



**THE NATIONAL OCCUPANCY RATE**  
*– how full shelters are –*  
**INCREASED BY MORE THAN 10% BETWEEN 2005-2014**

FIGURE 1 **Estimated number of annual shelter users**

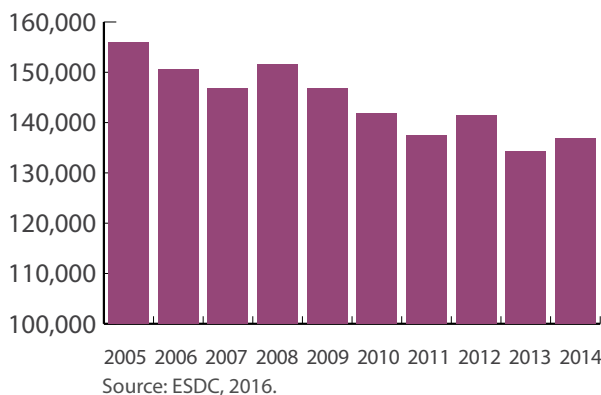
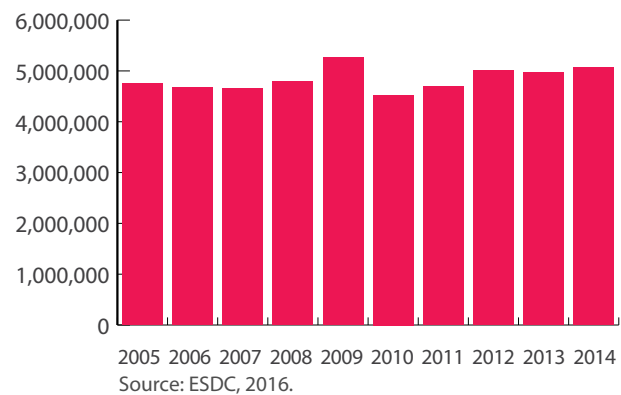


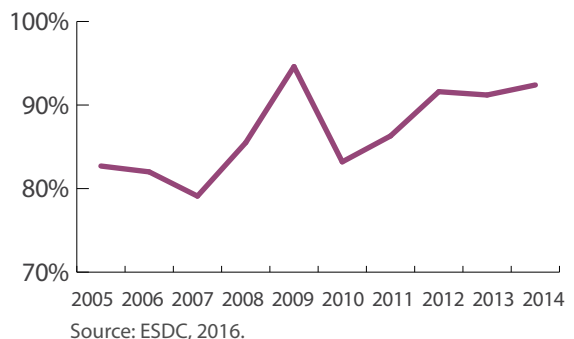
FIGURE 2 **Estimated number of annual bed nights used**



**CANADA’S EMERGENCY SHELTER SYSTEM IS OPERATING AT OVER 90% CAPACITY**

In 2005, Canada’s emergency shelters were on average operating at 82.7% capacity. By 2014, shelters were operating at 92.4% capacity, indicating that there has been an incredible strain on the emergency shelter system. Operating near system capacity prevents us from getting a real handle on the scope of the homeless population, particularly because we do not systematically keep track of people who are turned away from shelters because they are full, or those individuals who avoid accessing shelters because they believe they are overcrowded or unsafe. So while the numbers of shelter users has decreased slightly over 10 years, the strain on shelter capacity, and the fact that the average number of bed nights per person has increased, suggests we are not responding as effectively as we could in order to move people out of homelessness.

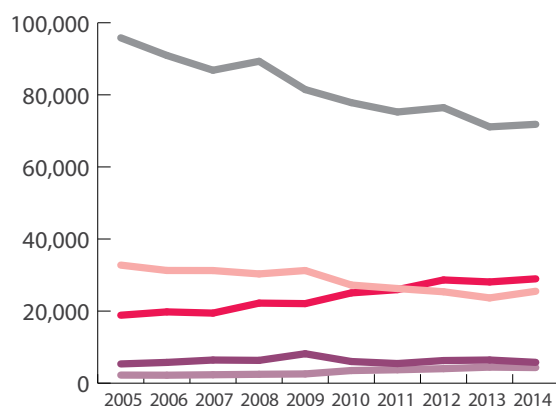
FIGURE 3 **National shelter occupancy rate**



## Who is homeless?

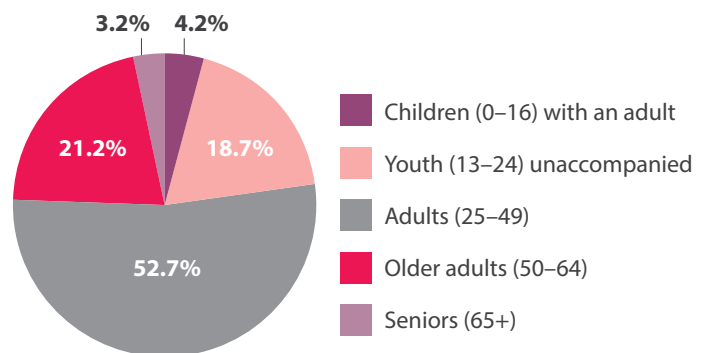
- Adults (25-49), at 52%, make up the largest age group of people who are homeless.
- Youth unaccompanied by adults (13-24), make up 18.7% of the homeless population, a decline of 2.4 percentage points since 2005.
- Women make up 27.3% of the homeless population, a figure that has not changed over the last ten years.
- Indigenous Peoples are greatly overrepresented amongst homeless shelter users, making up between 27.7% and 33.5% of the sample, while Indigenous Peoples make up less than 5% of the general population.
- There are approximately 2,950 veterans using emergency shelters, making up 2.2% of the shelter population.
- Family homelessness continues to be a problem in Canada. Family shelters continue to operate at high occupancy since 2008, and on average families stay in shelters twice as long as individuals. Women (89%) are most likely to be the head of families in shelters, and their average age is 34.
- Seniors (65+) make up a very small percentage of homeless shelter users (less than 4%) but, along with older adults (50-64), are the only demographic age groups for whom shelter use has increased over the last ten years. For instance, in 2005 there were 2,244 seniors staying in emergency shelters, and in 2014 there were 4,332. This increase is partly explained by the aging of the population, but the rate of shelter use among seniors has increased even taking into consideration the aging population.

FIGURE 4 **Estimated number of shelter users by age group**



Source: ESDC, 2016.

FIGURE 5 **Percentage of shelter users by age group (2014)**



Source: ESDC, 2016.

As Canada's knowledge base on homelessness expands, it is essential that this knowledge be translated into policy and practice. Robust data and rigorous research is not enough to end homelessness. Research that reveals that most shelters are operating at over 90% capacity, or that seniors' use of emergency shelters is increasing, is only valuable if it is translated into action. The real value of this knowledge lies in its ability to foster political will and guide more effective solutions to homelessness. This means that now, more than ever before, it is time to foster stronger links between research, policy, and practice.

Fortunately, evidence-based approaches, policies, and solutions are increasingly being adopted in communities across Canada. The next section turns to a review of some recent developments in Canada, many of which provide examples of how research can be used in our efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

## 3. What's happening in Canada?

### Developments at the federal, provincial/territorial and community levels

There is a sense nationally, provincially/territorially and locally, that we are on the cusp of a new chapter in our efforts to prevent and end homelessness. New funding opportunities, evidence-based policy creation, and unprecedented collaboration amongst stakeholders across sectors, all point to the potential for a seismic shift in Canada's approach to homelessness. We now have an opportunity to make a real impact on the lives of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

#### Federal Government

In 2015, Canada saw a change in federal government and a renewed appetite for federal involvement in housing and homelessness. While there has been some investment in the past two decades, such as the development of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH), funding has continually been short-term and these programs are a fraction of the federal support that existed prior to the 1990s. Research has shown that two of the main drivers of homelessness are the termination of federal funding for social housing and the complete transfer of social housing to provincial governments over the last 25 years (Gaetz, 2010). Since that time, Canada has held the dubious reputation of being the only G8 country without a national housing strategy. Fortunately, there are signs that tides are turning.

#### BUDGET 2016

The 2016 federal budget signaled positive movement in terms of funding for homelessness programs and affordable housing. Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development,

suggested that the “the Government of Canada is back at the table” with regards to housing and homelessness (CMHC, 2016).

The federal investments come in two phases. Phase 1 provides ‘transitional measures’ for immediate short-term infrastructure plans over two years, announced in the 2016 budget. Phase 2 is a long-term infrastructure plan spanning eight years that includes the development of a National Housing Strategy. While the investments outlined in the 2016 budget are modest and do not remedy the significant losses in federal investment in housing that have occurred over the last 25 years, the federal government’s allocated funding and expression of interest in pursuing housing and homelessness solutions are encouraging. The budget calls for \$3.4 billion in social infrastructure investment over five years. Included in this is \$2.2 billion in affordable housing spending over two years, with \$739 million devoted to First Nations, Inuit, and northern housing (see Chapter 2, *Growth for the Middle Class*). The spending is broken down into several key elements:

- ***Investment in Affordable Housing Initiative (IAH):*** Administered through Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the IAH program provides federal investments that are matched by the provinces and territories to fund the construction of new affordable housing units, renovate and repair existing units, improve housing affordability through rent supplements, and foster safe, independent living. The 2016 budget doubles the IAH investment by \$504.4 million over two years. The government estimates that 100,000 Canadian households can be supported through the increased funding, however, as noted in the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*, this affordable housing plan does not create affordable housing specifically for people who are homeless.
- ***Affordable Housing for Seniors:*** In an effort to support Canada’s greying population, the budget targets affordable housing for seniors by providing \$200.7 million over two years for the construction, renovation, repair, and adaptation of approximately 5,000 housing units (this funding does not need to be matched by the provinces and territories).
- ***Investment in Social Housing:*** The government is devoting \$573.9 million over two years to repair, renovate, and retrofit for energy efficiency some of the 570,000 federally supported social housing units. Non-profit housing organizations, such as the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA), point out that this investment amounts to just over \$1,000 in investment per unit, which falls short of the billions of dollars worth of repair backlogs.
- ***Rent Subsidies:*** The long-term operating agreements that provided federal funding to social housing providers to offset mortgage costs, and in some cases assist with operating costs, are expiring, with most ending by 2020. The budget calls for a time limited \$30 million investment over two years for the social housing projects with operating agreements that expire before March 2018.

- ***Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund:*** The government is investing \$208.3 million over five years in the new Affordable Rental Innovation Fund, which will support innovative business approaches to housing models, such as a mix of rental and home ownership.
- ***Shelters for Victims of Violence:*** \$89.9 million over two years is devoted to both the repair of existing shelters and transitional housing for victims of family violence, as well as new builds.

### **REINVESTMENT IN THE HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY (HPS)**

Another key element in the 2016 federal budget is reinvestment in the HPS. HPS provides funding in three areas: (1) 61 designated communities across Canada (largely urban centres); (2) rural and remote communities; and (3) Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness off reserve. The goal of HPS funding is to develop locally led solutions to preventing and reducing homelessness, and since 2013 HPS has made Housing First a priority.

While this shift is positive, it should be noted that funding for HPS has steadily declined from the initial investment in the National Homeless Initiative in 1999 to 2014, especially when adjusted for inflation. The original Government of Canada's allocation for homelessness in 1999 was \$753 million over three years. In subsequent years – including when the program was renamed the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2007 – the budget was either a flat-lined budget (not adjusted for inflation) or a reduced allocation. Then, when the Government of Canada announced the five-year renewal of the HPS in 2014, the annual budget was reduced once again from \$131 million to \$119 million, resulting in a decrease in funding for administration, but with a new mandate to focus more of its investment on Housing First (the largest designated communities are required to use 65% of their funding towards Housing First initiatives).

It is because of this fiscal retreat that the federal government's two-year reinvestment of an additional \$111.8 million in the HPS is so significant. While most of the reinvestment in HPS adds additional funding to the designated communities and the rural and remote homelessness stream, it also provides \$12.5 million to the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Stream – an initiative to test emerging approaches to preventing and reducing homelessness. The priorities of the new funding stream include new models for supporting Indigenous Peoples, youth, veterans, and women escaping violence.

Nevertheless, the HPS program must be renewed (it expires in 2019), and it is hoped that it will be part of the larger reinvestment in a national affordable housing strategy.

## CONSULTATIONS ON A NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

In their 2015 federal election campaign, the Liberal Party of Canada ran on a promise to create a National Housing Strategy. In June 2016, they took steps towards that promise by initiating an open consultation process with the intent of launching a National Housing Strategy by the end of the year.

The consultation began with a social media campaign asking Canadians to complete a survey on the proposed vision, principles, and themes of the National Housing Strategy. The survey ran until October 21, 2016.<sup>2</sup> The Government of Canada is due to release the results of the consultation on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016, National Housing Day.

A key aspect of the proposed strategy is the following vision statement:

All Canadians have access to housing that meets their needs and they can afford. Housing is the cornerstone of building sustainable, inclusive communities and a strong Canadian economy where we can prosper and thrive (letstalkhousing.ca).

To support this vision, the Government of Canada has proposed that the National Housing Strategy cover four key themes. As of yet, the strategy does not position housing as a human right as many have called for, but a rights-based approach may emerge during the consultation process.

- 1. Sustainability:** Environmentally resilient homes, effective laws and regulations, and housing that is financially viable and contributes to financial stability.
- 2. Affordability:** Affordable financing and land, an increased number of rental units, and properly maintaining the existing rental stock.
- 3. Inclusivity:** Providing suitable homes for individuals with specific needs such as individuals experiencing homelessness, new Canadians, Indigenous Peoples, seniors, and victims of family violence.
- 4. Flexibility:** Evidence-based practices, measurable results, and a continuum of housing options to meet the needs of Canadians in various markets.

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2. Joint recommendations for the National Housing Strategy, made by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, can be found in the conclusion of this report.

## Provincial Updates

Historically, provincial and territorial governments in Canada have been slow to develop and implement targeted strategies to address homelessness. As of 2016, there are four provincial governments that have developed homelessness strategies, including Ontario, Alberta, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. This is significant, as three years ago only one province – Alberta – had a provincial strategy. As of eight years ago, there were none. Below is a summary that highlights key activities among these four provinces.

### ONTARIO

Over the past year and a half, Ontario – Canada’s most populated province - has made progress in its efforts to end homelessness. Through a series of measures, including policy reform, increased funding and strategic targeting of specialized populations, Ontario is using evidence-based and community-led practices to build capacity to reduce poverty and end homelessness.

#### *Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy 2014-2019*

In 2014, Ontario released its second poverty reduction strategy: *Realizing our Potential: Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (2014-2019)*. The strategy focuses on three key areas: child poverty, financial security, and homelessness. The province reaffirmed its goal to reduce child poverty by 25% (using 2008 as a base year) and to end homelessness. The strategy provides increased funding for a number of existing programs such as the Affordable Housing for Ontario program and the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). The CHPI was introduced in 2013 to combine housing and homelessness funding into a single plan. This allows funding to be used for people at risk of becoming homeless more flexibly and to meet local needs. The goal is to help people experiencing homelessness obtain and retain housing and prevent those at risk from becoming homeless. In the poverty reduction strategy, Ontario committed an additional \$42 million in funding for a total of \$294 million per year. Then, in the 2016 *Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update*, the investment was enhanced by an additional \$30 million by 2018-2019 for a total of \$324 million in annual investments.

#### *The Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness*

The province of Ontario established the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, with a mandate to provide advice in three areas: defining homelessness, measuring homelessness, and determining how to prioritize and set targets for ending homelessness in Ontario. As a result, in October 2015, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs released their report *A Place to Call Home: Report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness*. In it, the panel made 23 recommendations centered on four themes:

1. *Defining homelessness*: The adoption of the *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*, developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

*“Like most people coming out of jail, I would have had to resort back to shelters, where the game never changes and you are always at ‘rock bottom’. Being forced into survival mode has its setbacks - for me, it pushed the limits on my ability to remain sober”.* - Richard

An excerpt from *Homelessness is Only One Piece of my Puzzle: Implications for Policy and Practice* (2015:66)



**2. Setting targets to end homelessness:** Setting a ten-year target to end homelessness in Ontario, while focusing on four priority groups:

1. Chronic homelessness
2. Youth homelessness
3. Aboriginal homelessness
4. Homelessness following transition from provincially-funded institutions and service systems (e.g., the child welfare system, jail, or hospitals)

**3. Measuring homelessness and collecting data to track its progress:** The creation of standard and consistent forms of data collection. This includes local efforts to enumerate homelessness, determine the number of people who are homeless in the four priority areas, and carry out equity impact assessments to highlight areas of improvement in order to ensure that some groups are not being inadvertently excluded.

**4. Expanding the evidence base and building capacity to address homelessness:** Exploring opportunities for data sharing across the province while maintaining privacy. This includes creating a common intake system for housing and homelessness service systems, supporting capacity building for municipalities to engage in cultural sensitivity and awareness, and creating long-term stabilized funding for affordable housing.

### ***Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update***

In March 2016, Ontario released its [\*Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy\*](#), an update to their 2010 strategy by the same name. The province wanted to collect evidence and best practices to inform its response to the affordable housing crisis, including an update to their vision that:

Every person has an affordable, suitable and adequate home to provide the foundation to secure employment, raise a family and build strong communities (Ontario, 2016:9).

In the report, the province commits \$178 million in funding over three years to affordable housing and pledges to create an Indigenous Housing Strategy. They also propose developing a Supportive Housing Policy Framework that will guide a more inclusionary, client-centered, flexible, innovative strategy that is driven by a common commitment to help those in need and informed by evidence-based best practices.

### **COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: HAMILTON**

The City of Hamilton is on track to end homelessness in their city. In May 2016, the city published their Housing First update showing a 35% reduction in chronic homelessness since 2014. Through the 20,000 Homes campaign, Hamilton surpassed their target and housed 184 individuals in one year. The February 2016 Point-in-Time Count revealed 138 people with acute needs experiencing chronic homelessness. The city aims to have all of these community members housed by March 31, 2017. Hamilton's progress has kept pace with their [10 year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan](#).

The report also notes an interest in developing a portable housing benefit where the assistance is tied to the individual rather than the housing unit or building, allowing for greater flexibility and consistency between recipients. The 2016 Ontario budget allocated \$2.4 million for 2016-2017 to pilot a portable housing benefit program for survivors of domestic violence, with the plan to increase funding to \$10 million in 2018/2019.

## QUEBEC

Quebec has long been at the forefront of policies that improve poverty and homelessness. This is demonstrated by the release of a number of strategies, policy changes, and funding initiatives over the last two years. Much of the work is spurred by Quebec's groundbreaking *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. Passed in 2002, the Act places the responsibility for reducing poverty squarely in the hands of the Quebec government (Smith, 2016). However, in the years following the legislation, Quebec has initiated what some describe as piecemeal responses to the issue, rather than a comprehensive approach to combatting homelessness (Mercier & Mendell, 2009).

In February 2014, the province released *Ensemble pour éviter la rue et en sortir*, its policy to address homelessness. Stemming directly from the aforementioned Act, the report provides a broad overview of homelessness in Quebec. The report reviews the systemic and individual causes of homelessness and presents a vision for preventing homelessness, rooted in human rights and dignity for all. The document outlines five axes upon which future policy should be designed:

### COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: MONTREAL

The plans outlined by the Quebec government are felt most notably in Montreal where the bulk of the province's homeless population is concentrated. The city released their own *Action Plan for 2014-2017*, where they outlined four directing principles:

**1. Knowledge sharing:** In an effort to enumerate the extent of homelessness in the city, Montreal conducted a Point-in-Time Count which identified that 3,016 people were homeless in Montreal on a given day (not including people experiencing hidden homelessness) (Latimer et al., 2015).

**2. Citizen involvement:** Montreal's Action Plan paved the way for people with lived experience of homelessness to participate in consultations regarding homelessness policy. It also called for the creation of a 'Protector of the homeless' position - an individual responsible for listening to the needs of those experiencing homelessness, advising the city on best practices, and helping to build more positive relationships between the police and people experiencing homelessness.

**3. Alternatives to homelessness:** The city plans to create 1,000 new beds with financial help from the province for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including social housing and new rooming houses.

**4. Reduce cohabitation problems in urban spaces:** Increased training for police, first responders, and social workers that interact with individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the Action Plan calls for the creation of three supervised injection sites.

In addition to the city's Action Plan, the *Mouvement pour mettre fin à l'itinérance à Montréal (MMFIM)*, an organization representing a variety of homelessness stakeholders, released its own plan in December 2015 with the goal to end chronic homelessness by 2020. In May 2016, Montreal announced it would invest \$700,000 over five years in MMFIM's Plan to end chronic and cyclical homelessness.

1. The right to housing
2. Health and social services
3. Access to income
4. Education, social inclusion, and workforce
5. Social integration

In December 2014, Quebec followed up with its Inter-Ministerial Action Plan on Homelessness 2015-2020, *Mobilisés, et engagés pour prévenir et réduire l'itinérance*. It includes data on the use of emergency shelters, transitional housing, and youth hostels. The Action Plan provides concrete models for implementing the provincial policy, consisting of 31 actions and 111 items for achieving them. These actions, which emphasize prevention and lifting people out of homelessness, include the five axes listed above as well as: supporting children, families, adults, and the elderly; addressing the needs of Indigenous Peoples; increasing knowledge on homelessness (including a systematic count of the number of people experiencing homelessness in Quebec); increasing opportunities for training and knowledge sharing; and actions for implementing policy in a coherent and consistent manner. While some have argued that there is inadequate funding for the goals outlined in the Action Plan, there is a sense that politics and policy are aligned with the aim of reducing homelessness.

## ALBERTA

Alberta has been a provincial leader in their efforts to reduce and end homelessness. Alberta was the first province to commit to ending homelessness with the release of *A Plan for Alberta Ending Homelessness in 10 Years* (2008). The plan was community-led and paralleled local commitments to end homelessness by Alberta's 7 Cities (Calgary,

## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: MEDICINE HAT

Medicine Hat, Alberta has achieved enormous success in their efforts to end homelessness, providing an example that other communities can build on. In 2009, Medicine Hat set out to end homelessness by 2015. Ending homelessness was defined as no one sleeping rough or in an emergency shelter for more than 10 days before being able to access stable housing and supports. Developed using a Housing First model, Medicine Hat housed and supported 1,013 individuals between 2009-2015. In that time, they also saw a 41% reduction in shelter use, as well as significant declines in hospital stays, trips to the emergency room, and time spent in jail.

Over the course of the last six years, stakeholders in Medicine Hat have learned that Housing First is not simply a programmatic approach to homelessness; it is a call for system reform. To achieve their goal of ending homelessness, the city has adopted five strategies:

1. A systems planning approach to develop a coordinated homeless serving system,
2. Adequate and appropriate housing and supports,
3. Systems integration and prevention to stop the flow into homelessness,
4. Using data and research to inform their approach, and
5. Leadership and sustainability to support ending homelessness in Alberta and across Canada.

In addition to these goals, Medicine Hat has also prioritized providing unique supports to address youth homelessness and culturally sensitive services for Indigenous Peoples.

Medicine Hat is now working on long-term sustainability in their system of care, which requires creating and maintaining more permanent supportive housing units and increasing their capacity to provide Intensive Case Management and rapid re-housing. The city is also moving upstream towards innovative and effective prevention strategies that will stop those at risk from becoming homeless.

Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Medicine Hat, Red Deer and Wood Buffalo). Despite early progress, the province is unlikely to meet its goal to end homelessness by 2019, in part due to the recent economic downturn. Encouragingly, however, the 2016 Alberta budget committed to investing \$892 million in funds to build and renovate affordable housing, reaffirming housing and homelessness as a priority area.

Alberta has made a significant impact on the lives of many homeless Albertans through its investment in affordable housing, its provincial plan to end homelessness, and the adoption of ten year plans in Alberta's 7 Cities. According to the 7 Cities website, Housing First clients report:

- 85% fewer days in jail,
- 64% fewer days in hospital,
- 60% fewer interactions with Emergency Medical Services,
- 60% fewer emergency room visits, and
- 57% fewer interactions with police (7 Cities, n.d.).

A further indication of progress is Alberta's commitment to youth homelessness. In 2015, the province released [\*Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness\*](#). This was the first provincial youth homelessness strategy in Canada and emphasized the need to focus on prevention efforts.

## NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

In recent years, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has prioritized reducing and ending homelessness. In 2014, the province released [\*A Road Map for Ending Homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador\*](#). The Road Map calls for a move away from the historic focus on emergency shelters. Instead, it advocates for a reorientation of the service delivery system, including a centralized approach to provincial funding, developing Housing First mandates for service delivery agents, identifying barriers and finding solutions to accessing housing services and shifting to structured assessments and prioritization for service delivery. The Road Map outlines four strategic priorities:

- 1. System transformation with strong provincial leadership:** The creation of a shared vision and collaborative approach across the province.
- 2. Strengthen homelessness prevention:** Training for service providers on diversion, as well as the implementation of a pre-screening tool to identify those requiring prevention services.
- 3. Enhance housing and support programming:** The alignment of existing programs with a Housing First philosophy, development of a coordinated access and assessment system, increases in Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing programs across the province, and improved access to social and transitional housing.
- 4. Improved information sharing and performance management:** The development of protocols for data collection and sharing, as well as training on how to use these tools.

The Road Map indicates a new direction for Newfoundland and Labrador. In March 2016, the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Homelessness Network (NLHHN) and End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ) hosted the first provincial Housing First Forum to build the provincial plan based on a Housing First model.

### **COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT: ST. JOHN'S**

The City of St. John's, in which 50% of the province's homeless population resides, is the site of much of the change going on in Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2014, End Homelessness St. John's released [The 2014-2019 St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness](#), the first plan released in Canada's Atlantic. The plan identifies that EHSJ aims to support and house 160 people experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness, as well as 450 people transitionally housed or at risk of homelessness, by 2019. This plan also aims to reduce the average length of stay in emergency shelters to under seven days. The plan identifies four priority areas:

1. System coordination: Coordination of supports through the Housing First philosophy and the development of discharge and transition planning measures.
2. Integrated information system and research: Implementation of a common data collection system across the sector and partnering with the research community in order to implement evidence-based policies and practices.
3. Housing and supports: Increasing housing affordability, introducing Housing First programs, supporting the needs of diverse groups (e.g., Indigenous Peoples, youth, families, newcomers, seniors) and enhancing service quality.
4. Leadership and resources: Developing the necessary infrastructure to implement the Plan, as well as coordinating funding and engagement from all levels of government in order to champion an end to homelessness.

A key component of the plan is greater system coordination. To that end, the EHSJ introduced the [St. John's Homeless-Serving System Coordination Framework](#) in May 2016. The Framework (Turner & Harvey, 2016) provides direction on how to transform the community's homelessness sector into an integrated and collaborative system based on the Housing First philosophy. The Framework seeks to create a common homeless-serving system process, including: coordinated access and acuity assessment, eligibility and prioritization criteria; the development of a Lived Experience Council; ongoing system mapping; shared information systems for data collection and performance management; and capacity building to successfully implement the Plan to end chronic and episodic homelessness.

## 4. Homelessness and Diversity: Addressing the needs of key populations

Terms such as “homelessness,” “the homeless,” and “homeless people” tend to homogenize the diversity of people who lack safe, affordable, and appropriate housing. In Canada, those who lack housing are enormously diverse and include Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, people who identify as LGBTQ2S, families, seniors, veterans, racial and ethnic minorities and newcomers. In this section, we highlight key developments for three groups experiencing homelessness in Canada: youth, veterans and Indigenous Peoples.

### Youth Homelessness in Canada

Communities and all levels of government across Canada have begun to recognize that youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness and thus requires distinct solutions. In the past several years there have been a number of developments that signal a shift in how we are responding to youth homelessness in Canada.

*Communities and all levels of government across Canada have begun to recognize that youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness and thus requires distinct solutions.*

### Defining Youth Homelessness in Canada

Definitions of homelessness are essential for articulating the nature and scope of the problem. In 2016, a team of researchers at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, working in partnership with A Way Home Canada, the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, and young people with lived experience of homelessness, launched the first [\*Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness\*](#). Building on the *Canadian Definition of Homelessness* (2012) (and using the same typology of housing circumstances), this youth-specific definition clarifies the unique dimensions of youth homelessness and offers more precision with respect to age.

## Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness

“Youth homelessness” refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue because as a society we have failed to provide young people and their families with the necessary and adequate supports that will enable them to move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way. In addition to experiencing economic deprivation and a lack of secure housing, many young people who are homeless lack the personal experience of living independently and at the same time may be in the throes of significant developmental (social, physical, emotional and cognitive) changes. As a result, they may not have the resources, resilience, education, social supports or life skills necessary to foster a safe and nurturing transition to adulthood and independence. Few young people choose to be homeless, nor wish to be defined by their homelessness, and the experience is generally negative and stressful. Youth homelessness is the denial of basic human rights<sup>3</sup> and once identified as such, it must be remedied. All young people have the right to the essentials of life, including adequate housing, food, safety, education and justice.

3. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#), the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) and the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination \(ICERD\)](#).

## Community and provincial strategies to end youth homelessness

A growing number of communities are now developing targeted plans to end youth homelessness. For example, the Mobilizing Local Capacity initiative (MLC), a partnership between Eva’s, the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, supported six smaller communities across Canada to develop and implement local plans. These communities included Kamloops, BC; Kingston, ON; St. John, NB; Wellington County, ON; Brandon, MB; and Yellowknife, NWT. Larger communities, such as Edmonton, have also released comprehensive strategies to address youth homelessness, and there is now a growing number of communities across the country working on new plans, including Ottawa, Toronto, St. John’s, Hamilton, Lanark County, and many others.

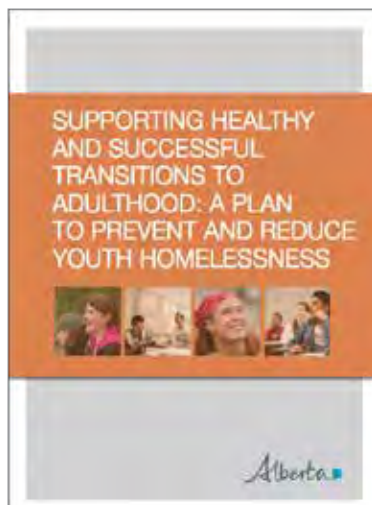


[Edmonton's Community Strategy to End Homelessness](#)

- [Learn about the systems planning process that led to the plan](#)

*“I remember sleeping in a parkade on a piece of cardboard when I was 16, waking up periodically when a businessperson would uncomfortably walk around me. I was shocked and angry every time: I had no clue how a person could walk by such a tragedy without so much as a word.” - Derek*

An excerpt from *Homelessness is Only One Piece of my Puzzle: Implications for Policy and Practice* (2015:18)



[\*Alberta's Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness\*](#)

Provincial strategies are key for addressing youth homelessness because effective local solutions require the alignment of policy and funding. This alignment is especially important given that youth homelessness is a 'fusion policy' issue, meaning that many provincial responsibilities are directly implicated in addressing youth homelessness, including child and family services, health, housing, education, employment and justice and corrections. Fortunately, two provinces are leading the way in Canada. Alberta developed and implemented the first provincial strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness in 2015. Importantly, this strategy lays out what is unique about youth homelessness and makes the case for a strong prevention approach. At the end of 2015, the Province of Ontario also named youth homelessness as one of four priorities in its review and planning of the poverty reduction strategy. Further developments in Ontario are expected in 2017.

## The emergence of A Way Home Canada

The emergence of [A Way Home Canada](#) is an important development in the area of youth homelessness in Canada. A Way Home is a cross-sectoral national coalition whose members align strategies and resources to affect real change on the issue of youth homelessness. Focused on a shift from management to prevention, A Way Home Canada supports the development of better responses to youth homelessness within the homeless youth-serving sector, the systems that drive youth homelessness, communities, and all levels of government.



A Way Home takes a Collective Impact approach. Collective Impact involves a group of relevant actors from different sectors working together to address a major challenge by working toward a common goal that fundamentally changes outcomes for a population.

The work of A Way Home has inspired a number of communities across Canada to launch local planning processes under the name of A Way Home, including Ottawa and Lanark County. In October 2016, Ottawa released [\*The Opportunity Project: Telling a New Story about Youth Homelessness in Ottawa\*](#) with recommendations to prevent and end youth homelessness in the city. A Way Home Canada has also had an international impact, inspiring the launch of A Way Home coalitions first in Washington State, and then in the summer of 2016, A Way Home America. Several countries in Europe and Australia are considering their own A Way Home coalitions. What began in Canada as a collaborative effort to address youth homelessness has very quickly spread to inspire a global movement to prevent and end youth homelessness.



## SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

In 2016, A Way Home, in collaboration with its partners, launched a number of resources and supports designed to help communities and governments make the conceptual and practical shift to prevention. These resources include a comprehensive [Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit](#), developed with the support of the Province of Ontario. The toolkit leverages best practices in community planning, as well as knowledge gained from the on-the-ground trial and error in youth homelessness planning and implementation (drawn from numerous communities across Canada and the United States).

In partnership with Canada Without Poverty and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, A Way Home also launched [Youth Rights, Right Now! Ending Youth Homelessness: A Human Rights Guide](#) to help communities ground their strategies in international human rights law. All of these resources are based on months of consultation with youth with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, researchers, policy makers and planners. These resources are essential for crafting and implementing strategies to end youth homelessness.

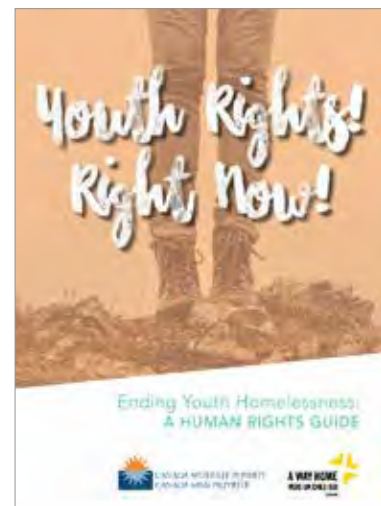
## GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

In recent years, numerous homelessness stakeholders have adopted innovative approaches to engaging all levels of government in efforts to end youth homelessness. For example, in May 2016 Joe Roberts, a formerly homeless youth, began pushing a shopping cart across the country to not only raise awareness about youth homelessness, but to encourage a cross-country understanding of prevention. [The Push for Change](#) is partnered with [Raising the Roof](#), A Way Home, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and a number of community organizations and school boards to launch [The Upstream Project](#), which is a school-based, early-intervention model adapted from Australia. Moving forward, the COH, A Way Home and the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness plan to launch a series of resources and webinars focused on youth homelessness prevention.

In the spring of 2016 the COH, in partnership with A Way Home, released two policy briefs ([one for Canada](#) and [one for the province of Ontario](#)). Through the lens of ‘solutions-focused advocacy,’ these briefs lay out a strategic road map for a Federal and Ontario (provincial) commitment and investment to address youth homelessness. The recommendations focus on a shift from the ‘crisis’ response to prevention and youth specific models of housing and supports. The briefs also recommend supporting communities to develop and implement comprehensive plans to prevent and end youth homelessness that will help communities situate prevention interventions within a systems framework. A Way Home Canada and the COH are currently scoping out a cost-benefit study to help make the economic argument for an investment in prevention of youth homelessness.



[Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit](#)



[Youth Rights, Right Now! Ending Youth Homelessness: A Human Rights Guide](#)

## Research and Innovation

In November 2016, the COH, in collaboration with A Way Home and the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, will release the results of the largest national study on youth homelessness done in Canada. The results reinforce the necessity of a shift towards prevention – in policy, investments and practice. They also indicate that we must work more effectively, and further upstream, to address the systems that drive youth homelessness, such as child protection and corrections. Further, we must take a ‘Family First’ approach to ensuring that every young person has supports in their lives to help enable a healthy transition to adulthood. To implement these findings, it is imperative that within the National Housing Strategy, the Government of Canada includes a targeted youth strategy with a dedicated investment for housing and supports.

Another emerging development is the Canadian Youth Homelessness Social Innovation (SI) Laboratory, led by the COH in partnership with A Way Home. The SI Lab brings together leading minds with the objective of identifying and nurturing innovation, and enabling funders, governments, communities, and service providers to adapt and implement social innovations in order to more effectively respond to, and eventually end, youth homelessness. Moreover, the work of the SI Lab will be further enhanced through participation in the International Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Network. This network will link thought leaders from around the world with similar agendas of identifying and mobilizing innovative and effective approaches to ending youth homelessness.

One concrete output of the Social Innovation Lab is Housing First for Youth. Since the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness developed the Housing First for Youth Framework in collaboration with the Hamilton Street Youth Planning Collaborative and the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, the model has gained traction internationally. The next steps are to:

- Work with international partners to refine the model,
- Develop a comprehensive toolkit complete with fidelity testing,
- Launch a technical support and assistance program in partnership with the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, and
- Continue to document and share examples of Housing First for Youth in action around the world.

As we work together to make the case for a conceptual and practical shift to prevention, we must take a human rights-based approach to identifying and promoting housing solutions appropriate for youth experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. It is through a National Housing Strategy that we have an opportunity to do so. A Way Home – based on consultation with youth with lived experience, service providers, coalition members, and partners – has published [a series of youth-specific recommendations](#) to ensure the strategy reflects the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

## Veterans and Homelessness in Canada

Veteran homelessness is a growing concern in Canada. There are 697,400 veterans in the general population, approximately 2,950 of whom are shelter users. Veterans make up 2.2% of the homeless population (ESDC, 2016). All responses to veteran homelessness require a thorough understanding of the unique drivers of veteran homelessness. While the U.S., the U.K. and Australia have made some headway on this issue over the years (e.g., President Obama recently announced that veteran homelessness in the United States has been reduced by 50%), we know little about the experiences of homelessness for Canadian veterans. Fortunately, this is beginning to change.

approximately  
**2,950 VETERANS**  
EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS



**VETERANS REPRESENT  
2.2% OF THE HOMELESS  
POPULATION IN CANADA**

In 2011, Ray and Forchuk conducted a study asking Canadian homeless veterans about their experiences of homelessness. A key finding was that the veteran population tended to be much older than other groups experiencing homelessness (average age 52.8), and that for many veterans there was significant lag time between when they left the Forces (24.8 years ago) and when they first experienced

*A key finding was that the veteran population tended to be much older than other groups experiencing homelessness (average age 52.8), and that for many veterans there was significant lag time between when they left the Forces (24.8 years ago) and when they first experienced homelessness (9.8 years ago).*

homelessness (9.8 years ago). This indicates a long, difficult pathway to homelessness for veterans. The study also showed that participants had experienced homelessness for 5.8 years on average, revealing a greater likelihood of episodic and chronic homelessness among this group (Forchuk & Richardson, 2014; Forchuk, Richardson & Atyeo, 2016).

Ray and Forchuk (2011) also identified that the Canadian veteran population is distinct from the American population in key ways. While in the U.S. a large percentage of veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in Canada alcohol and drug addiction are key drivers of veteran homelessness, followed by mental health challenges (including PTSD) and difficulty transitioning to civilian life. Many veterans in the study recounted that they began drinking alcohol while in the military, while others noted that they use alcohol and drugs as a way to cope with unaddressed mental health problems. The study recommended more supports for discharged veterans while transitioning to civilian life, program outreach in shelters to find and assist more veterans and the development of support systems to address the unique needs of veterans. Implementing such recommendations poses a challenge because only veterans with a disability directly related to their service are eligible to receive benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC).

Based on these findings, the HPS, VAC and the City of London launched *The Canadian Model for Housing and Support for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness* in 2012. The two-year pilot project used different programming models in four Canadian cities (Calgary, London, Toronto and Victoria) to develop best practices to address veteran homelessness. The project was guided by several principles:

1. Peer support (by veterans for veterans),
2. Provision of services separate from the general shelter population,
3. Emphasis on promoting self-respect,
4. Providing structure during the day,
5. Addressing alcohol issues and addiction, and
6. Providing a transition process to housing (Forchuk & Richardson, 2014).

The pilot sites used a Housing First approach, with some providers offering scattered site private sector rental apartment and others operating shared units in their own buildings. Some form of volunteer and/or staff resources were available for each participant, as well as intensive case planning. Peer support was also a part of each model. In keeping with the Housing First framework, all of the programs took a harm reduction approach, to varying degrees, where complete abstinence from substance use was not required as a condition to housing or supports.

The pilot project yielded positive results. Over the course of two years, there was a significant reduction in the number of emergency room visits, 911 and crisis line calls, ambulance uses and visits by crisis teams. The cost savings that came from a reduction in shelter and drop-in use is estimated to be \$536,600 per year in the first year following the implementation of veteran-specific housing (Forchuk, Richardson & Atyeo, 2016; Gaetz, 2012). These savings are projected to accumulate over time.

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According to Forchuk, Richardson and Atyeo (2016:374) there are several key considerations to attend to when addressing homelessness among veterans:

1. Homeless veterans have unique needs within the broader homeless population,
2. Structure and routine (including leisure) are important,
3. Peer support requires an understanding of military service and homelessness-related issues,
4. Collaboration includes an integrated and shared response with both homeless-serving and veteran-serving organizations,
5. Permanent long-term housing is preferable over transitional housing,
6. Housing first and harm reduction philosophies and interventions must drive programming,

7. Choice of housing and living arrangement is important. In particular, the needs of women and families are unlikely to be met by single-site housing models, and
8. Programs need to be outcome-focused with housing stability a primary goal. Secondary goals include diversion from emergency services such as shelters, police and emergency departments.

In light of the growing concern for homeless veterans, in July 2016 the Ottawa-based Multi-Faith Housing Initiative announced the development of Veterans House, a permanent housing facility with a range of supports for 40 veterans. Fundraising is currently underway and construction is set to begin in 2017. The hope is that Veterans House will be a model for future sites across Canada.

Through the aforementioned research and pilots, we now recognize that specialized, targeted interventions specific to veterans need to be available for those who become episodically and/or chronically homeless. The National Housing Strategy, to be effective, must take note of the emerging research on veteran homelessness in Canada.

## Indigenous Homelessness in Canada

Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately represented in the homeless population in Canada (Klodawsky, 2009; Menzies, 2009; Patrick, 2014). While making up only 4.3% of the general population, Indigenous Peoples account for between 28% and 34% of the homeless population (ESDC, 2016). The percentage of the homeless population that is Indigenous is higher in northern and western communities. Indigenous Peoples' experiences of poverty and homelessness are firmly rooted in colonial practices and systemic discrimination.

**INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS  
IS INCREASING RAPIDLY,  
*particularly in urban settings***



Since taking office in November 2015, the new federal government has expressed its commitment to building a more equitable and respectful relationship with Indigenous communities. Ensuring that First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have access to safe, adequate and affordable housing is an essential way for all sectors to foster more equitable relationships with Indigenous Peoples across Canada.

### TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

While the final Truth and Reconciliation Commission report does not mention homelessness specifically, the legacy of residential schools has created a context in which Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately affected by ineffective child protection policies, overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and face poorer health outcomes. Each of these factors increases the likelihood that Indigenous Peoples will experience homelessness. Given these realities, an Indigenous homeless strategy must be developed which takes into account the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

## OVERVIEW OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

On December 15, 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission tabled their final report. The nearly 4,000-page document with its 94 recommendations is the culmination of a six year investigation into Canada's residential school system that was in place between 1883 and 1969, with the final school closing only in 1996. During that time, approximately 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were forced into residential schools across Canada.

The Commission heard from 7,000 witnesses, most of whom were residential school survivors, and documented the trauma they experienced. This included physical, emotional and sexual abuse; malnutrition; disease; and untimely death for some. Reportedly 3,200 children died in residential schools, although poor record keeping and unmarked burial sites suggest that the number of deaths likely reaches well over 6,000.

The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission confirm that the residential school system amounted to cultural genocide.

Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next. In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015:1).

The cultural genocide of Canada's Indigenous Peoples and the legacy of residential schools have ongoing consequences for Indigenous Peoples today, who continue to experience systemic, institutionalized discrimination. Among the recommendations, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proposes a public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; the establishment of a National Council of Reconciliation; enacting an Aboriginal Languages Act; and revising Canada's citizenship test and oath to reflect the inclusivity of Indigenous Peoples.

*"I come from Sliammon Nation (mother's side). My birth parents are the late Florence and Moses Dominic, who were survivors of the residential school system... These horrible experiences were overshadowed by the trauma of seeing their first-born apprehended by the Canadian state authorities in 1966. I was placed in government care in a residential health facility called Sunny Hill Children's Hospital. I was two years old and would remain there for the next six years, classified as a ward of the state and misdiagnosed by medical authorities as 'mentally retarded.'" - Rose*

*An excerpt from Homelessness is Only One Piece of my Puzzle: Implications for Policy and Practice (2015:27)*

## CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

Ontario, in their 2015 report *A Place Called Home*, noted that transitioning out of provincially funded institutions and service systems, including child protection services, increases an individual's vulnerability to becoming homeless. Research has similarly shown that young people who have experienced child protection services are at higher risk of homelessness (Nichols, 2013; Raising the Roof, 2009). Given that Indigenous children are twice as likely to end up in foster care compared to non-Indigenous children (Fluke et al., 2010; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004), it is crucial to act upon the Commission's recommendation that all levels of government take action to reduce the number of Indigenous children in provincial care. As identified by the Commission, this can be achieved by ensuring social workers are properly trained in Indigenous family healing traditions; keeping Indigenous children with their families or, if necessary, culturally appropriate environments; and requiring that child-welfare decision makers consider the impact of residential schools on children and their caregivers. Rather than breaking ties between families, child protection services can act as a vehicle to strengthen family bonds in Indigenous communities. It is likely that a shift in policy of this magnitude would reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples among those experiencing homelessness.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Just as Indigenous children are overrepresented in child protection services, a similar trajectory plays out in the criminal justice system. In their 2015 annual report, the Office of the Correctional Investigator (the watchdog for the Correctional Services of Canada) revealed that while Indigenous Peoples make up only 4.3% of the Canadian population, they represent almost one quarter (24.6%) of the federal prison population. Indigenous women account for a startling 35% of the female prison population. Further, the report found that Indigenous prisoners are in prison longer, spend more time in segregation, are less likely to get parole, and are more likely to have parole revoked for minor infractions, compared to non-Indigenous prisoners. The provincial/territorial custody figures follow the same trend (Statistics Canada, 2015).

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
**MAKE UP 4.3%**  
OF CANADIAN POPULATION

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but they represent  
**ALMOST 1/4**  
OF THE FEDERAL  
PRISON POPULATION



**35%** of the  
FEMALE PRISON  
POPULATION IS  
INDIGENOUS

With respect to Indigenous homelessness, this data is deeply unsettling given that the criminal justice system has been used as an emergency response to the homelessness crisis in Canada (Gaetz, 2010). Individuals experiencing homelessness are more likely to be subject to the criminal justice system through targeted surveillance, anti-homelessness legislation (such as Ontario's *Safe Streets Act*), denial of bail and being discharged from custody into homelessness (Deshman & Myers, 2014; Novac et al., 2009). Additionally, Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to be subject to these criminal justice interventions than non-Indigenous youth (O'Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011).

As a result, this leads to what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls the systematic bias of Canada's criminal justice system. The Commission made 18 recommendations regarding justice for Indigenous Peoples accused and found guilty of crimes, as well as Indigenous victims of crime. Among these recommendations is a call to eliminate the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal people in custody; provide community sentences as alternatives to imprisonment where possible for Aboriginal offenders; and for all levels of government to address the needs of offenders with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

## **HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission also documented the health disparities facing Indigenous Peoples, due in part to the ongoing intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools. First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have higher rates of diabetes, tuberculosis and other circulatory, respiratory and digestive illnesses, as well as higher rates of infant mortality and chronic illnesses, compared to non-Indigenous populations (Reading & Wien 2009; Tang & Browne 2008). This disparity is problematic given that poor health can be a catalyst for homelessness (e.g., an inability to work, high cost of treatment and care) and that homelessness then can exacerbate poor health. We know that those who experience homelessness have poorer health outcomes and are at increased risk for seizures, musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory infections and illnesses such as tuberculosis and HIV (Frankish, Hwang, & Quantz, 2005; Hwang, 2001).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission also found that many survivors of residential schools developed addictions in their efforts to cope with trauma. Research has shown that addiction and mental health challenges are among the causes and effects of homelessness (CPHI, 2009; Leach, 2010; Orwin, Scott, & Arieira, 2005), thus contributing to the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples among those experiencing homelessness.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission sets out several calls for action related to improving the health outcomes for Indigenous Peoples. First, the Commission calls on all levels of government to recognize the health disparities that are a direct result of residential schools:

We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law and under the Treaties (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Additionally, the federal government is called upon, in consultation with Indigenous Peoples, to establish goals to close the gap in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, address the unique health needs of Indigenous People living off-reserve, and enhance funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental and emotional harms caused by residential schools.



## THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made a number of recommendations related to the adoption and implementation of *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Among its most salient articles, the Declaration reads:

7(2): Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.

The Declaration was passed by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007, but it was only in May 2016 that Canada officially adopted and began implementing its principles. The Declaration covers the rights of Indigenous Peoples on a variety of issues, including: culture, identity, language. Land and religion. There are several articles specifically related to issues of poverty and health that significantly impact individuals at risk of and/or experiencing homelessness:

21(1): Indigenous Peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.

23: Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous Peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

24(2): Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.

## TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are deplorable, shameful and reflect the systematic and ongoing discrimination faced by Indigenous Peoples. The Commission identifies that reconciliation must begin from an acknowledgement of the harm that has been done and continues to be done to Indigenous Peoples, and a commitment to political action to address the causes and consequences of this harm. The report states,

Reconciliation must become a way of life. It will take many years to repair damaged trust and relationships in Aboriginal communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Reconciliation not only requires apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada's national history, and public commemoration, but also needs real social, political, and economic change (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015:238).

Prime Minister Trudeau has promised to fully implement all 94 of the Commission’s recommendations, and it is essential that all responses to Indigenous homelessness share that same commitment. With a shift towards reconciliation, we have the momentum to build the infrastructure, services and supports necessary to end homelessness among Indigenous Peoples both on and off reserve.

### DEFINITION OF INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

The *Canadian Definition of Homelessness* does not capture the qualitatively distinct experience of Indigenous homelessness. In light of the unique circumstances that perpetuate Indigenous homelessness, namely historical and ongoing colonialism and pervasive racism, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness set out to develop the Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada. In February 2016, Jesse Thistle, a Métis Cree scholar, began a widespread consultation process to support the drafting of a definition. The consultation process includes three phases:

Phase	Consultation Group	Key Stakeholders	Timeline
Phase 1	Creation and consultation of National Steering Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers</li> <li>Represent each of Canada’s Indigenous Peoples</li> <li>From North and South</li> </ul>	February – August 2016
Phase 2	Consultation with Elders Council and 50 Regional Advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assembly of First Nations National Elders Council</li> <li>Regional Advisors from each of Canada’s Indigenous Peoples</li> </ul>	August 2016 – January 2017
Phase 3	Open National Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virtual Town Halls with interested stakeholders</li> </ul>	February 2017 – April 2017

The first phase is complete and phase two is now underway. The definition seeks to capture an understanding of the meaning of homelessness from Indigenous perspectives. For Indigenous Peoples, ‘home’ often signifies relationships and connections to kin. This means that homelessness for Indigenous Peoples may include loss of land, language, family bonds, as well as spiritual disconnection and cultural disintegration (Christensen, 2013). As we look to Indigenous communities to guide these efforts, we hope that the definition will provide vocabulary and insight into Indigenous homelessness in Canada. The COH will release a proposed definition in Fall 2017.

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

In the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*, we made several recommendations regarding investment in Indigenous housing, both on and off reserve. In this section, we take stock of the progress in the last two years and call for a renewed effort in prioritizing the unique challenges to Indigenous housing that require immediate action.

On-reserve housing is often described as unsafe, inadequate and overcrowded (Patterson & Dyck, 2015). The disproportionate rate of homelessness among Indigenous Peoples in cities across Canada reveals the ongoing and systematic problems across municipalities, provinces/territories and nationally (Leach, 2010; Peters, 2012). There is reason to be concerned that the lack of available and affordable housing across Canada, along with population growth in Indigenous communities, will further exacerbate homelessness for Indigenous Peoples. These structural issues exist alongside the discrimination Indigenous Peoples experience in relation to housing and employment, as well as the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma and colonization (Walker, 2008; Wilson & Macdonald, 2010).

In 2014 we made three recommendations related to Indigenous housing. For more information on these recommendations, refer to the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Review and expand investment in Aboriginal housing both on and off reserve
2. That the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, working in partnership with Aboriginal communities across the country, conduct an up-to-date audit of Aboriginal housing on-reserve in order to determine immediate and long term housing needs and provide a realistic estimate of the investment required over ten years to meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples
3. Continue committed funding of \$300 million (2015/16) to allow time to complete audit as outlined and determine future fiscal needs

### **A WAY FORWARD – NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission called for action and we must deliver. The National Housing Strategy is one opportunity in which to do so.

It is our hope that alongside the National Housing Strategy, the Government of Canada, in partnership with Indigenous communities, will develop and implement strategies to prevent and end Indigenous homelessness. Encouragingly, there are new initiatives taking place to draw from, initiatives that have the potential to address the unique causes and consequences of Indigenous homelessness.

### **POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

In 2012, Calgary released its *Plan to End Aboriginal Homelessness in Calgary* as part of its ten-year plan to end homelessness. The plan was developed by and for Indigenous Peoples and sought to understand the unique experiences of Indigenous homelessness. The plan is rooted in an understanding that by and large Indigenous homelessness is a result of structural factors such as unemployment, loss of housing, discrimination, colonization, and cultural and geographic displacement. The plan commits to reducing

the number of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness through a prevention strategy and an understanding that any plan must be developed in a culturally appropriate way.

Ontario is heading in a similar direction. In *A Place to Call Home*, the Expert Panel suggested four priorities to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness – including Indigenous homelessness. The panel recognized that providing safe and affordable housing to Indigenous Peoples is a step towards reconciliation. In March 2016, Ontario announced a plan to develop an Indigenous Housing Strategy as part of their *Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update*. The Strategy will be implemented in partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and will focus on their unique housing challenges.

## RESEARCH

Good policy is built on strong research. Valuable research conducted by and with Indigenous Peoples is the cornerstone for evidence-based solutions. The following are just a few of the innovative research projects currently taking place across Canada.

Dr. Evelyn Peters from the University of Winnipeg and Shelly Craig, Executive Director of Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre, recently completed a research study on Indigenous homelessness in Flin Flon, Manitoba. Their work reported on the disproportionate number of Indigenous Peoples facing homelessness in Flin Flon relative to the national average. They made several recommendations, including: Indigenous organizations take a leadership role in homelessness strategies; collaboration between service providers, RCMP, the city, and government; a focus on youth homelessness; provision of support services after someone has been housed; and a call on the federal government to support initiatives to create housing on-reserve.

In Saskatchewan, Dr. Alex Wilson, in collaboration with urban Indigenous organizations, are conducting research on how Indigenous Two-Spirit Peoples experience homelessness. They emphasize the challenges this group faces due to the intersection of homophobia, transphobia and racism. Their final report will be available in Fall 2016.

Finally, in their project on youth homelessness, Dr. Marleny Bonnycastle, Dr. Maureen Simpkins, as well as eight collaborating northern organizations, are uncovering ways to include the voices of youth experiencing homelessness in policy decisions in northern Manitoba. Through a participatory action research model, Indigenous youth will conduct research into the causes of youth homelessness in northern Manitoba, the gaps in homeless services for youth (especially Indigenous youth) and the development of an action plan to respond to the research findings. This project is ongoing.

## 5. Recommendations

Modern mass homelessness in Canada is primarily the product of federal withdrawal from housing investment. For that reason, the National Housing Strategy currently under development, is a critically important initiative. We have, for the first time in more than 25 years, an opportunity to make real progress on one of Canada's most entrenched, costly and deadly social problems.

In the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014* we put forward recommendations that would:

- eliminate chronic homelessness and reduce the length of stay in emergency shelters in Canada to less than two weeks;
- provide direct financial assistance to 836,000 poor Canadian households per year; and,
- create 88,000 new units of supportive and affordable housing over a decade.

In this report we have revised and updated our 2014 recommendations to meet or exceed these outcomes and reflect emerging best practices in preventing and ending homelessness. In the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014* we provided a series of proposals aimed at increasing the affordable housing stock, targeted investments for episodically and chronically homeless people, and an expansion for Indigenous housing on and off reserve. In this report we renew our call for these proposals and include new recommendations emphasizing the role of the National Housing Strategy in preventing and ending homelessness.

The cost of our proposed recommendations, outlined in detail in the conclusion, is \$4,474 million in 2017/18, or \$43.788 billion over a ten year period. This represents an annual increase of \$1,818 million over what the federal government is projected to spend in 2017/18 on affordable housing. This increased annual investment amounts to an additional \$50 per Canadian. For less than an additional \$1 per week per Canadian, we can prevent and end homelessness in Canada.

TABLE 1 **Comparing cost of existing federal housing and homelessness spending to proposed investments 2017-2027 (in millions)**

Year	CMHC social housing investment	2017/18 federal investment	Total federal spending	Our recommendation
2017/18	1,202	1,453	2,655	4,474
2018/19	1,126	1,453	2,579	4,463
2019/20	1,055	1,453	2,508	4,459
2020/21	979	1,453	2,432	4,451
2021/22	898	1,453	2,351	4,440
2022/23	773	1,453	2,226	4,386
2023/24	646	1,453	2,099	4,331
2024/25	530	1,453	1,983	4,288
2025/26	424	1,453	1,977	4,257
2026/27	329	1,453	1,782	4,239
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,962</b>	<b>14,530</b>	<b>22,592</b>	<b>43,788</b>

If the 2016 federal budget investment sets the pattern for spending under a National Housing Strategy, we should expect to see \$22.592 billion in housing and homelessness spending over ten years. Again, this new investment is welcome, but insufficient to make meaningful progress on Canada's housing crisis. Without major new investment it is clear the National Housing Strategy will not solve Canada's housing crisis.

*Without major new investment it is clear the National Housing Strategy will not solve Canada's housing crisis.*

We're at a unique moment in this country – the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014* showed the roots of modern mass homelessness in the withdrawal of the federal government from housing. Now the government is re-engaging on housing with a National Housing Strategy but that strategy has to be matched with the funding required to ensure all Canadians have safe, decent, appropriate and affordable housing.

Homelessness is preventable and solvable. Canadians have mobilized to solve homelessness for neighbours dislocated by disasters in Kelowna, Calgary, Lac Megantic and most recently are working to end homelessness for those who lost their homes to fire in Fort McMurray. We've even reached across the globe to resettle 25,000 Syrians fleeing the horrors of a brutal civil war. We can and must do the same for Canadians made homeless by poverty, policy or disability.

When disaster strikes we must be ready with swift, locally driven responses that are supported by all orders of government. More than this, we need processes to prevent catastrophes from happening in the first place. We must tackle homelessness at all angles if we are to meet our goal of preventing and ending homelessness in Canada.

# How a National Housing Strategy can end homelessness in Canada

Here we offer recommendations for a National Housing Strategy that would prevent and end homelessness in Canada. We believe housing is a right for Canadians. Our National Housing Strategy has to ensure that all Canadians have access to safe, decent and affordable housing, but we must act most urgently for those for whom a lack of housing is a matter of life and death.

We know the longer people are homeless, the worse their health becomes. Homelessness causes premature death, poor health and is a burden on our health-care system. Beyond the tragic human toll, we also know ignoring homelessness is extraordinarily expensive, costing Canadians over \$7 billion per year.

Solving all of Canada's housing problems at once, from homelessness to the rising cost of home ownership, is absolutely the right objective, but the sheer scale of the challenge when set against political and fiscal realities will force the government to make some difficult choices. **We believe ending homelessness must be a priority of the National Housing Strategy.**

## Key recommendations

### I) ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

The following recommendations focus on the role of the federal government in preventing and ending homelessness in Canada through the National Housing Strategy.

#### 1. The Government of Canada should adopt a national goal of ending homelessness with clear and measurable outcomes, milestones and criteria

In the consultation for the National Housing Strategy the Government of Canada states that it "believes that all Canadians deserve access to housing that meets their needs and that they can afford." If this is the case, then setting a measurable, time-bound national goal of ending homelessness should be a centerpiece of its National Housing Strategy. This commitment should be supported by a plan to end homelessness, like the U.S. 'Opening Doors' plan.



To be effective, a National Housing Strategy that prevents and ends homelessness should be grounded in these principles:

- **A NATIONAL GOAL OF ENDING HOMELESSNESS**

As Canadians, we cannot accept as inevitable the homelessness of any of our neighbours. Homelessness in Canada should be rare, brief and non-recurring with clear milestones and criteria set out for defining the goal and measuring progress.

- **BROAD ADOPTION OF HOUSING FIRST**

Canadians should have direct access, without pre-conditions, to permanent, safe, appropriate and affordable housing with the support necessary to sustain it. We believe housing is a right for all Canadians. Housing First is both a philosophy that should guide strategies to end homelessness, and is also a program intervention with a strong evidence base.

- **AN EMPHASIS ON PREVENTION**

Perhaps the most important thing we can do to address homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. All orders of government must be proactive in their efforts to end homelessness. This is an area where the Government of Canada can exercise leadership.

- **LOCAL LEADERSHIP ON ENDING HOMELESSNESS, WITH CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES FOR ALL ORDERS OF GOVERNMENT**

Homelessness lives in our cities, towns and villages. When disaster strikes local emergency response plans kick in, the local authority takes charge and senior governments support based on clearly defined roles. The same approach should be in place for preventing and ending homelessness.

- **EFFECTIVE PRIORITIZATION**

When someone does become homeless, we must respond urgently to those Canadians for whom a lack of housing, or housing instability is leading to great suffering. At the same time we need to acknowledge that housing is a right, and that individuals should not have to wait until their personal situation has greatly deteriorated before they get the help that they need. For instance, expecting young people to lift themselves out of homelessness may simply be preparing them to become the chronically adult homeless population of the future.

- **THE USE OF DATA TO TARGET INVESTMENT, MAKE DECISIONS AND TRACK PROGRESS**

We cannot solve a problem without understanding its scope. This means we require a national strategy for the collection of real-time, person specific information and an understanding of the unique needs and circumstances of every Canadian experiencing or at risk of homelessness.



- **BUILDING AND IMPROVING LOCAL SYSTEMS**

The National Housing Strategy supports the building of coordinated local housing and support systems that are simple to navigate, while targeting resources quickly and efficiently to the people who need it the most.

The principles outlined above provide a foundation for the NHS that positions housing as a human right for all Canadians, irrespective of income, health status, or level of need. If housing is a right, it is our obligation to provide the means, resources and support necessary to allow everyone to obtain and maintain a safe, appropriate and affordable home. In the next section we provide recommendations on how the NHS can accomplish these goals for individuals experiencing homelessness and as part of a national affordable housing framework.

## 2. Renew, refocus and expand the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

Federal involvement in homelessness began with the National Homelessness Initiative, announced in 1999. The National Homelessness Initiative was renamed the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) in 2006.



One of the success stories of HPS is its support of 61 designated communities across Canada. Communities are provided with funding to support a range of activities to address homelessness. In the past communities have been asked to develop community plans that are used to describe how the federal investment can be used.

### TRANSFORMING CANADA'S RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS FROM THE COMMUNITY UP

In Canadian (and U.S.) cities that have achieved significant reductions in homelessness (for example, Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Hamilton) we consistently see the development and implementation of coordinated local systems. These systems feature community plans focused on preventing and ending homelessness, a Housing First orientation in all services, coordinated access processes, agreed prioritization criteria and processes, the effective use of data to make decisions and track progress and strong, dedicated local leadership. These communities are all working toward integrated systems that involve not only the homelessness sector, but mainstream services as well.

*"I want to live in a world where we view access to housing, basic needs, privacy and dignity as human rights (rather than as privileges)". - Stasha*

*An excerpt from Homelessness is Only One Piece of my Puzzle: Implications for Policy and Practice (2015: 98)*

The HPS community planning process, in 61 communities across Canada, can be the vehicle to deliver a Canadian plan to end homelessness by creating a process to develop coordinated local housing and support systems that are simple to navigate, while targeting resources quickly and efficiently to the people who need it the most.

**We recommend** that HPS community plans become community system plans focused on preventing and ending homelessness, within the context of a national objective to end homelessness.

A community systems planning approach to ending homelessness means creating an efficient, wide-reaching system of care that can meet the needs of all individuals facing homelessness. According to Turner (2014) a systems plan requires several key elements:

- I. PLANNING AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT:** Community plans need to move beyond distributing federal funding to integrating a systems framework, grounded in Housing First philosophy.
- II. ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE:** essential system leadership and coordination infrastructure must be in place to meet the goals set out in the community plans.
- III. SYSTEM MAPPING:** An assessment of the existing services, against a framework of best practice in system planning, to understand where there are gaps and redundancies in the system.
- IV. CO-ORDINATED SERVICE DELIVERY:** facilitate common access points, assessment tools and flow-through between organizations and services to respond to the needs of the client.
- V. INTEGRATED INFORMATION MANAGEMENT:** Allows co-ordinated systems delivery through shared data, as well as simplified intakes and referrals.
- VI. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE:** Ensure that programs and systems are achieving optimal outcomes.
- VII. SYSTEMS INTEGRATION:** The homelessness sector works collaboratively with public systems and services such as health, child welfare, criminal justice, domestic violence and poverty reduction.

As we recommended in the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*, Indigenous governments, all orders of government, homeless serving agencies, local funders and people with lived experience of homelessness should be included in the development process. This will strengthen targeted strategies for specific populations, such as Indigenous homelessness and women fleeing violence.

*“I would like to see a facility that would have people come in one door and have everything they need under one roof – like one-stop shopping. To the left we have doctors, dentists, psychiatrists and mental health care; on the right we have addictions counsellors, personal care workers for housing, etc. So at the end, when you walk out the last door, you’re ready for a new start.” - Richard*

*An excerpt from *Homelessness is Only One Piece of my Puzzle: Implications for Policy and Practice* (2015:66-67)*

## **RENEW AND RESTORE FUNDING TO THE HPS**

The current HPS was renewed in 2014 for a five year period until 2019. The 2016 federal budget announced a time limited 40% increase in annual HPS funding of \$55.9 million for a period of two years. Prior to this increase, funding for the critical work of Homelessness Partnering Strategy stagnated relative to inflation, and was cut in the final years of the previous government.

**We recommend** the government permanently restore the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to its 1999 levels and be renewed for 10 years. Accounting for inflation, this amount in 2016 would be \$349 million annually, a difference of \$158 million. Long-term funding for Canada's most vulnerable – those experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness – is needed to keep this population stably housed.

## **MAINTAIN COMMITMENT TO HOUSING FIRST FOR IMMEDIATE IMPACT**

As one of the few existing homelessness interventions that can legitimately be called a “Best Practice” (the successful *At Home/Chez Soi* project contributed to the evidence base), Housing First is an effective, humane and rights-based approach to addressing homelessness. The Government of Canada committed to supporting communities to implement Housing First in 2013. Going forward, HPS should continue this effort, expand resources and ensure communities get adequate training and technical support to do this well.

Within the context of a National Housing Strategy, Housing First, especially when targeted to chronic and episodic homelessness, provides the government with a strategic opportunity to: make short-term reductions in homelessness while also making the longer lead time housing investments; to take immediate action to reduce emergency shelter use (a problem outlined in the National Shelter Study); and, make rapid progress on priority populations like veterans and women fleeing violence.

HPS should also invest in the development of targeted adaptations of Housing First to address the needs of specific populations. Housing First for Youth is a good example of this, and more communities should be encouraged to implement this. The knowledge base regarding how to do Housing First with veterans, Indigenous Peoples, women fleeing violence and people leaving corrections needs to be built as well.

## **DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION FRAMEWORK**

Homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness, or for those who have been homeless reduce the reoccurrence. While there is growing acceptance that we should be doing more to prevent homelessness, how we do this and whose responsibility this is, is not as well understood.

Homelessness prevention means working upstream with broad population-based approaches that mean people have access to the income and safe and affordable housing they need to reduce the risk of homelessness. It also means addressing systems failures (child protection, criminal justice, health care)

that lead to people being dumped into homelessness. It also means effective early intervention strategies to help people in crisis. Finally, it means providing those who have experienced homelessness with the housing and supports they need to make this episode of homelessness their last. When prevention strategies are at the forefront of our response to homelessness we can prevent people from experiencing the traumatic effects of homelessness in the first place and intervene before it is too late.

A federal Homelessness Prevention Framework and investment will bring together the leadership and interaction from all orders of government and communities needed to plan and implement effective strategies that will reduce the flow of individuals and families into homelessness. Homelessness is invariably a “fusion” policy issue, in that the drivers of homelessness – and therefore the solutions – interface with multiple ministries and departments of government at the federal, provincial and territorial levels. It is imperative then for HPS to engage and work collaboratively with ministries such as Families, Children and Social Development; Health; Employment, Workforce Development and Labour; Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Status of Women; as well as the Departments of Justice and Veterans Affairs, for instance.

## **USE DATA AND RESEARCH TO TARGET INVESTMENT, MAKE DECISIONS AND TRACK PROGRESS**

Data becomes critically important within the context of a National Housing Strategy because without it the government is potentially making multi-billion dollar investments without the data to target investments, no visibility of the impact of that investment, limited understanding of how many people are homeless in Canada, who they are, where they are, how they move through systems or a detailed understanding of their needs.

**We recommend** that the government develop a national strategy for the collection of real-time, person specific information and an understanding of the unique needs and circumstances of every Canadian experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This could be accomplished through an expansion of the *National Homelessness Information System*. System-wide data collection and sharing across sectors must be in place to support an outcomes-based approach to addressing homelessness.

A National Homelessness Data Strategy need not re-invent the wheel. We have excellent data system and process models in Canada including the ‘by-name lists’ being developed under the 20,000 Homes Campaign (for example, in Hamilton, Waterloo and Kingston) and the Homelessness Management Information System in Calgary. The existing Homeless Individuals Families Information System being used by HPS can also be adapted as the technological backbone of the strategy.

Research has to figure prominently in any strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness especially in making sense of the data we collect, informing decisions in government and at the community level, testing and providing strong evidence for solutions, as well as collecting good ideas from other countries that can be replicated and adapted locally. Research should be part of any strategic solution to homelessness, and should include the following elements:

*I. Basic research on the causes, lived experience and solutions, makes for better policy and practice.*

*II. Point in Time (PiT) counts conducted on a Biannual Basis.* To complement by-name lists, the Government of Canada should conduct a national PiT count every two years to collect information, populate local data systems, assist with planning and to identify individuals not using services. Participation in the national PiT count should be mandatory for all communities receiving federal funding.

*III. Program Evaluation and Demonstration Projects.* Instituting a culture of innovation and evaluation in the sector (including funding to support this) is important to demonstrate the effectiveness of strategies and practices. This supports the drive for 'continuous improvement', the measurement of progress, more effective planning and also becomes a means to identify effective models and practices.

*IV. Knowledge Mobilization.* Communities should be supported to develop mechanisms and strategies to identify effective practices and enable the sharing of them both within and between countries.

### **3. A new federal/provincial/territorial framework agreement that defines local leadership on homelessness and housing investment**



In order to achieve meaningful reductions in homelessness, as part of its new National Housing Strategy, the Government of Canada should set clear priorities and expectations for their investment. It is critical that the provinces and territories invest in these new housing priorities as they have principal jurisdiction over many of the critical systems of care that impact homelessness and, in the end, will be the net financial beneficiaries of reduced homelessness. Finally, any new federal investment in housing has to reflect the reality that homelessness and homeless systems are ultimately local or regional in nature and as a result investment planning and allocation must also be local or regional.

There is now a renewed interest on the part of the Government of Canada to work with provincial and territorial governments as partners. We believe a new federal/provincial/territorial framework agreement on housing and homelessness is required. In our proposed framework, the federal government is responsible for setting the national direction for ending homelessness in Canada and for providing a significant investment to support the work of other orders of government and communities. In Canada, provincial and territorial governments have expanded responsibility for the funding and delivery of a broad range of health and social services (in addition to housing), many of which have a direct impact on housing stability and well-being necessary to prevent and end homelessness. Communities and

municipalities, with support from higher levels of government, should be responsible for coordinating and allocating housing investments based on the needs of their community.

An effective federal, provincial/territorial agreement on housing and homelessness should:

1. Define F/P/T and local roles and responsibilities in the national objective to end homelessness.
2. Specify agreed milestones, outcomes and performance expectations along with an agreement on regular evaluation and reporting.
3. Ensure all federal investment would be directed by local or regional system plans.
4. Ensure direct federal investment in housing prioritizes those at greatest risk including:
  - a. homeless individuals and families who are deemed to be 'high acuity' based on an agreed evidence based assessment;
  - b. chronic and episodically homeless individuals and families;
  - c. people living in core housing need with a history of housing instability or homelessness;
  - d. young people leaving public systems; and,
  - e. women fleeing domestic violence.
5. Federal investment should first be used for permanent supportive housing and deep subsidy affordable housing (up to 60% below market).
6. Ensure that federal investment for deep subsidy and permanent supportive rental housing could be used for up to 75% of capital cost. The provinces/territories would be expected to contribute the remaining 25%, resulting in 100% of capital cost being covered by public investment.
7. Ensure that the provinces cover 100% of support costs relating to supportive housing and match federal investment in Housing First programs.
8. Ensure that all orders of government articulate and implement a plan to address homelessness prevention. In particular, provincial and territorial governments should focus on prevention because they have jurisdictional responsibility for a number of areas that impact on homelessness, including income supports, health, mental health and addictions, education and child protection, for instance. Aligning the federal homelessness prevention framework and investment with the work being done by other orders of government will lead to a more coordinated approach to homelessness prevention.

## 4. Targeted Strategies to Address the Needs of Priority Populations



Because the homeless population in Canada is diverse, there is a necessity for special targeted investments to address priority groups. While there are many groups in need, we recommend the Government of Canada prioritize the following three populations for specific attention:

### A) YOUTH

Youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness in terms of its causes and conditions, and therefore so must be the solutions. In 2016, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada released a policy brief titled: *Federal Investment in Youth Homelessness: Comparing Canada and the United States and a Proposal for Reinvestment*, calling for a targeted federal strategy and investment in preventing and ending youth homelessness. The strategies to end youth homelessness require the partnership of sometimes separate systems, including education, child welfare, youth justice and health. Age appropriate housing and supports delivered through a [Housing First for Youth framework](#) are imperative to help young people move out of homelessness and remain stably housed. These supports should reflect the diversity of young people experiencing homelessness, including the 20% of homeless youth who identify as LGBTQ2S. A comprehensive systems framework with the goal of preventing and eliminating homelessness must include youth planning. Federal investment and leadership can help communities address the problem of youth homelessness by providing them with knowledge, direction and resources necessary to achieve results.

In line with [recommendations from A Way Home Canada](#) and [the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness](#), **we recommend** that within the National Housing Strategy there be a targeted youth homelessness strategy and investment with a focus on *housing and supports*.

We call for an annual federal investment of \$16.5 million as part of the HPS renewal.

### B) VETERANS

Veteran homelessness is an area of clear federal jurisdiction. Veterans Affairs Canada is making recommendations to prevent and end homelessness among veterans. According to the latest Point in Time counts veterans make up between 5-7% of Canada's homeless population. In light of this statistic, we support the following recommendations:

- i. Housing First funding for veterans who are at risk of or who are experiencing homelessness

- ii. New affordable housing units specifically designed to support veterans, including those with addiction and/or mental health challenges
- iii. Expanded eligibility for veterans benefits beyond those who can demonstrate a direct link between military service and their injury or illness. The strategy includes greater flexibility for local offices to distribute emergency funds to veterans to keep them stably housed

The cost of preventing and ending veterans homelessness may be in the range of \$3 million annually, or \$32.8 million over ten years (adjusted for inflation). This could be cost shared between HPS and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

### C) INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

It is well established that Indigenous Peoples are more likely to experience homelessness than other Canadians (Patrick, 2014; Belanger, et al. 2012). While making up 4.3% of the total Canadian population, Indigenous Peoples form a disproportionate percentage of the homeless population in communities across the country. According to the National Shelter Study, Indigenous Peoples use emergency shelters at a rate 10 times higher than non-Indigenous Peoples. In Canada, one cannot really discuss homelessness – and its solutions – without explicitly addressing Indigenous homelessness.

We do know that the experience of colonialism (resulting in intergenerational trauma), poverty, violence (in particular, against women), as well as racism and discrimination undermine health, well-being and opportunities, as well as enhance the risk of homelessness. In light of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the current National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, it is imperative that the Government of Canada engage Indigenous communities across the country in developing and implementing Indigenous led strategies to prevent and end homelessness.

At this time we cannot make a solid recommendation of the cost of this initiative. To support a strategy to address Indigenous homelessness, The Ministry of Indigenous and Northern Affairs may be requested to make an additional investment in partnership with HPS.

## RECOMMENDATION

**HPS renewal \$349 million a year; \$3.821 billion over ten years**

### Notes:

- This does not include costing for an Indigenous homelessness strategy.
- To support targeted investments for priority populations, additional resources may be requested from other Ministries and Departments (e.g., Veterans Affairs, Indigenous and Northern Affairs).
- Once the numbers of people who experience homelessness begin to significantly decline, this investment can be drawn down.



## II) ADDRESSING AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN CANADA

The following recommendations focus on expanding the affordable housing supply for low-income Canadians and people at risk of homelessness.

### 1. Retain and expand existing affordable social housing stock

Many low-income Canadians live in public housing and/or co-ops and get by because they are paying rent-geared-to-income. The 620,000 units of social housing, including co-op housing, built across Canada in the 1970s and 1980s were made possible through an investment by the federal government and were covered by 25-40-year operating agreements that support capital costs and operating expenses. When administrative responsibility was devolved to the provinces and territories in 1993, the Government of Canada agreed to continue their share of funding at 1994-95 levels and only until those agreements expired. Unfortunately, for communities across Canada, the 25-40-year operating agreements are all coming to an end; by 2020 the majority will have expired. Moreover, there has been no indication to date by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) that these agreements will be renewed.



The 2016 budget allocated a short-term, two-year \$30 million dollar investment for those operating agreements set to expire before March 2018 in anticipation of a comprehensive National Housing Strategy. Certainly this investment is necessary but does not provide the kind of stability necessary for long-term sustainability.

As part of the National Housing Strategy, there needs to be new investments to retain and expand the existing affordable housing stock. As part of this effort, guarantees are needed to ensure that marginalized populations such as youth and Indigenous Peoples have access to existing and new affordable housing stock. Below are our recommendations:

#### I. REMOVE THE FUNDING CAP FOR THE MORTGAGE PRE-PAYMENT PROGRAM AND INTRODUCE GREATER APPLICATION FLEXIBILITY

In June 2016 the federal government announced a \$150 million program over three years to allow housing providers who were locked into long-term mortgages to renew mortgage without pre-payment or other penalties. We recommend that all eligible housing providers should have the opportunity to participate in this program by lifting the \$150 million cap and create open ended intake of applications. We support CHRA's recommendations for further plans to allow for greater flexibility within existing operating agreements, such as allowing partial prepayment, allowing the consolidation of operating agreements, and eliminating CMHC's massive reporting requirements.

## **II. RENEW AND EXPAND INVESTMENT IN THE INVESTMENT IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING INITIATIVE (IAH)**

The Investment in Affordable Housing Initiative (IAH) serves an important function by providing funding to increase the supply of affordable housing and preserve the quality of affordable housing that already exists, which should include energy efficiency and other sustainability measures. The 2016 federal budget doubled the IAH investment by \$504.4 million for two years. We recommend a ten-year renewal at \$600 million annually, adjusted for inflation, recognizing that the current level of federal/provincial/territorial expenditures has not had any impact in reducing the percentage of the population of people living in core housing need. This investment would produce 4,000 new units of housing annually, based on a cost estimate of \$150,000 per unit<sup>4</sup>.

## **III. PROVIDE TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT RESOURCES TO HOUSING PROVIDERS NEARING THE END OF THE OPERATING AGREEMENT.**

CHRA has submitted a funding partnership proposal to CMHC to offer online and in-person tools for providers to address financial, legal, social and business development issues. Specifically, the tools will support housing providers assess their viability status, propose operational and functional options and help them implement a transitional plan.

## **IV. CREATION OF THE CANADA HOUSING FINANCE AUTHORITY.**

*The goal is to create and support alternative financing mechanisms that will allow housing providers to leverage their existing assets to secure greater capital.* A proposal developed by Housing Partnership Canada, would create a Canadian Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) to act as a dedicated non-profit lending institution for affordable housing initiatives, both to finance regeneration and to develop new housing projects. Focused on long-term investments, the CHFA will act as an independent entity to pool investments from multiple and diverse investors who might not otherwise be interested in funding individual housing providers. In turn, housing providers can access capital markets at a low rate to build and repair affordable housing. This lending model has found success in the UK and here in Canada, with the First Nations Finance Authority and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. The CHFA can provide necessary financial resources to housing providers as operating agreements come to an end and encourage self-sufficiency in the sector. A downside of this proposal is that housing projects that take on debt (at market rates) will invariably require rent subsidies of some kind for low end tenants in order to offset costs. It is recommended that the Government of Canada provide an up front investment of \$100 million to establish the authority. CHRA has explored this and alternative financing mechanisms. Whichever structure the Government of Canada chooses, the focus must be on using housing providers' assets

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4. We recognize that it is difficult to calculate building costs as they vary depending upon dwelling type, size of individual unit, construction type, cost of land, municipal/provincial/territorial tax benefits and incentives, size of building (single home, multi-unit etc.), for-profit/non-profit developer, municipal fees and levies etc.

to leverage capital from the private investment market or use a public authority (such as CMHC) to underwrite loans.

## RECOMMENDATION

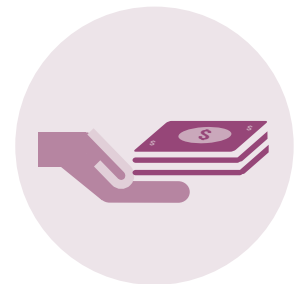
- Pre-mortgage payment program \$150 million a year;
- IAH \$600 million a year;
- Transitional support resources \$250 000 a year (five years);
- CHFA \$100 million (start up).

### TOTAL:

**Year 1 (2017): \$1,100 million**

**Ten years: \$12.045 billion**

## 2. National Low Income Housing Benefit – a new program to assist those who face a severe affordability problem in their current accommodation.



A large number of Canadians are precariously housed, because of a severe affordability problem in this country (Gaetz, Gulliver & Richter, 2014). While poverty and the resulting housing affordability can be a problem in both urban and rural areas, it is particularly an issue in large cities, because this is where housing costs tend to be the highest (see Chapter 3 of the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014* for elaboration). It is even the case that many people who live in so-called ‘affordable’ housing units, built under the federal Affordable Housing Initiative, may be in a difficult situation because not all units are rent-geared-to-income - rents are often pegged at 80% of markets which makes them high enough to place a strain on the household budget (Londerville and Steele, 2014:41).

In 2014 we recommended that the federal government implement a National Housing Benefit that would provide monthly cash payments directly to low-income households when accounting for income level and cost of housing. The benefit could be delivered through the income tax system and deposited directly into the recipient’s bank account, similar to ‘child tax’ benefits. Based on an earlier study by Pomeroy et al (2008) in Ontario, Londerville and Steele (2014) suggest that the housing benefit would take into account income and the cost of the housing (e.g. maximum income for a family of two adults and two children would be under \$36,000 while a single would need to make less than \$22,000). Recipients would be expected to make a reasonable contribution towards the cost of their housing – for example 30% of their income – and the housing benefit would cover 75% of the difference between the actual housing costs and the contribution.<sup>5</sup> Receivers of the benefit would have to demonstrate to CRA that they are paying the rent they claim to be paying.

5. While this will dramatically reduce the number of Canadian households living with an extreme affordability problem and will greatly reduce the deprivation of households experiencing core housing need, it will not eliminate extreme housing need completely. For example, if a household is currently paying 80% of its income on rent, the Housing Benefit (because of constraints such as max rent in the formula) would be very unlikely to bring the payment down to below 50%. A family household gets only 75% of the gap between rent and 30% of income.

Londerville and Steele have calculated the cost of this housing benefit at \$871.08 million annually for renters and \$247.92 million annually for low-income homeowners (based on 2014 dollars). A further breakdown follows:

Renters	Homeowners
\$428.28 million for renter families (215,000 recipients)	\$123.37 million for families (105,000 recipients)
\$388.8 million for renter singles (360,000 recipients)	\$125.94 for singles and childless couples (106,000 recipients)
\$54 million for homeless at income tax time (50,000 recipients)	
<b>TOTAL: \$871.08 million (625,000 recipients)</b>	<b>TOTAL: \$247.92 million (211,000 recipients)</b>

The National Housing Benefit would have the effect of greatly reducing those in extreme housing need and could act as a significant strategy for preventing homelessness by keeping individuals and families stably housed. We renew our call for a National Housing Benefit as part of the National Housing Strategy.

Notwithstanding the enormous improvements the National Housing Benefit will have to the lives of many Canadians, it does present some challenges worth noting.

### **A. ADDITIONAL FUNDING AND SUPPORTS FOR PEOPLE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.**

Because of their acute poverty, it will be difficult for someone currently experiencing homelessness to access the benefit and save first and last month rent. According to Steele (2016) in that case another kind of support payment will be required to assist those transitioning out of homelessness. Indeed, the benefit will reduce but not eliminate the need for rent subsidies and other income supports. Social supports, such as assistance filling out tax forms, will also be necessary. These challenges are surmountable but only with community leadership and collaboration and innovation from all orders of government. To the extent that a National Housing Benefit displaces provincial rent supplements, provincial government should be expected to contribute displaced funding into these transition funding programs and /or new affordable housing.

### **B. HOUSING BENEFIT FOR YOUTH UNDER THE AGE OF 18.**

Concerns regarding whether or not the housing benefit will incentivize young people to leave home at an earlier age when they still have access to housing and supports provided by parents or guardians, suggest additional conditions for those under the age of 18. One remedy is if young people under 18 are eligible for the benefit if: a) they become legally emancipated, b) their status as being homeless without recourse to return home is provided by a legal representative or housing worker.

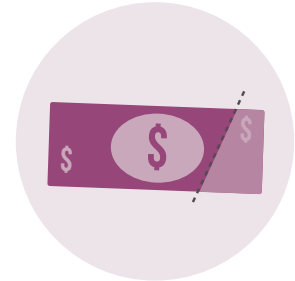
## RECOMMENDATION

- \$1,164 million a year
- \$12.745 billion over ten years.

**This will benefit 625,000 renters and 211,000 homeowners.**

### 3. Affordable housing tax credit

As reported in *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*, in order to encourage the creation of affordable housing by private and non-profit developers, we are proposing the creation of an affordable housing tax credit, modelled in major respects on the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) in the U.S. (Steele & des Rosiers, 2009).



According to Steele and Londerville:

“The US credit has provided housing for a wide range of clients and tenants over nearly three decades, surviving different Administrations of both U.S. political parties – proving to be remarkably robust. Among the developments it has helped fund is Anishinabe Wakiagun, a non-profit building providing supportive housing in Minneapolis for 45 chronically homeless alcoholic men. The housing credit has also funded thousands of units of for-profit housing, often targeted at moderate-income families.”

Essentially, an affordable housing tax credit is designed to give private equity investors reductions in federal income tax for dollars invested in qualifying affordable housing projects. The credits awarded for successful applicant developers would apply only to construction cost; the developer would need to fund land, architect and planners fees and other soft costs separately. Unlike most other incentives, the government would set a maximum amount of affordable housing tax credits awarded in each year so the government cost is known as soon as the amount is set. The credits would be allocated to provinces and territories based on CMHC’s assessment of core housing need and a provincial or territorial body would take applications and award them according to set criteria.

It is likely, as is the case with the LIHTC in the U.S., that syndicators would be required to pool funding from a number of investors to fund individual projects, as few individuals or developers would have enough taxable income to allow them to use all the credits awarded to a project. Highly regarded Canadian firms have experience as syndicators in the U.S. – for example RBC Capital Markets, through its Tax Credit Equity Group. We recommend that at least half the credits be allocated to non-profit developers, that rents for credit units be capped at no more than 80% of market rent and that occupants of the units, on entry, be required to have an income less than 125% of CMHC’s Household

Income Limit. All developments, except for those providing permanent housing for the chronically homeless, would be required to keep at least 15% of units in a primarily tax credit development as non-credit units. The motivation for this provision is twofold: to ensure the building has an income mix in its tenants; to provide units for those who initially meet the income requirement but whose income rises while they are sitting tenants so that they no longer qualify. Rising income would then not jeopardize a tenant's security of tenure. We also propose that the manager of a development with credit units, with some exceptions, be required to accept up to 20% of tenants from Housing First programs.

Londerville and Steele estimate that this investment would produce an additional 4,800 new units of housing annually, for a ten-year total of 48,000 units.

## RECOMMENDATION

- \$150 million per year
- \$1.642 billion over ten years

## 4. Review and expand investment in affordable housing for Indigenous Peoples

The lack of quality and accessible housing for Indigenous Peoples currently has an impact on the homelessness crisis in Canada (Patrick, 2014; Belanger et al., 2012). Population growth combined with a declining housing stock suggest that in time, there will be greater migration to urban areas as people seek better opportunities and in all likelihood, the homelessness problem amongst Indigenous Peoples in Canada is projected to become much worse than it already is.



We also must not forget the challenges that Indigenous Peoples face in accessing housing off reserve. While the housing problems for Indigenous Peoples off-reserve are similar to those of non-Indigenous people – lack of access to safe and affordable housing – the problem is exacerbated by constant and ongoing discrimination (in both housing and employment), as well as impacts of inter-generational trauma and colonization. This has resulted in disproportionate rate of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness in urban centers.

All of this indicates that prioritizing a strategic investment in Indigenous housing is required. For this report, we are not prepared to identify a cost for this investment because we lack solid information about the full extent of the problem today and in the immediate future.

The federal government is currently making investments in affordable housing both on and off reserve. Funding to improve housing among First Nations, Inuit and in the North is welcome and will make a

significant impact on the affordable housing stock. Still, these investments are largely short term, and are clearly inadequate. Using the knowledge and expertise of Indigenous Peoples and governments, the National Housing Strategy must include long-term, sustainable solutions to affordable housing for Indigenous Peoples both on and off reserve.

We renew the call made in 2014 for the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, in partnership with Indigenous communities, to conduct an audit of on-reserve housing in order to develop an evidence based plan for investing in affordable housing.

We also support the National Association of Friendship Centres, the JM McConnell Family Foundation and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's launch of the Indigenous Innovation Demonstration Fund. The fund supports organizations to develop and expand Indigenous social innovation and enterprise projects. We recommend that the Fund set aside specific investments for innovative solutions to housing and supports for Indigenous Peoples, both on and off reserve.

The call for solutions to affordable housing for Indigenous Peoples is critical as the Indigenous population grows. 28% of the Indigenous population are under the age of 14. This means that housing solutions for young people are an essential component to an Indigenous housing strategy. We call upon all stakeholders to recognize the importance of supporting Indigenous youth in their community plans to prevent and end homelessness.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- A projected minimum \$509 million per year
- \$5.573 billion over ten years, but the cost will likely increase based on the results of the audit

## 6. Conclusion: Time for Reinvestment in a National Housing and Homelessness Strategy

While homelessness continues to be a major crisis in Canada, we believe it is a problem that can be solved. With the Government of Canada now poised to develop and implement a new National Housing Strategy, there is an opportunity to make significant progress.

Our recommendations outline a plan with two main areas of focus:

- I) An investment in the prevention and ending of homelessness
- II) An expansion of the affordable housing supply in Canada

The key point is we can end homelessness in Canada. This requires an investment, but one that will pay big dividends for all Canadians as housing becomes more affordable. Moreover, this will allow us to finally say that homelessness is no longer a problem in our country.

*“We live in an amazing country and we certainly have the capability to provide everyone with some sort of adequate housing... Hope is beautiful, and may my hope that we are all housed properly be realized sooner rather than later”. - Sean*

*An excerpt from Homelessness is Only One Piece of my Puzzle:  
Implications for Policy and Practice (2015:110-111)*



## A renewed investment

In the 2016 federal budget, the Government of Canada outlined its commitment to affordable housing in Canada through an expanded investment in a number of existing and new program areas. Table 2 below outlines budget allocations in a number of areas, for a total of \$3,188 million in 2016-17.

TABLE 2 Federal Spending on Affordable Housing, 2016-17 and 2017-18 (in millions)

	2016-17	Projected 2017-18
CMHC Social housing agreements	\$1282	\$1202
IAH	\$515	\$496
Indigenous housing	\$497.1	\$523.7
Homelessness Partnering Strategy	\$176.9	\$172.9
Investment in social housing repairs	\$500	\$74
Affordable housing for seniors	\$100.3	\$100.4
Affordable Rental Housing Innovation Fund	\$41.6	\$41.6
Rent subsidies	\$15	\$15
Shelters for victims of violence	\$60	\$30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,187.9</b>	<b>\$2,655.6</b>
<b>10 Year Projection – 2017-2026</b>		<b>\$22,592</b>

In the *State of Homelessness 2016*, we outline our key recommendations for the new National Housing Strategy. The costs of these proposals are detailed in Table 3 below:

TABLE 3 State of Homelessness in Canada  
Cost Estimates of Recommendations, 2017-18 and 10 year projection (in millions)<sup>6</sup>

Recommendation I – Addressing Homelessness in Canada		
	2017-18	10 years
1. The Government of Canada should adopt a national goal of ending homelessness with clear and measurable outcomes, milestones, and criteria	The annual investment in an HPS renewal referenced below covers all four recommendation areas.	
2. Renew, refocus, and expand the Homelessness Partnering Strategy		
3. A new federal/provincial/territorial framework agreement that defines local leadership on homelessness and housing investment		
4. Targeted strategies to address the needs of priority populations		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$349</b>	<b>\$3,821</b>

6. 10 year projections adjusted for inflation

<b>Recommendation II – Addressing the Affordable Housing Supply</b>		
	<b>2017-2018</b>	<b>10 years</b>
1. Retain and expand existing affordable social housing stock	\$1,100	\$12,045
2. National low income housing benefit	\$1,164	\$12,745
3. Affordable housing tax credit	\$150	\$1,642
4. Review and expand investment in affordable housing for Indigenous Peoples	\$509	\$5,573
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,272</b>	<b>\$35,826</b>
<b>Additional federal commitments for expiring CMHC social housing agreements<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>\$1,202</b>	<b>\$7,962</b>



## State of Homelessness in Canada 2016 - proposed National Housing and Homelessness Strategy

**Total investment 2017-2018** \$4,474 million

**Total 10 year investment 2017-2026** \$43.788 billion

## Can we afford this?

As we argued in the *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014*, our current affordable housing crisis is the outcome of a massive disinvestment in housing over the past 25 years. Since the 1990s, federal spending on low-income affordable housing (on a per capita basis) dropped from over \$115 annually, to just over \$60 (adjusted to 2013 dollars). While we pride ourselves on being able to balance federal budgets, we have done so by creating a massive affordable housing and infrastructure deficit.

In order to save money in the short term, we have created a crisis. This is not unlike putting off roof repairs for 25 years in order to save money, but at the expense of the structural integrity of the whole house. We now need a reinvestment in order to make up for the lost opportunities of the past 25 years.

Our recommendations for the National Housing Strategy are not only comprehensive they are affordable. Federal spending on affordable housing and homelessness in 2017-18 is projected to be \$2,655.6 million. While this is a significant increase over the previous years (and amounts to \$73 per Canadian on a per capita basis) it is not enough, and is still considerably lower than the \$115 level of 1989. Over a ten year period (2017-26) the total amount of federal investment would be \$22.592 billion (note that there is an annual decline in federal spending because of expiring social housing agreements).

7. Note that current federal expenditures for IAH, Indigenous Housing, and HPS are included in our recommendations.

Our proposal, combined with existing federal expenditures (including expiring social housing agreements) is \$4,474 million, or \$43.788 billion over a ten-year period (the ten year projection is indexed to inflation). This represents a minimum annual increase of \$1,818 million. To put this in perspective, our proposal means increasing the annual investment from \$73 per Canadian to \$123 per Canadian, only an additional \$50 per year. For each Canadian this amounts to \$1 a week – a reasonable investment to expand the affordable housing supply in Canada. More importantly it will mean we have the resources to prevent and end homelessness in Canada.

There are other important spin offs. It should be noted that our investments will lead to an increase in employment opportunities in communities across the country. As Zon, Molson, and Oschinski (2014) articulate, “Each \$1 increase in residential building construction investment generates an increase in overall GDP of \$1.52 as the investment continues to cycle through the economy. Each \$1 million in investment also generates about 8.5 new jobs.”



Our recommendations for the National Housing Strategy suggest there is a real opportunity to put in place infrastructure and supports that will benefit individuals, families, and communities across the country. These investments will potentially be recouped by offsetting the costs associated with homelessness. Moreover, the biggest reason for this investment is the contribution it will make to preventing and ending homelessness in Canada. For too long we have allowed mass homelessness to continue in this country, to the detriment of the health and wellbeing of tens of thousands of individuals and families. We are now presented with a chance to make real progress, to turn the dial on homelessness in Canada.

**WE CAN END HOMELESSNESS, IF WE WANT TO.**

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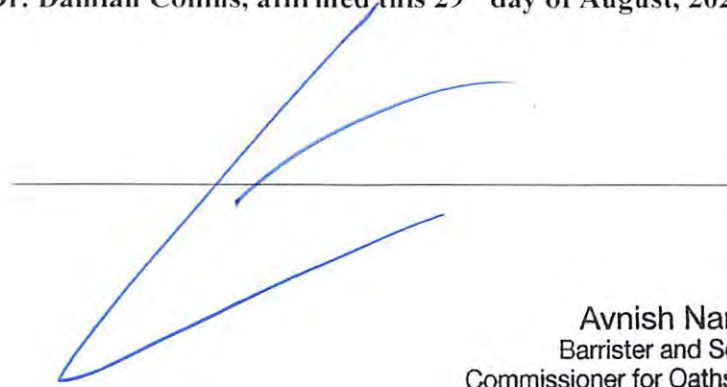
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This is Exhibit "6" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

THE STATE OF  
**HOMELESSNESS**  
*in*  
**CANADA**  
**2013**



the  
homeless hub



Canadian Alliance to  
End Homelessness

# The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013

Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver

Homeless Hub Paper #4



ISBN: 978-1-55014-632-5

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## How to cite this document:

Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver (2013): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

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Canadian Homelessness  
Research Network



Canadian Alliance to  
End Homelessness

Layout & design by:  
Steph Vasko

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# Executive summary

The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2013 is the first extensive Canadian report card on homelessness.

This report examines what we know about homelessness, the historical, social and economic context in which it has emerged, demographic features of the problem, and potential solutions. The State of Homelessness provides a starting point to inform the development of a consistent, evidence-based approach towards ending homelessness.

Our goal in developing this report was to both assess the breadth of the problem and to develop a methodology for national measurement. We believe that homelessness is not a given and that not just reducing, but ending, the crisis is *achievable*.

The information for the State of Homelessness in Canada report has been compiled by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (Homeless Hub)

*We believe that homelessness is not a given and that not just reducing, but ending, the crisis is achievable.*

and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness from the best available research to date. Because we lack strong data on homelessness in Canada, our estimates of the scale of the problem are just that: an estimate, but they represent an important starting point. As the first national report card on homelessness, the evaluation of the response to

homelessness by Canada's homeless sector provides an important means of benchmarking progress toward ending homelessness.

## Defining homelessness

In 2012, a new Canadian Definition of Homelessness was released by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network:

*“Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.” (CHRN, 2012: 1)*

The accompanying **typology** identifies a range of housing and shelter circumstances:

- 1) **UNSHELTERED** - living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation
- 2) **EMERGENCY SHELTERED** - staying in overnight emergency shelters designed for people who are homeless
- 3) **PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED** – people who are homeless whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, including interim (or transitional) housing, people living temporarily with others (couch surfing), or living in institutional contexts (hospital, prison) without permanent housing arrangements.
- 4) **AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS** - people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

The pathways into and out of homelessness are neither linear, nor uniform. Individuals and families who wind up homeless may not share much in common with each other, aside from the fact that they are extremely vulnerable and lack adequate housing, income and the necessary supports to ensure they stay housed. The causes of homelessness reflect an intricate interplay between structural factors (poverty, lack of affordable housing), systems failures (people being discharged from mental health facilities, corrections or child protection services into homelessness) and individual circumstances (family conflict and violence, mental health and addictions). Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of these factors.

While it may be true that due to personal crises, individuals will continue to fall into homelessness, there is no reason why people should remain homeless for years, or even months on end. The problem of homelessness is not one of individual crises, however, but instead refers to: “the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing” (CHRN, 2012:1).

We do know that the homelessness crisis was created through drastically reduced investments in affordable and social housing in the 1990s, shifts in income supports and the declining spending power of almost half of the population since that time. Currently many Canadians are at risk of homelessness because of the high cost (and unavailability) of housing, inadequate incomes and family violence. The good news is that if we understand the causes of homelessness, we can do something about it.

# Major findings

## How many Canadians are homeless?

Estimating the number of homeless persons in Canada has been a source of debate for years. Until recently, there has never been a concerted, coordinated or consistent effort to enumerate homelessness in Canada. This means that in the past we have relied on ball-park estimates, based on unreliable and incomplete data. This is now changing.

### At least 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness in a given year

We estimate at least 200,000 Canadians access homeless emergency services or sleep outside in a given year. The actual number is potentially much higher, given that many people who become homeless live with friends or relatives, and do not come into contact with emergency shelters.

Recent data from a March 2013 Ipsos Reid poll suggests that as many as 1.3 million Canadians have experienced homelessness or extremely insecure housing at some point during the past five years.

### At least 30,000 are homeless on a given night

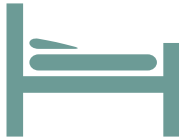
The number of Canadians who experience homelessness on any given night in Canada is estimated to be approximately 30,000 individuals. This is the best estimate of homelessness developed in Canada to date, and includes people who are:

- I. **UNSHELTERED** (outside in cars, parks, on the street) – 2,880
- II. **STAYING IN EMERGENCY HOMELESSNESS SHELTERS** – 14,400
- III. **STAYING IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS** – 7,350
- IV. **PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED** (homeless but in hospitals, prison or interim housing) – 4,464

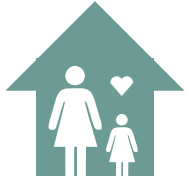
**30,000** PEOPLE  
ARE HOMELESS ON A GIVEN NIGHT



**2,880**  
UNSHELTERED



**14,400**  
STAYING IN  
EMERGENCY SHELTERS



**7,350**  
STAYING IN VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS



**4,464**  
TEMPORARY INSTITUTIONAL  
ACCOMMODATION

## As many as 50,000 Canadians may be 'hidden homeless' on any given night

Often referred to as couch surfing, this includes people who are temporarily staying with friends, relatives or others because they have nowhere else to live and no immediate prospect of permanent housing. There is no reliable data on the hidden homelessness in Canada at the national level and very little at the community level. One Canadian study in Vancouver (Eberle, et al., 2009) estimated 3.5 people were considered to be hidden homeless for every one who was homeless. While the methodology of this study is sound, it was conducted in only one city, and the differences between cities, their infrastructure to support homelessness and their homeless population are quite profound. Applied nationally with a more conservative 3:1 ratio, as many as 50,000 people could be estimated to be hidden homeless on any given night in Canada.

### Warning signs

As we attempt to determine the scope of homelessness in Canada it's important to pay attention to warning signs in national statistics that point to a larger segment of the Canadian population struggling with poverty, high housing cost and poor nutrition that may indicate homelessness risk:

- The reduction in rental housing combined with stagnating or declining incomes, benefit reductions, and economic changes meant that since the 1980s, more and more Canadians were spending a larger percentage of their income on housing. It is estimated that there are roughly 380,600 households living in severe housing need (living in poverty and spending more than 50% of their income on rental housing).
- 10% of Canadian households live below the Low Income Cut-off (LICO). In some cities, the percentage is even higher, such as Vancouver (16.9%) and Toronto (13.2%), both of which also have the highest housing costs in the country.
- 10% of Canadian families fall below the Market Basket Measure (MBM) poverty threshold, meaning they do not have enough money to meet even the most basic needs.
- 8.2% of Canadian households are experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity.
- Between 1980 and 2005 the average earnings among the least wealthy Canadians fell by 20%, even as the country went through a period of sustained economic and employment growth.

Homelessness is a problem larger than the number of people counted on the streets or in shelters.

# WARNING ! SIGNS

BETWEEN 1980 AND 2005  
THE AVERAGE EARNINGS AMONG  
THE LEAST WEALTHY CANADIANS  
FELL BY 20%

A larger segment of the Canadian population struggling with poverty, high housing cost and poor nutrition may indicate homelessness risk:

10%

OF HOUSEHOLDS  
LIVE BELOW THE  
LOW INCOME  
CUT-OFF (LICO).



10%

OF FAMILIES DO NOT  
HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO  
MEET EVEN THE MOST  
BASIC NEEDS



8.2%

OF HOUSEHOLDS  
ARE EXPERIENCING  
MODERATE OR SEVERE  
FOOD INSECURITY

380,600 LIVE IN SEVERE  
HOUSEHOLDS HOUSING NEED



## Who is homeless in Canada?

While homelessness can affect any number of people, we do know that some groups of people are more likely to be homeless than others. Single adult males, between the ages of 25 and 55, account for almost half of the homeless population in Canada (47.5%), according to a Government of Canada study.



At the same time, it is also important to note that other sub-populations face unique risks and/or face special circumstances. Because the specific experiences of being homeless will differ for each group, strategies to address homelessness must be tailored to these differing needs. Key sub-populations include:

**YOUTH** – Youth make up about 20% of the homelessness population, though the prevalence rate is the same for adult men. The causes and consequences of homelessness for young people are distinct from those which afflict adults, meaning we require tailored responses.

**ABORIGINAL PEOPLE** – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are overrepresented amongst homeless populations in most communities in Canada. This necessitates the inclusion of their historical, experiential and cultural differences, as well as experiences with colonization and racism, in consideration of Aboriginal homelessness. Aboriginal peoples must be part of any solutions to homelessness. *Aboriginal peoples must be part of any solutions to homelessness.*

**WOMEN AND FAMILIES** – Violence and poverty are the main causes of homelessness for women and families. There is some evidence that family homelessness is a growing problem in Canada.

## Chronic homelessness

For the vast majority of people who become homeless, the experience is rather short. In Canada, though the median length of stay in emergency shelter is approximately 50 days, most people are homeless for less than a month (29% stay only one night), and manage to leave homelessness on their own, usually with little support. For these people homelessness is a one-time only event. People who are chronically homeless (long-term) or episodically homeless (moving in and out of homelessness), form a smaller percentage of the overall homeless population, but at the same time use more than half the emergency shelter space in Canada and are most often the highest users of public systems.

Based on our estimate of the total number of homeless people who use shelters on an annual basis (200,000), we can project the following numbers of chronic, episodic and transitionally homeless persons in Canada:

**CHRONIC HOMELESS:** 4,000 to 8,000  
**EPISODIC HOMELESS:** 6,000 to 22,000  
**TRANSITIONALLY HOMELESS:** 176,000 to 188,000

# HOMELESSNESS COSTS THE CANADIAN ECONOMY \$7 BILLION ANNUALLY

THIS INCLUDES NOT ONLY  
THE COST OF EMERGENCY  
SHELTERS, BUT SOCIAL  
SERVICES, HEALTH CARE  
AND CORRECTIONS.

## Homelessness costs the Canadian economy \$7 billion per year

In 2007, the Sheldon Chumir Foundation estimated that the emergency response to homelessness costs taxpayers from \$4.5-\$6 billion annually. This figure includes not only the cost of emergency shelters, but social services, health care and corrections. **Our updated figure for the annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy is \$7.05 billion dollars.**

Homelessness is expensive because we cycle people through expensive public systems and increasingly costly and uncoordinated emergency services systems. By shifting focus to permanent solutions, we have the opportunity to reduce the long term cost of homelessness and make more efficient and effective use of public resources.

## Progress pointing to a solution

Communities across Canada have been struggling to address the problem of homelessness for several decades. The Government of Canada, as well as many provincial, territorial, regional, municipal and Aboriginal governments, have invested in creating effective solutions. A key question is whether we are making any progress? Is it making a difference?

Unfortunately, the data which does exist doesn't point to major progress being made on a national level. A recent Government of Canada study indicates that between 2005 and 2009, there was little change in the number of individuals who use shelters on an annual basis.

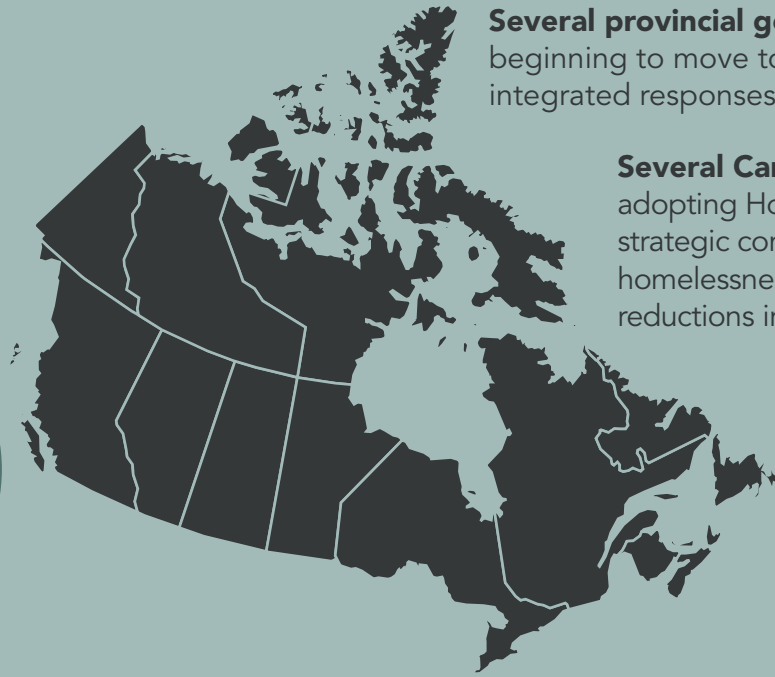
*A recent Government of Canada study indicates that between 2005 and 2009, there was little change in the number of individuals who use shelters on an annual basis.*

There are some positive signs of progress, however.

- In March of this year, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) was renewed by the Government of Canada for five years with a financial commitment of \$119 million. The HPS encourages a housing-first approach, which recognizes that housing stability is necessary for the success of other interventions such as education and training, life skills development, management of mental health challenges – or treatment of substance abuse.
- The success of the At Home/Chez Soi pilot of Housing First programs in five Canadian cities points the way to how we can effectively contribute to an end to homelessness through the adoption and adaptation of Housing First by communities across the country.

# PROGRESS POINTING TO A SOLUTION

Success of the  
At Home/Chez Soi  
pilot of Housing  
First programs in  
5 Canadian cities



Several provincial governments are beginning to move towards strategic & integrated responses to homelessness.

Several Canadian cities, through adopting Housing First as part of their strategic community plans to end homelessness, have seen considerable reductions in their homeless populations.

Homelessness  
Partnering  
Strategy (HPS)  
renewed for  
5 years.

- Several provincial governments, including New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia are beginning to move towards strategic and integrated responses to homelessness. The Government of Alberta leads the way with their plan to end homelessness which has resulted in province-wide reductions in homelessness. Further, Alberta has established the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness, to lead provincial planning, coordination and service integration.
- Many Canadian cities have made progress in ending homelessness, using strategic community plans, investing in affordable housing and emphasizing Housing First. Several cities in Alberta have seen considerable reductions in their homeless populations through these efforts, including Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Vancouver has seen a 66% reduction in street homelessness on their way to a goal of ending street homelessness by 2015.

These developments show that important progress is being made and demonstrate some of critical ingredients necessary to reduce homelessness including: a deliberate focus on ending homelessness, political leadership, targeted investments in affordable housing, shifting to Housing First and, importantly, taking action.

## Recommendations

1. **Communities should develop and implement clear plans to end homelessness, supported by all levels of government.**
2. **All levels of government must work to increase the supply of affordable housing.**
3. **Communities – and all levels of government - should embrace Housing First.**
4. **Eliminating chronic and episodic homelessness should be prioritized.**
5. **Ending Aboriginal Homelessness should be prioritized as both a distinct category of action and part of the overall strategy to end homelessness.**
6. **Introduce more comprehensive data collection, performance monitoring, analysis and research.**
  - 6.1 The Government of Canada should institute a national Point in Time Count of Homelessness.
  - 6.2 Funders should support communities to conduct effective and reliable program evaluations.
  - 6.3 The Government of Canada should mandate implementation of Homelessness Information Management Systems.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the report

The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2013 is the first extensive Canadian report card on homelessness. This report examines what we know about homelessness, the historical, social and economic context in which it has emerged, demographic features of the problem, and potential solutions. The State of Homelessness provides a starting point to inform the development of a consistent, evidence-based approach towards ending homelessness.

Our goal in developing this report was to both assess the breadth of the problem and to develop a methodology for national measurement. The need for baseline measurement is important in our efforts to address homelessness. We cannot demonstrate progress if we don't know where we started. The State of Homelessness in Canada attempts to fill this void, through presenting what we know about homelessness in Canada drawing from the best available data. We do this with a full understanding of the limitations of existing research and data. The lack of consistency across the country makes it difficult to compare statistics, effectiveness of interventions and programs and to truly determine how many Canadians experience homelessness. While these methodological problems exist, we do feel that we can provide very informed estimate based in the best research on numbers that is available at this time. Based on our extensive research, our estimates provide a relatively accurate snapshot of homelessness in Canada and can be used as a starting point for decision-makers to allocate resources, develop plans to end homelessness and deliver services within the homeless sector. As an ongoing exercise, the accuracy will improve providing effective data for governments, researchers and community organizations working to end homelessness.

We believe that homelessness is not a given and that not just reducing, but ending, the crisis is achievable. While we don't want to prescribe a "one-size-fits-all" methodology given the importance of determining diverse local needs, we feel that street counts and other statistical analysis must be underpinned by uniform definitions of homelessness. Improved consistency of definitions, techniques, tools and analysis at the local level will further clarify requirements at the national level.

*We believe that homelessness is not a given and that not just reducing, but ending, the crisis is achievable.*

## 1.2 Structure of the report

The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2013 provides a brief summary of the causative factors and typology of homelessness based on the Canadian Definition of Homeless (CHRN, 2012). It defines the *problem* of homelessness in Canada in order to help create a common understanding of the issue for readers. We also explore the issue of those at-risk of becoming homelessness to draw attention to the grave danger we are in if we don't address the issue and move towards solutions.

The next section examines our findings by looking at the number and type of homeless people in Canada. This includes an exploration of the demographics and geography of the country's homeless population. We explore the methodology of the various types of counting that has occurred and look at the implications for accuracy.

We move on to tracking the response to homelessness across Canada including the various government and community initiatives, and the successes of some municipalities in creating significant change.

Finally, we end with recommendations for changes in order for Canada to both improve its understanding of homelessness and take serious steps towards eradicating it.

It is our hope that by creating a national baseline, Canadians will be able to see the extent of the problem and measure progress towards the solution.

*People who are homeless are not a distinct and separate population. In fact the line between being homeless and not being homeless is quite fluid.*



VIEW THIS INFOGRAPHIC AT [www.homelesshub.ca/SOHC2013](http://www.homelesshub.ca/SOHC2013)

## 2 The context

The meaning of homelessness is seemingly straightforward. However, people who become homeless do not form a homogeneous group and the term can describe a range of individuals and families who experience vastly different circumstances and challenges. The Canadian Definition of Homelessness (CHRN, 2012) reflects these differences: it includes a typology which distinguishes between unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated and those at-risk of homelessness which is crucial to unifying the discussion. But more precise language is only the first step in making sense of the issue. To tackle homelessness we must understand how structural factors, systems failures and individual and relational factors interact to create the problem. Through this distinction it becomes clear that although homelessness affects individuals, it is created and reinforced by much larger societal factors, such as the growing income gap and a major lack of affordable housing. An analysis of housing affordability reveals a precarious housing situation for many Canadians. Fortunately, these problems can be solved, but only with a nationally consistent understanding of what homelessness is and a strategy that addresses the causes of homelessness across all levels.

*The lack of clarity around homelessness gets in the way of effective solutions.*

### 2.1 What is homelessness?

Most Canadians probably agree that people living outdoors or in emergency shelters are in fact, 'homeless'. However, when we move beyond that group to consider those who are temporarily homeless, couch surfing, or living in transitional housing, there is less agreement. The lack of clarity around homelessness gets in the way of effective solutions. A common definition provides communities and all levels of government with a common language for understanding homelessness, and a means of identifying strategies and interventions, and measuring outcomes and progress. In response to this lack of clarity, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network established the Canadian Definition of Homelessness. According to this definition:

*"Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual / household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing." (CHRN, 2012: 1)*

The definition also includes a **typology** that identifies a range of housing and shelter circumstances:

- 1) **UNSHeltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation, including: a) people living in public or private spaces without consent or contract, and b) people living in places not intended for permanent human habitation.
- 2) **EMERGENCY SHELTERED**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence, and those fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires or floods, for example.

- 3) **PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure. This includes people: a) staying in interim or transitional housing; b) living temporarily with others (couch surfing), c) accessing short term, temporary accommodation (motels, for instance); d) living in institutional contexts (hospital, prison) without permanent housing arrangements.
- 4) **AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards. It should be noted that for many people homelessness is not a static state but rather a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency. We include 'at risk' of homelessness not because we want to count this population, but because understanding risk factors facilitates prevention.

## 2.2 The CAUSES of homelessness

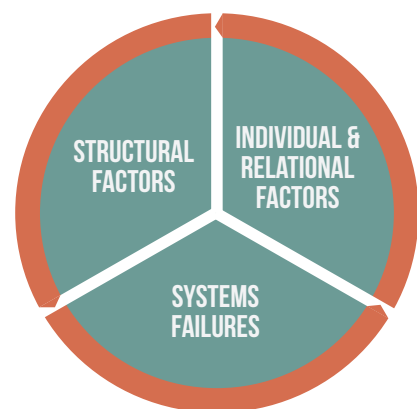
People who are homeless are not a distinct and separate population. In fact the line between being homeless and *not* being homeless is quite fluid. In general, the pathways into and out of homelessness are neither linear nor uniform. Individuals and families who wind up homeless may not share much in common with each other, aside from the fact that they are extremely vulnerable, and lack adequate housing and income and the necessary supports to ensure they stay housed. The causes of homelessness reflect an intricate interplay between structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances. **Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of a number of factors, rather than a single cause.**

**Structural factors** are economic and societal issues that affect opportunities and social environments for individuals. Key factors can include the lack of adequate income, access to affordable housing and health supports and/or the experience of discrimination. Shifts in the economy both nationally and locally can create challenges for people to earn an adequate income, pay for food and for housing. Arguably, the most impactful factor is the lack of affordable housing nationwide however; discrimination can impede access to employment, housing, justice and helpful services. Racial and sexual minorities are at greater risk of such discrimination.

**Systems failures** occur when other systems of care and support fail, requiring vulnerable people to turn to the homelessness sector, when other mainstream services could have prevented this need. Examples of systems failures include difficult transitions from child welfare, inadequate discharge planning for people leaving hospitals, corrections and mental health and addictions facilities and a lack of support for immigrants and refugees.

**Individual and relational factors** apply to the personal circumstances of a homeless person, and may include: *traumatic events* (e.g. house fire or job loss), personal crisis (e.g. family break-up or domestic violence), mental health and addictions challenges (including brain injury and fetal alcohol syndrome), which can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness and physical health problems or disabilities. Relational problems can include family violence and abuse, addictions, and mental health problems of other family members and extreme poverty. Family violence, estimated to affect 2 million Canadians, (Statistics Canada, 2011) can force individuals and families to leave home suddenly, without proper supports in place. This is particularly an issue for youth and women, especially those with children.

FIGURE 1 Causes of Homelessness



## 2.3 Homelessness as a *problem*

It is important to distinguish the individual and personal experiences of those who lose their housing, from homelessness as a broader societal *problem*.

*The **problem** of homelessness and housing exclusion refers to the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing. The goal of ending homelessness is to ensure housing stability, which means people have a fixed address and housing that is appropriate (affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and suitable in size), and includes required services as needed (supportive), in addition to income and supports. (CHRN, 2012: 1)*

This distinction is important because while individuals and families will undoubtedly continue to experience crises that result in their becoming homeless, the problem of homelessness is something that we, as a society, can address. Canada has long been home to people experiencing poverty, and homeless people have always needed charitable services such as emergency shelters and soup kitchens. Yet, homelessness as a social ‘problem’ has emerged only in the last two decades. Changes in our economy and housing market, as well as significant shifts in policies addressing poverty, have contributed to the homelessness crisis across the country.

### Declining income

In the three decades prior to the economic downturn of 2008, wage gaps widened and household income inequality increased in a large majority of OECD countries, and in 2011 the income gap in Canada was above average (OECD, 2011). Between 1980 and 2005, the incomes of the top 20% wealthiest

*The past several decades have seen declining purchasing power for low income Canadians.*

Canadians increased by 16% while the average earnings among the least wealthy fell by 20%, even as the country went through a period of sustained economic and employment growth (Statistics Canada, 2008). This rise in inequality was due in large part to “wage suppression, benefit reduction, growth of part time work and the deindustrialization of the Canadian economy” (Gaetz, 2010). The end result is a decline in purchasing power of low income people; they are less and less able to pay for basic necessities such as housing, food and transportation.

*“The income gap is growing. The middle has disappeared. We’ve doubled the number of people at the top and hugely increased the number of people at the bottom. That’s no good way to build a society.”*

David Hulchanski

### Reductions in benefits for low income Canadians

Infrastructure support for low income Canadians, including health, post-secondary education and social welfare services has significantly reduced. Federal benefits (including Family Allowance, Old Age Security and Employment Insurance Benefits), reached 6.3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1993 but were reduced to 3.8% by 2008 (Dunlop, 2006), despite the continual rise of Canada’s GDP.



Without adequate security nets, more and more people are at increased risk of homelessness. Due to sweeping budget cuts and transfers to provinces, as well as concerns about welfare fraud reported in the media, some governments decided to make significant changes to welfare programs, often in the form of deep cuts in benefits and/or changing eligibility requirements. In 1995 for example, the Province of Ontario slashed welfare rates by 21.6% (Moscovitch, 1997) with only minor adjustments made for cost of living increases since. Today, with that initial 21.6% cut and inflation for the last 18 years, the rates are approximately 55% below rates in the 1990s.

## Affordable housing crisis

The policy shift with the most profound impact on homelessness has been the reduction in the investment in, and overall supply of, affordable housing (including private sector rental and social housing). Key here was the dismantling of Canada's national housing strategy in the mid-1990s. This began with the gradual reduction in spending on affordable and social housing (including support for co-op housing) in the 1980s, culminating in the cancellation of the program in 1993 and the transfer of responsibility for social housing to the provinces in 1996. The government's housing policy shifted from direct investment in housing to a monetary policy (low interest rates) and tax incentives to encourage private home ownership.

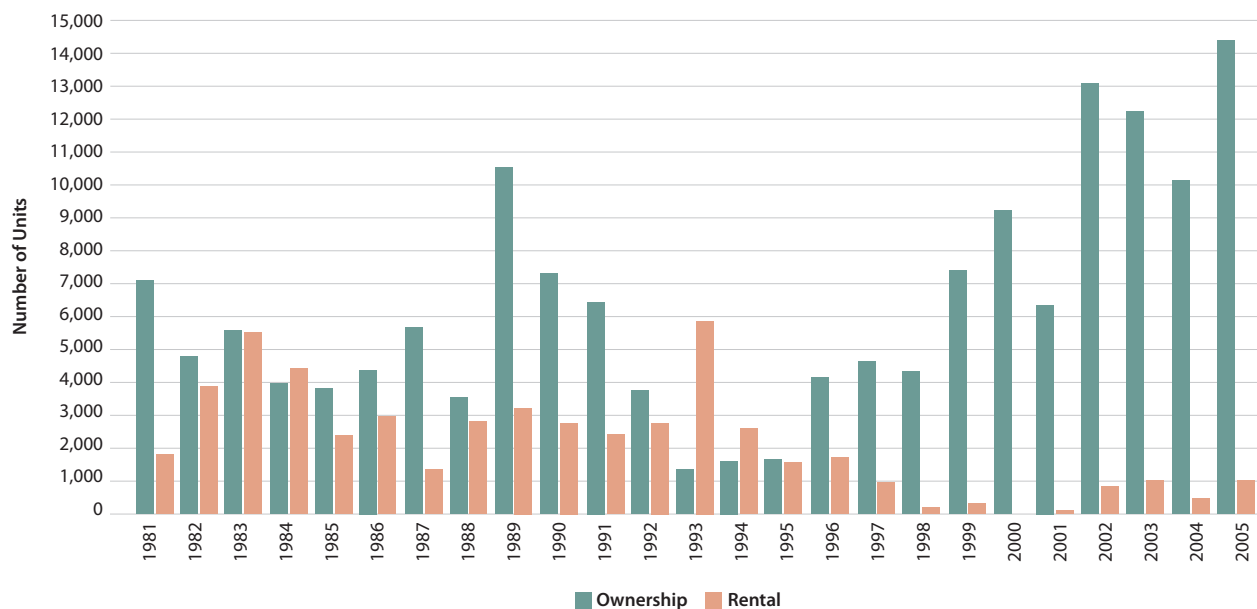
Michael Shapcott notes that in 1982, all levels of government funded 20,450 new social housing units. By 1995, the number dropped to approximately 1,000, with a modest increase to 4,393 by 2006 (Wellesley Institute, 2008). While the private sector has increased the overall supply of housing by building a large supply of ownership housing since that time, it has not responded to the affordable housing need through an increase of the rental housing supply. In fact, the opposite has occurred – in cities across the country, particularly in gentrifying neighbourhoods, many rental properties (including apartments and rooming houses) have been demolished or converted to unaffordable condominiums.

The reduction in rental housing combined with stagnating or declining incomes, benefit reductions, and economic changes means that since the 1980s, more and more Canadians are spending a larger percentage of their income on housing. Since that time, all levels of government have periodically injected more direct funding to develop affordable housing and, in some cases, used tax incentives to encourage the development of rental housing. At the same time, in many communities, the use of zoning and creative strategies by private sector developers to develop innovative and accessible affordable housing projects have made a contribution to expanding housing options in Canada.

*"The word "homelessness" came into common use in developed countries in the early and mid-1980s to refer to the problem of dehousing – the fact that an increasing number of people who were once housed in these wealthy countries were no longer housed. Canada had started to experience dehousing processes"*  
Hulchanski 2009, p. 3.

*The point is that homelessness is a problem or a crisis that we created.  
And if we created it, we can end it.*

FIGURE 2 Housing Completions, Toronto, 1981-2005<sup>1</sup>



Nevertheless, all of these efforts have not reversed the trend. The very significant decline in the availability of affordable housing in Canada, combined with economic factors described above, has contributed to the creation of the homelessness problem. Since the 1990s, homelessness has become a much more visible issue in communities across the country. Not only has homelessness become a real problem in most cities, it is no longer primarily an urban issue. As cities struggled to cope with the rising number of people who needed services, many homeless people went to smaller towns and rural areas – including in Canada’s north - in an effort to survive.

## 2.4 People at risk of homelessness

Many Canadians are at risk of homelessness. Risk factors include poverty, personal crises, discrimination, a lack of affordable housing, insecurity of tenure and/or the inappropriateness of their current housing.

The combination of rising housing costs and stagnating incomes mean that many Canadians are close to the edge, paying too much of their income on housing. It is in this context that personal crises can lead individuals and families to lose their housing and become homeless.

### Housing affordability

One measure of housing affordability is the percentage of an individual or family’s income that is used to pay housing. Housing is considered affordable if people are paying 30% or less of their annual income. Those who are below median income

#### PRECARIOUS HOUSING

CMHC defines a household as being in core housing need if its housing: “falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards)” (CMHC, 2010).

- **Adequate** housing is reported by residents as not requiring any major repairs. Housing that is inadequate may have excessive mold, inadequate heating or water supply, significant damage, etc.
- **Affordable** dwelling costs less than 30% of total before-tax household income. Those in extreme core housing need pay 50% or more of their income on housing. It should be noted that the lower the household income, the more onerous this expense becomes.
- **Suitable** housing has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the resident household, according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.

*Many Canadians are close to the edge, paying too much of their income on housing.*

(living in poverty) and are paying more than 30% are in “core housing need” and at risk of becoming homeless. Further, households that are below median income and paying more than 50% of their income are considered to be in “severe housing need.”

How many Canadians are in this situation? Rising rental costs and reduced availability have put 1.5 million of 12 million Canadian households into core housing need, with 3.4 million households waiting for subsidized housing (Wellesley Institute, 2010).

Table 1 offers insight into the extent of the affordable housing crisis, with a comparison between select Canadian cities. Over 27% of Canadian households are living in core housing need, with 10.5% (roughly 380,600 households) living in severe housing need (CMHC, 2010). Access to housing is compromised by high housing costs, partially fueled by low interest rate policies and tax incentives to invest in privately owned housing, such as allowing people to use RRSPs for house down payments.

TABLE 1 Affordable Housing in Canada<sup>2</sup>

Census Metropolitan Areas	Population	Homeownership Rate	Vacancy Rate	Average Rents (Bachelor/ 1 Bed)	Core Housing Need; Renters (# of households/incidence)	Severe Housing Need; Renters (% of households)
Canada	33,476,688	68.4%	2.8%	\$655	981,750	10.5%
				\$812	27.2%	
Victoria	344,615	64.7%	2.7%	\$695	12,480	10.9%
				\$828	26.5%	
Vancouver	2,313,328	65.1%	1.8%	\$864	79,365	12.3%
				\$982	31.2%	
Calgary	1,214,839	74.1%	1.3%	\$776	22,515	8.6%
				\$958	22.4%	
Edmonton	1,159,869	69.2%	1.7%	\$743	28,750	9.4%
				\$882	24.6%	
Saskatoon	260,600	66.8%	2.6%	\$655	6,525	10.7%
				\$815	22.2%	
Regina	210,556	70.1%	1.0%	\$633	5,535	8.9%
				\$831	24.3%	
Winnipeg	730,018	67.2%	1.7%	\$527	20,915	7.6%
				\$704	23.9%	
Hamilton	721,053	71.6%	3.5%	\$569	22,105	12.4%
				\$735	31.4%	
Toronto	5,583,064	67.6%	1.7%	\$837	198,295	13.2%
				\$1,007	37.4%	
Ottawa	921,823	66.7%	2.5%	\$754	29,560	10.4%
				\$916	28.9%	
Moncton	138,644	70.1%	6.7%	\$485	3,850	10.9%
				\$619	26.7%	
Halifax	390,328	64.0%	3.0%	\$690	14,700	12.8%
				\$773	28.4%	

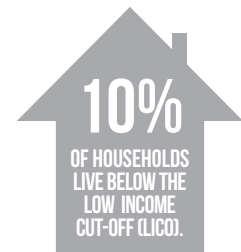
At the same time, over 30% of Canadians live in rental housing, and high rents and low vacancy rates can make housing unaffordable in many communities. In cities like Toronto and Vancouver, for instance, the average rent is over \$800/month, which is unaffordable to many individuals, particularly during this period of higher unemployment. The vacancy rate in larger Canadian cities of between 1% and 1.7% puts further pressure on housing costs.

*Affordable housing is not the only solution to homelessness, but homelessness cannot be solved without an adequate supply of affordable housing.*

Affordable housing is not the only solution to homelessness, but homelessness cannot be solved without an adequate supply of affordable housing. Any strategic plan to address homelessness must prioritize affordable housing options.

### Income security

Income security further controls individuals' ability to secure housing, as low income and/or unemployment increases the risk of homelessness. In Table 2 below, some key figures related to income security in Canada are revealed. The Low Income Cut Off (LICO) is a widely recognized and standard measure of poverty used in Canada by Statistics Canada. LICO is: "an income threshold below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income (20% more) on the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family" (Statistics Canada, (n.d.) 1). In Canada, almost 10% of the population falls within this category. In some cities, the percentage is even higher, such as Vancouver (16.9%) and Toronto (13.2%), both of which also have the highest housing costs in the country.



Due to structural shifts in our economy, fewer Canadians are able to obtain well-paying full time jobs with adequate benefits. Increasingly, individuals and families are relying on low wage, part time work. In 2008, 5.2% of employed Canadians earned the minimum wage (Statistics Canada, 2009), making it difficult for them to afford housing, particularly as housing costs have increased disproportionately to wages.

TABLE 2 Income Security in Canada<sup>3</sup>

CMA	Unemployment Rate	% under LICO	Minimum Wage	Income Assistance, Single Adult	Market Basket Measure, % under threshold (2009)
<b>Canada</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>10.60%</b>
<b>Victoria</b>	5.5%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.25	\$601	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Vancouver</b>	6.8%	16.9%	\$10.25	\$601	16.50%
<b>Calgary</b>	4.9%	8.6%	\$9.75	\$583	8.20%
<b>Edmonton</b>	4.5%	10.5%	\$9.75	\$583	12.00%
<b>Saskatoon</b>	3.9%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.00	\$583	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Regina</b>	3.6%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.00	\$583	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Winnipeg</b>	6.3%	10.6%	\$10.25	\$565	8.30%
<b>Hamilton</b>	6.9%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.25	\$606	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Toronto</b>	8.0%	13.2%	\$10.25	\$606	12.30%
<b>Ottawa</b>	6.2%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.25	\$606	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Moncton</b>	6.9%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.00	\$537	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Halifax</b>	6.5%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.30	\$538	<i>Not avail.</i>

Another approach to measuring poverty used by Statistics Canada is the Market Basket Measure (MBM). In short, the MBM is based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services, which someone with a modest and basic standard of living should be able to purchase. The MBM includes the costs of: “food, clothing, footwear, transportation, shelter and other expenses for a reference family of two adults aged 25 to 49 and two children (aged 9 and 13)” (Statistics Canada, (n.d.) 2). Over ten percent of Canadian families fall below the MBM threshold, meaning they do not have enough money to meet even the most basic needs. The more income that one must invest in housing, the less that is available to pay for food, clothing, transportation, etc.

## Hunger and nutritional vulnerability

When money is short, one of the things that often gets sacrificed is food. The report by Tarasuk and her team (Proof, 2013) highlights the severity of food insecurity in Canada today. In Canada in 2011, 12.3% of households were food insecure with 8.2% of Canadian families experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity. In Table 3, below, household food insecurity is presented for a selection of Canadian cities, demonstrating that the situation is much worse in some places than others (Proof, 2013). Households described as *moderately food insecure* report compromises in the quality and/or quantity of food consumed among adults and/or children. Those classed as *severely food insecure* report more extensive compromises, including reduced food intakes among adults and/or children because of a lack of money for food. Individuals and families that do not get enough to eat inevitably suffer from lack of basic and necessary nutrients, which can affect energy levels, mood (including depression), cognitive functioning and stress and impact on one’s ability to carry out day to day activities including work, school and self care.



TABLE 3 Prevalence of household food security & insecurity (Health Canada & revised definitions) by major census metropolitan area Canada, 2011<sup>4</sup>

Census Metropolitan Area	Total households (000s) <sup>5</sup>	Food insecure (Marginal, Moderate & Severe)		Food insecure (Moderate & Severe)	
		Number (000s)	Percent	Number (000s)	Percent
St. John's	83.4	7.1	8.5%	4.6	5.5%
Halifax	157.3	29.7	18.9%	21.0	13.3%
Moncton	63.4	14.1	22.3%	8.9	14.0%
Saint John	52.9	6.7	12.6%	4.2	7.9%
Quebec	318.0	27.4	8.6%	11.7	3.7%
Montréal	1,546.1	217.9	14.1%	136.7	8.8%
Ottawa-Gatineau	464.0	41.7	9.0%	29.7	6.4%
Toronto	2,073.4	259.4	12.5%	177.3	8.6%
Hamilton	283.9	21.5	7.6%	16.1	5.7%
Winnipeg	295.9	35.6	12.0%	18.9	6.4%
Regina	86.0	11.5	13.3%	8.7	10.1%
Saskatoon	109.1	11.4	10.5%	8.3	7.6%
Calgary	479.1	57.8	12.1%	42.9	9.0%
Edmonton	446.5	65.5	14.7%	46.4	10.4%
Vancouver	933.0	87.6	9.4%	52.3	5.6%
Victoria	137.0	21.3	15.5%	17.0	12.4%
<b>Average of all CMAs</b>		915.9	12.2%		8.1%

## 2.5 Conclusion

This section sets the stage and context for a broad understanding of homelessness, its meaning and its causes. Creating a shared definition of homelessness is an important first step to being able to end it. As a society we tend to have a mental image of a homeless person as an older, single male, usually dealing with addictions or mental health issues, while living long-term in a shelter or on the street. The reality is that homelessness for the vast majority of people is short-term and only happens once (Segaert, 2012).

Moving the conversation away from homelessness as an individual problem to the conceptualization of homelessness as a result of structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances is key to being able to address the issue head on. To develop the support and political will needed to change our current response Canadians need to understand the extent of the problem. This report is a step towards a shared understanding of the meaning and causes of homelessness, as well as the various contributing factors.

But the data in this section shows us that homelessness is a problem larger than the number of people counted on the streets or in shelters. A large segment of the Canadian population is struggling with poverty and income security (social assistance rates, low-income cut-offs and minimum wage), housing affordability (including vacancy rates, cost of housing and social housing wait lists) and food insecurity which puts them at increased risk of homelessness. A large number of families are making choices between paying rent and feeding their kids. Too many Canadians are living on the margins and are just one small disaster or missed paycheque away from homelessness.

*Moving the conversation away from homelessness as an individual problem to the conceptualization of homelessness as a result of structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances is key to being able to address the issue head on.*

# 3 The current situation: homelessness in Canada

An effective strategic response to homelessness cannot be developed without understanding the breadth and depth of the issue. However, homelessness is difficult to measure, particularly on a national scale. In part, this is to do with the wide range of circumstances that the term homeless can describe. Limited shelter use data is available but this alone cannot account for the unsheltered or provisionally accommodated. These categories of homelessness are the most difficult to quantify but data collection is improving as more Canadian municipalities conduct ‘point in time’ counts. These counts provide a detailed look at the number homeless individuals on a given night, as well as useful demographic information. We know that the experience of homelessness is greatly affected by factors such as age, gender, ethno-racial diversity, sexual orientation and the length of time an individual is homeless. Perhaps most significantly, we now understand the importance of dealing with chronic homelessness. It is clear that most individuals and families that become homeless move in and out of that situation rather rapidly. For a much smaller percentage of the population, homelessness becomes a much more acute, damaging and long-term or repeated experience. This is the group that is in greatest need, but also which uses the most existing emergency services. As local data collection improves and a national estimation of homelessness is agreed upon, tailored responses can be sought and progress can be measured.

## 3.1 How many people are homeless in Canada?

Estimating the number of homeless persons in Canada has been a source of debate for years. The Homelessness Partnering Secretariat (HPS) has regularly used the estimate that between 150,000 and 300,000 individuals experience homelessness in Canada in a given year, with advocates often employing the higher number. However, there has never been a concerted, coordinated or consistent effort to enumerate homelessness in Canada. Until recently we have relied on ball-park estimates, based on unreliable and incomplete data.

Fortunately, things have begun to change. More communities across the country are using point in time counts to determine the number of people who are homeless on a given night, and we are also now accumulating more reliable data on shelter usage.

### Annual homelessness numbers – How many people are homeless in a given year?

Earlier this year, the HPS released “The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009” (Segaert, 2012), which for the first time gives us reliable shelter data to inform a national estimate of homelessness. This study estimates the number of annual shelter users to be around 150,000 per year, a figure that did not

*In 2009, for instance, 147,000 different and unique individuals stayed in an emergency shelter at least once, a rate of about 1 in 230 Canadians.*

change significantly over the period of study. In 2009, for instance, 147,000 different and unique individuals stayed in an emergency shelter at least once, a rate of about 1 in 230 Canadians (Segaert, 2012: iii).

While this approximation gives us a good baseline estimate of shelter users, it does not tell the whole story. As Segaert points out, the study did not include individuals in transitional housing (for individuals or families), Violence Against Women shelters and second-stage housing, immigrant/refugee shelters, halfway houses or temporary shelters (e.g. for extreme weather). Why does this matter? Below are some key characteristics of select homeless sub-populations:

**UNSHELTERED** – Also referred to as the ‘street homeless’ or ‘rough sleepers’, this population generally avoids the shelter system (except in extreme circumstances) because of rules, concerns about safety and health, ownership of pets or fear of being separated from partners (most shelters are organized to meet the needs of single individuals). A 2002 study of shelter users in Ottawa found that 61% of the street homeless use emergency shelters only as a last resort and 24% reported that they did not use shelters at all in the previous twelve months (Farrell et al., 2002:15). Many people in this group are chronically homeless.

**PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED** – Surveys of shelter use do not capture the number of people in temporary accommodation with a lack of tenure security. Often referred to as the ‘Hidden Homeless’, this includes people who are couch surfing (staying temporarily with friends), in short term transitional housing, staying in motels, or are in institutional settings (hospital, prison) but are, by definition, homeless. Many people who seek temporary accommodation never use the shelter system or emergency services. While some street counts capture some of this data, there are no reliable national statistics on the number of people who are provisionally accommodated.

#### HOW MANY HOMELESS PEOPLE ARE THERE IN CANADA ON A GIVEN DAY?

The number of Canadians who experience homelessness on any given night in Canada is estimated to be minimally 28,500 individuals. The reader should be cautioned that this is only a rough estimate (for more details on our methodology for calculating this figure, see endnotes section of the report<sup>6</sup>). Nevertheless, this is the best estimate of homelessness developed in Canada to date, and includes people who are:

##### I. Staying in Emergency

###### Homelessness Shelters (14,400).

There are approximately 15,467 permanent shelter beds, and in 2009 an average of 14,400 were occupied (Segaert, 2012:27)

##### II. Staying in Violence Against Women shelters (7,350).

In 2010, there were 9,961 beds for women and children fleeing violence and abuse. This includes not only emergency shelters, but also transitional and second stage housing. In a Point in Time count on April 15, 2010, 7,362 beds were occupied by women and children (Burczycka & Cotter, 2011).

##### III. Unsheltered (2,880).

If one draws from the data comparing homelessness in Canadian cities, one can estimate the unsheltered population. On average, for every one hundred people in the shelter system, there are 20 people who are unsheltered.

##### IV. Temporary institutional

###### accommodation (4,464).

Of those communities that count some portion of the provisionally accommodated, there are 31 people in this category for every 100 staying in emergency shelters.



**TURN-AWAYS** – There are no reliable statistics on the numbers of individuals who show up at emergency shelters, and are denied admittance because: a) there are no open beds, or b) they have been barred from the premises.

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS** – Typically in Canada, the infrastructure to support Violence Against Women (VAW shelters) is not integrated into or coordinated with the homelessness sector (VAW shelters were not included in the Segaert study). The VAW shelters have a different history and generally, different organizational structures.

A 2010 study of Violence Against Women shelters in Canada showed that there were 593 different operators of shelters (this includes emergency shelters, as well as transitional and second-stage housing for women fleeing violence) and that there were 64,500 admissions of women to shelters across Canada in 2009. Almost one third (31%) had been in the same shelter at some time in the past.

### Point in Time counts – Counting homelessness on a given night

Street counts are an important way of identifying the nature and extent of homelessness in a community. Often referred to as ‘point in time’ counts, these studies are snap shots that determine the number of homeless individuals on a given night. Some Canadian municipalities conduct counts and are able to assess the problem and better understand the homeless population for purposes of planning and evaluation; you cannot determine progress unless you have a clear measure of where you started. Doing point in time counts is challenging because the homeless population, of course, has no fixed address, is mobile, and in many cases is ‘hidden’ (couch surfers, for instance). There is no history of doing a coordinated, national street count in Canada, which makes extrapolating the data difficult<sup>7</sup>. In addition, the various communities that do counts use different definitions (until last year, there was no national definition of homelessness), employ different methodologies and do not consistently

### HOW MANY HOMELESS PEOPLE ARE THERE IN CANADA ON A GIVEN DAY?

*(Continued)*

**Hidden Homeless** (50,000). There is considerable debate about the number of people who are homeless but whom do not access any emergency services. The ‘hidden homeless’ refers to people who are temporarily staying with friends, relatives or others because they have no where else to live and no immediate prospect of permanent housing. This activity is sometimes referred to as ‘couch surfing’. Estimating the scale of the hidden homeless population and the conditions in which they live is extremely challenging, because the people who find themselves in this situation are difficult to access. Currently there is no reliable data on hidden homelessness in Canada at the national level and very little at the community level. For this reason we have not included a figure in our estimate of the number of people who are homeless on a given day.

The most reliable estimate of hidden homelessness comes from a single Canadian study in Vancouver (Eberle, et al., 2009) that demonstrated a ratio of 3.5 people considered to be hidden homeless for every one person who is sheltered or unsheltered. While the methodology of this study is sound, it was conducted in only one city, and the differences between cities, their infrastructure to support homelessness and their homeless population are quite profound, making a broader generalization highly problematic. We therefore cautiously estimate that there are 3 people who can be considered ‘hidden homeless’ for every one who is in an emergency shelter and/or is unsheltered.

conduct counts at the same time of year (counts can vary seasonally). This presents challenges in comparing data from one community to the next. Nevertheless, there are some important things we can learn from street counts. In Table 4 below, we look at street count data (varying years) from eleven different cities<sup>8</sup>.

*We therefore cautiously estimate that there are 3 people who can be considered 'hidden homeless' for every one who is in an emergency shelter and/or is unsheltered.*

TABLE 4 Point in time counts of homelessness in select Canadian cities<sup>9</sup>

	Year of Count	City Population	Total # Homeless	As a % of the total population	Unsheltered	Sheltered	Other	# of known published street counts	# of Emergency Shelter Beds
<b>Vancouver</b>	Mar-12	603,502	1602	0.27%	306	1296		6	1390
<b>Kelowna</b>	Apr-07	117,312	279	0.24%	150	119	10	4	80
<b>Calgary</b>	Jan-12	1,096,833	3190	0.29%	64	1715	1411	10	1606
<b>Red Deer</b>	Oct-12	90,564	279	0.31%	184	93	2	1	51
<b>Edmonton</b>	Oct-12	812,201	2174	0.27%	1070	1104		10	957
<b>Lethbridge</b>	Oct-12	83,517	99	0.12%	5	94		9	93
<b>Saskatoon</b>	May-08	222,189	260	0.12%	44	199	17	2	127
<b>Toronto</b>	Apr-09	2,615,060	5086	0.19%	400	4175	511	2	3253

The cities in this table range from the largest in Canada (including Toronto and Vancouver, but not Montreal, which does not appear to have done a count since the 1990s) to smaller centres, such as Kelowna, BC and Red Deer, Alberta. Toronto, which perhaps has the most comprehensive and advanced methodology for counting homelessness, also has the largest number of homeless persons in the country. However, it is the cities of Alberta that perhaps seem to have the most significant homelessness problem, when measured as a percentage of the total population.

Across the ten cities, there are variances in the number of people staying in emergency shelters compared with the number who are unsheltered. On average, there are four people staying in shelters for every one person sleeping rough, and the latter population makes up about 18% of the total homeless population across ten cities.

While all cities count people in emergency shelters, and most count those who are unsheltered, few are counting those who are provisionally sheltered – that is, living in interim (transitional) housing, couch surfing, or who are in hospital or prison, while homeless, for instance. What we can say though, is that in most Canadian cities, there is an average of one person who is un-housed, for every four people who are staying in emergency shelters, based on data from those cities that count both.



**7,362**  
BEDS WERE OCCUPIED  
BY WOMEN & CHILDREN

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS** – A point in time count of Violence Against Women shelters was conducted on April 15 2010 across Canada. The count identified that there were 546 shelter facilities (again, this includes emergency shelters as well as transitional and second stage housing), with a total of 9,961 beds. On the day of the count, 7,362 beds were occupied by women and children, for an occupancy rate of 74%.

## 3.2 Who is homeless?

The homeless population in Canada is quite diverse, in terms of age, gender, and ethno-racial background. The Segart study (2012) identified the mean age individuals staying at shelter as being 37 years of age, and includes children, youth, adults and the elderly. Interestingly, those 65 years of age and older comprised just over 1.7 percent of shelter users, which may be explained by the expanded benefits accessible to seniors, but also by the much higher mortality rate of chronically homeless persons (Hwang, et al. 2009).

While homelessness can affect any number of people, we do know that some groups of people are more likely to be homeless than others. Single adult males between the ages of 25 and 55 account for almost half of the homeless population in Canada (47.5%), according to the Segart study. The characteristics of this group include greater incidences of mental illness, addictions and disability, including invisible disabilities such as brain injury and FASD. Because single adult males arguably form a large percentage of the chronic homeless population, suggesting that efforts targeting this population are warranted.



At the same time, it is also important to note that other sub-populations certain Canadian groups face unique risks and/or face special circumstances, including: *youth; Aboriginal people; women and families*. Because the specific experiences of being homeless will differ for each group, strategies to address homelessness must be tailored to these differing needs.

**YOUTH:** Young people aged 16-24 make up about 20% of the homeless population according to Segart, although the prevalence rates are similar to that of adult males (308/100,000 for youth vs. 318/100,000 for males

**YOUNG PEOPLE**  
— aged 16-24 —  
**MAKE UP ABOUT 20%**  
**OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION.**

between 25-55). However, the causes and consequences of homelessness for young people are distinct from those which afflict adults. Unlike the majority of adults, homeless youth come from homes where they were in the care of other adults. They typically come from homes characterized by family conflict of some kind (including in some cases physical, sexual and emotional abuse), disruptions to school and family life, neglect and poverty. Many are in the throws of adolescent development, and lack life experience and the skills and supports to live independently, including the ability to secure employment and housing. Homeless youth are also more vulnerable

to crimes and exploitation. All of these factors increase the challenges in supporting this group, since the needs of a 16-year-old are very different from those of someone older.

Segart identifies that in 2009, 20% of the total homeless population were between 16 and 25 (or approximately 30,000 annually) and a further 1% (1,500) were under the age of 16 and unaccompanied by adults (Segart, 2012:16). The figure of 2/3 male (63%) versus 1/3 female (36.9%) is consistent with other research on youth homelessness in Canada (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004).

In many studies of youth homelessness, young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual are over-represented, making up 25-40% of the youth homeless population, compared to only 5-10% of the general population (Josephson & Wright, 2000). This is important to note because the persistence of homophobia clearly plays a role in youth homelessness, with sexual minorities being over-represented in street youth populations, a result of tension between the youth and his or her family, friends and community. Homophobia by the homeless sector can further oppress this population.

**WOMEN:** While the percentage of women in the homeless emergency shelter population is lower than men (males: 73.6%, females: 26.2% (Segaert, 2012: 14)<sup>10</sup>, the unique circumstances facing women must be addressed. Women are at increased risk for hidden homelessness, living in overcrowded conditions or having sufficient money for shelter, but not for other necessities. In addition, according to the 2009 General Social Survey, 6% of women report some form of intimate partner (spousal) assault (Sinha, 2013:24). Family violence is a major cause of homelessness for women, and while some women make use of Violence Against Women shelters others wind up using homelessness shelters. A 2010 point in time count of women staying in found that abuse was the most commonly cited reason for admissions (71%) and the majority (60%) had not reported this to the police (Burcycka & Cotter, 2011:5).

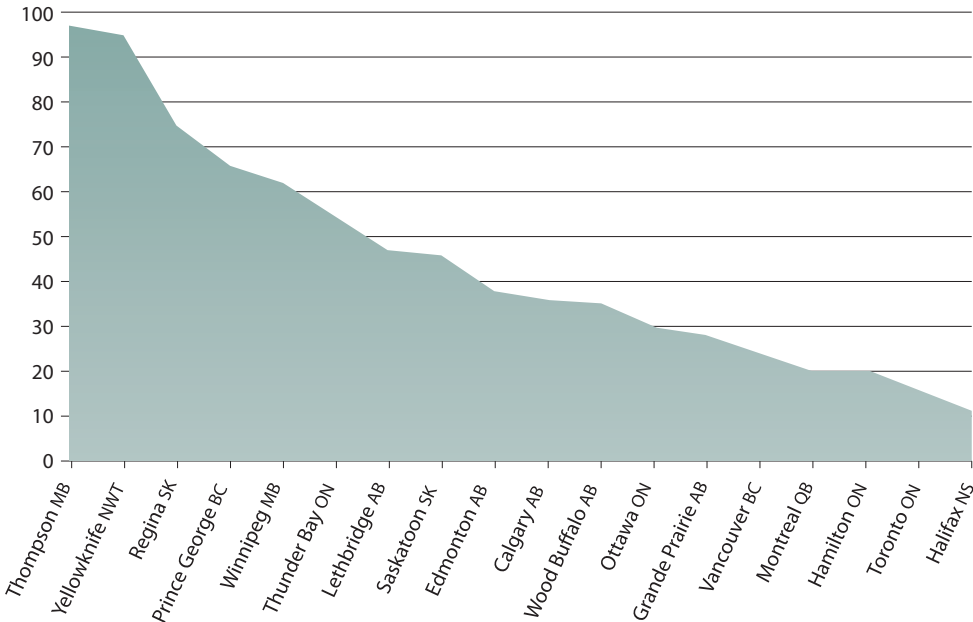
When women become homeless, they are at increased risk of violence and assault, sexual exploitation and abuse (Gaetz et al., 2010; Paridis & Mosher, 2012) which may explain the lower numbers of women in the shelter system. That is, many women will go to lengths to avoid the shelter system, including staying in dangerous and unhealthy relationships and/or making arrangements to move in with a partner (even when that situation is unsafe) rather than submit to the incredible risk of violence and exploitation on the streets.

**ABORIGINAL:** Aboriginal peoples (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples) are overrepresented amongst the homeless population in virtually all urban centres in Canada. The experience of colonialism (resulting in intergenerational trauma), poverty, as well as extreme racism in many Canadian cities creates more limited opportunities and greater risk of homelessness. In thinking about how to respond to Aboriginal homelessness, it is therefore necessary to consider the specific historical, experiential and cultural differences, as well as colonization and racism: "The urban Aboriginal homeless experience differs from that of mainstream Canadians due to a convoluted policy environment predicated on assumptions of cultural inferiority and forced societal participation" (Belanger et al., 2012:15). It is also important to consider the extreme poverty, lack of opportunities and inadequate housing on many reserves as a driver of migration to cities. Even further, Canada's colonial history, including the federal Indian Act, which identified who "qualifies" as an Aboriginal person and therefore has access to various benefits, the history of residential schools (which took Aboriginal children away from their families, communities and culture and tragically exposed many to abuse) and ongoing discrimination, racism and systemic oppression continue to affect Aboriginal access to services, programs and support. We find that while Aboriginal people make up 6% of the general population, they are considerably over-represented amongst the homeless population. As a recent study by Belanger et al. (2012) attests, this over-representation dramatically increases as one moves west and north in Canada:



**FAMILY VIOLENCE**  
*- is a major cause of -*  
**HOMELESSNESS**  
**FOR WOMEN**

TABLE 5 Urban Aboriginal Homeless as Percentage of Overall Homeless Population, Select Canadian Cities<sup>11</sup>



It should be noted however, that in many major urban centres, including Toronto, Ottawa, Halifax and Vancouver, the percentage of the homeless population that is Aboriginal appears lower; this is misleading because the overall percentage of Aboriginal people who are part of the urban population is also considerably lower. So, in Toronto for instance, Aboriginal people make up 16% of the homeless population, but as a percentage of the total Aboriginal population in the city, they make up 17.3%, which is the third highest ratio for all cities included in this study.

**FAMILIES:** Homeless families are diverse in structure, with some including two parents, and many headed by a single parent (usually female). Family homelessness is largely underpinned by structural factors, including inadequate income, lack of affordable housing and family violence. Following the withdrawal of government housing programs and decreased supports, more families are turning to emergency shelters.

A significant finding from the Segaert study was that the sharpest increase in shelter use has been amongst families (in most cases headed by women) and therefore children. For instance the number of children staying in shelters increased by over 50% between 2005 (6,205) and 2009 (9,459). Segaert identifies that the average length of shelter stay for families was 50.2 days, an increase of 50% over five years, and more than triple the average stay for the total population of people who experienced homelessness (Segaert, 2012:19). This means that while families accounted for just 4% of all shelter stays, they used 14% of total bed nights. This puts incredible pressure on the family shelter system, which has not had the capacity to deal with this increase. It is worth noting, once again, that these figures do not include female-headed families using Violence Against Women shelters.

*While families accounted for just 4% of all shelter stays, they used 14% of total bed nights.*

### 3.3 Chronic homelessness in Canada

How long are people homeless, and does it matter? Research from the North America shows that for the vast majority of people who become homeless, the experience is rather short. In Canada, though the median length of stay in emergency shelter is approximately 50 days, most people are homeless for less than a month (24-29% stay only one night), and manage to leave homelessness on their own, usually with little support (Segaert, 2012:19). For these people homelessness is a one-time only event.

Conversely, a segment of the homeless population is chronically or episodically homeless. Chronically homeless individuals are people who have been on the streets for a long time, potentially years, and are locked into a state of homelessness due to multiple needs across health, addiction and contact with criminal justice system. Episodically homeless individuals have an ongoing pattern of homelessness throughout their lifetime. These groups are significant because combined they account for less than 15% of the homeless population, but consume more than half the resources in the homelessness system, including emergency shelter beds and day programs.

*These groups are significant because combined they account for less than 15% of the homeless population, but consume more than half the resources in the homelessness system, including emergency shelter beds and day programs.*

#### Why this matters

People who are chronically homeless make up a small portion of the overall population, but have the highest needs. The longer one is homeless, the greater likelihood that preexisting and emergent health problems worsen (including mental health and addictions) and there is greater risk of criminal victimization, sexual exploitation and trauma. There is also a much greater likelihood of involvement in the justice system. All of this makes life much more challenging for people who experience chronic homelessness.

#### WHAT IS CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS?

In the 1990s, Kuhn and Culhane wrote a seminal article on patterns of shelter stays in the United States. They came up with a typology that included three patterns of shelter stay amongst homeless adults:

**Transitional:** Individuals and families who generally enter the shelter system for a short stay (less than a month) and usually for one stay only. They tend to be younger and are less likely to have complex issues relating to mental health, addictions and other medical problems. The original study by Kuhn and Culhane found that the transitionally homeless make up about 81% of the total homeless population, with an average length of stay of just over 42 days. In Canada, the transitionally homeless make up 88-94% of the population (Aubry et al., 2013)

**Episodic:** This includes individuals who move into and out of homelessness several times over a three year period (and some of the moves may be into corrections or hospital). This population is also younger, but has more complex health issues than transitionally homeless. The Kuhn and Culhane study found this population represented around 9% of the homeless population, had around 5 different periods of homelessness over three years, and logged a total of 264 shelter stays, for an average length of 54.4 days. In Canada, the percentages are similar (3-11%).

**Chronic:** Those who are chronically homeless are typically long term shelter users, and 'absolutely homeless' individuals who live on the streets, the vast majority having serious mental health or addictions issues, and / or a physical disability. Making up 9.8% of the homeless population, this group had on average 2.3 stays in shelters, but generally for a long period of time, ranging from 317 to 1095 days in shelter per stay (ibid, 220). The chronic homeless population in Canada is smaller, ranging from 2-4% (Aubry et al., 2013)

Addressing chronic homelessness should be central to any strategy to end homelessness. Over a decade ago in the United States, it became clear that while the chronically homeless make up around 10% of the homeless population, they wind up using over 60% of the resources in the homelessness sector. Though the Canadian figures differ, the policy implications are the same. In the American context, this realization had a major impact on U.S. homelessness policy, and made addressing chronic homelessness a top priority of governments at the local, state and national levels.

### 3.4 Conclusion

For the first time, we have a strong evidence-based understanding of the number of people who are homeless in Canada, inside and outside of shelters. Yet, we believe these numbers likely underestimate homelessness in Canada because of the challenges of counting and lack of statistics across the country. The lack of coordinated information systems or tools to assist with recording statistics and counting homeless people, or the limited ability and resources for agencies and municipalities to conduct counts (not to mention lack of common definition or methodology) means that we have likely missed pockets of homelessness across the country.

We are able to identify trends through the use of the data that we do have. Women, youth and Aboriginal people have been identified as groups with unique needs that must be incorporated into any response. The issue of chronic homelessness shows that costs savings can be found – after initial increased investment – if we are able to address the individual and systemic issues that arise from long-term homelessness.

We also are aware that a great deal of homelessness is hidden. The inability to count those people who share with friends and family by couch-surfing, doubling or tripling up or who are otherwise underhoused and at-risk of homelessness is a definite area of concern that needs to be better understood and addressed further. This is one area where we firmly believe our numbers are more than likely quite low.

Yet, there is good news too. A significant percentage of people spend only one night in a homeless shelter

#### CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

Can we estimate the level of chronic homelessness in Canada? A recent study of shelter users in Toronto, Ottawa and Guelph by Aubry, et al. (2013) helps to identify the level of chronic homelessness in Canada. They found that approximately 88-94% of the homeless population can be considered transitionally homeless, and 3-11% are episodically homeless. Interestingly, the number of chronically homeless in Canada, as a percentage of the homeless population is between 2-4%, and is considerably lower than is the case in the United States (10%).

Based on our estimate of the total number of homeless people who use shelters on an annual basis (200,000), and drawing on the research of Aubry et al. (2013), we can project the following numbers of chronic, episodic and transitionally homeless persons in Canada:

**Chronic homeless:** 4,000 to 8,000  
**Episodic homeless:** 6,000 to 22,000  
**Transitionally homeless:** 176,000 to 188,000

A key point needs to be made here, however. Though the number of people who have lengthy stays in the shelter system is relatively small (less than 20%) the chronically homeless are also at the same time the highest users of homeless services.

“In the case of Toronto and Ottawa, individuals in these two clusters occupied over half of the shelter beds during the four-year period of the study even though they represented only between 12 per cent and 13 per cent of the shelter population.” (Aubry et al., 2013:10).

and are able to reestablish their lives and solve their recovery themselves. A focus on early intervention and supports that help prevent homelessness can assist towards eliminating the needs for these individuals to enter the homelessness spectrum.

But these statistics are a starting point. They are an initial step towards beginning to the conversation that needs to happen in communities – large and small – to determine the next steps towards ending homelessness.

## 4 Responding to homelessness – how are we doing?

Communities across Canada have been struggling to address the problem of homelessness for several decades. The Government of Canada, as well as many provincial, territorial, regional, municipal and Aboriginal governments have invested in creating effective solutions. A key question is whether we are making any progress? Is it making a difference?

This is a challenging question because, as we have argued throughout this report, we lack sufficient national data to provide a solid baseline against which to measure progress. Many, if not most, communities do not do regular street counts, and few communities or agencies rigorously evaluate their outcomes and efforts.

That data which does exist unfortunately doesn't point to major progress being made in responding to homelessness. The shelter use study by Segaert indicates that between 2005 and 2009, there was little change in the number of individuals who use shelters

on an annual basis. At an average of 150,000 individuals a year, there is no evidence that our efforts to address homelessness in Canada have resulted in an overall reduction of the problem (Segaert, 2012:12). While the annual shelter use remained relatively stable over a five year period, the average length of stay increased, shown by the

annual number of shelter 'bed nights' (that is, the number of individual shelter beds filled over the course of the year) rising from 4.5 million in 2007 to 5.3 million in 2009. In terms of shelter occupancy, this means on any given night over 2,000 more people slept in homeless shelters each night in 2009 than was the case two years earlier. The proportion of those with longer shelter stays of one month or more was 16.7% in 2009, compared with 12.6% in 2005 (ibid., 20).

*Any given night over 2,000 more people slept in homeless shelters each night in 2009 than was the case two years earlier.*

*At an average of 150,000 individuals a year, there is no evidence that our efforts to address homelessness in Canada have resulted in an overall reduction of the problem.*

The key point is that over this five year period, there is very little evidence of that we made any impact on the problem of homelessness, and potentially, we allowed the problem to worsen. Unfortunately, we don't have up-to-date data for the past four years to signal any major shift, and although there are signs of progress in a number of communities (see Section 4.4), there isn't any compelling evidence of change at the national level.

All of this suggests that we can no longer justify going down the same road. Morally, ethically and financially, our response to homelessness has failed to achieve the kinds of results that are necessary for Canada to continue to prosper as a leading country internationally. Six years ago the Sheldon Chumir Foundation argued:

*"Whether it's the immorality of increasing usage of emergency shelters by children, families and seniors, or the estimated \$4.5 to \$6 billion annual cost of homelessness, most Canadians seem to agree, according to polls, that the status quo is unacceptable." (Laird, 2007)*



A solution to homelessness in Canada requires a shift in focus, from crisis management (i.e. emergency shelters and soup kitchens) to permanent solutions. We need to work to ensure that individuals and families experiencing crises have access to permanent, appropriate, safe and affordable housing with the support necessary to sustain it. All of this must come together in a coordinated, planned, cohesive strategy that is supported and implemented by all representatives of the community, including governments.

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## 4.1 Addressing the problem

There are three interrelated areas of activity that we can engage in as part of an effective response to homelessness. First, we can focus on prevention - putting in place measures that ensure people have the income and supports they need in order to reduce the chances that people will lose their housing and wind up homeless. This means targeted early intervention strategies when people are about to, or have recently, become homeless. It also means engaging in strategies to prevent people from being discharged from hospitals, prisons and child protection into homelessness.

Second, we will need emergency services, because no matter how well developed the preventive measures, there will still be crises that produce homelessness. This means that we will always need emergency shelters and day programs to help people get by in a time of crisis.

Finally, we must develop a range of housing options and strategies (with appropriate supports) to help move people out of homelessness, ideally as quickly as possible. The strongest responses to homelessness – in Europe and Australia – tend to emphasize prevention and rehousing (with supports), with emergency services designed to help people quickly transition through a crisis.

Canadian communities have responded to homelessness in many creative ways. Innovative programs and services exist across the country. However, if one were to characterize the overall Canadian response to homelessness, it would be that we generally place too much emphasis on managing the crisis rather than trying to solve it. Many jurisdictions continue to rely on a patchwork of emergency services such as shelters and day programs; these services are mostly concentrated in downtown areas that meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. This focus is in some ways not surprising, because relative to those countries that are experiencing greater success in tackling homelessness, Canada is still in the early stages. In each of those other contexts, the first response was an emergency response, followed by a more strategic and coordinated approach emphasizing prevention and rehousing.

## 4.2 The cost of the emergency response to homelessness in Canada

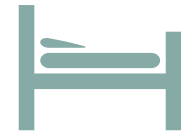
A common perception about the response to homelessness is that an emphasis on the provision of emergency services (shelters, day programs) while perhaps not ideal, is maybe the best we can do. After all, people who are homeless are being provided with shelter and are well fed, aren't they? In any event, isn't this a prudent response in these times of austerity and budget cutbacks?

There are compelling reasons to question this logic. We do know that the longer people are homeless the more that their health and mental health declines (Frankish, et al., 2005; Hwang, 2001; Hwang et al., 2009) and their risk of being a victim of a crime increases (O'Grady et al., 2011). Moreover, there is solid evidence that our emergency response doesn't provide homeless people with enough food. A study of homeless youth by Tarasuk and her team found that it doesn't matter if they get all their food from charitable services or from the proceeds of panhandling; they are likely to be malnourished (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2013). We're attempting to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless, but given the worsening health, damaged relationships and downward spiral that many people become victims of, we have to question whether this response is even minimally adequate.

Moreover, we need to consider whether a focus on emergency response is even cost effective. A recent report, "The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can we save money by doing the right thing?" (Gaetz, 2012) found that there is considerable evidence that investing in emergency services as a response to homelessness not only has a negative impact on health and well-being of people who experience it, but it is also expensive (Laird, 2007; Eberle et al., 2001; Palermo et al., 2006; Shapcott, 2007; Pomeroy, 2005; 2008). For instance, a 2001 study in British Columbia indicated that it costs \$30,000 - \$40,000 annually to support one homeless person (Eberle et al., 2001) and a 2006 study in Halifax (Palermo et al., 2006) notes that investments in social housing would generate a per person savings of 41%. In the Wellesley Institute's *Blueprint to End Homelessness* (2007), Shapcott argued that the average monthly costs of housing people while they are homeless are \$1,932 for a shelter bed, \$4,333 for provincial jail, or \$10,900 for a hospital bed. This can be compared with the average monthly cost to the City of Toronto for rent supplements (\$701) or social housing (\$199.92).

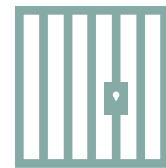
Why is emergency response so expensive? The cost of homelessness does not only accrue for our emergency shelters, soup kitchens and day programs, but also for the health care system and correction services. When we keep people in a chronic state of homelessness, their health precipitously declines (including, for many, the exacerbation or development mental health and addictions issues), and their involvement in the criminal justice system increases. So, in comparing the cost of emergency services versus providing housing and effective supports, a comprehensive estimation of the cost of homelessness becomes crucial.

### THE AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS OF HOUSING PEOPLE WHILE THEY ARE HOMELESS



\$1,932

SHELTER BED



\$4,333

PROVINCIAL JAIL



\$10,900

HOSPITAL BED

VS.



\$701

RENT SUPPLEMENTS



\$199.<sup>92</sup>

SOCIAL HOUSING

### 4.3 The tide is turning – signs of progress

Can we really end homelessness in Canada? It is certainly true that there will always be crises that lead to homelessness – eviction, personal problems, family breakdowns, natural disasters – and that we will need emergency services to respond to these needs. However, when we speak of ending homelessness, we are talking about ending a broad social problem of our own making that traps people in a state of emergency, sometimes for years on end, without access to permanent housing and with declining health. That is the problem we are trying to solve. **No one should be homeless and using emergency services for any longer than a few weeks.**

So what can we do to end homelessness? Many years of research and practice have helped identify successful approaches and practices. We know that without adequate housing, adequate income, and adequate support services, people will struggle to remain housed. We know that all levels of government – federal, provincial, regional, municipal and aboriginal – must show leadership, strategic engagement and investment if we are to address the causes of homelessness. The challenge now is to work together, across all levels of society, to coordinate and implement successful prevention and intervention programs and policies that will put an end to homelessness.

In the following section, we present some key examples of progress being made in addressing homelessness in Canada. This list is intended neither to be exhaustive nor completely comprehensive, but rather to highlight several communities whose strategic work to address homelessness is resulting in a shift from ‘managing’ homelessness to reducing or eliminating this seemingly intractable problem.

*The challenge now is to work together, across all levels of society, to coordinate and implement successful prevention and intervention programs and policies that will put an end to homelessness.*

#### THE COST OF HOMELESSNESS TO THE CANADIAN ECONOMY: \$7 BILLION ANNUALLY

In 2007, the Sheldon Chumir Foundation estimated that the emergency response to homelessness costs taxpayers from \$4.5-\$6 billion annually, based on an estimate of providing services and supports (between \$30,000 and \$40,000) to 150,000 homeless individual annually (Laird, 2007). This includes not only the cost of emergency shelters, but social services, health care and corrections.

**Our updated figure for the annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy is \$7.05 billion dollars.** In order to come up with this estimate, we drew from several sources of data. We began with our own estimate of unique individuals accessing the shelter system in a given year (200,000). Next we made a determination of the annual cost of supporting a homeless person based on preliminary data from the At Home/Chez Soi project. We consider this to be a very rough estimate, and believe that as the data sources in Canada improve, so will our ability to determine the annual cost of homelessness (see footnote for more detail<sup>12</sup>).

### Government of Canada

In 1999 the Government of Canada launched the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) which emphasized the importance of community responses to homelessness through funding for 61 ‘Designated Community’ entities, each responsible for planning, decision-making and distribution of funds locally. The stated goal of NHI was to make “strategic investments in community priorities and a planning process that encourages cooperation between governments, agencies and community-based organizations to find local solutions for homeless people and those at-risk” (Treasury Board of Canada, n.d.).

The now renamed Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) has continued to support local communities in their efforts to address homelessness. An important

contribution of HPS has been to support research on homelessness through its Homelessness Knowledge Development program, which is intended to provide a solid evidentiary base for homelessness policy and practice across the country. Research is a key component of determining promising or best practices that exist in Canada in order to replicate success.

In March of this year, HPS was renewed by the Government of Canada for five years, a financial commitment of \$119 million. While this represents a drop in annual expenditures (formerly the commitment was for \$134.5 million) the renewed commitment also signals a shift in priority. HPS is encouraging community entities embrace and implement a housing-first approach, which recognizes that housing stability is necessary for the success of other interventions such as education and training, life skills development, management of mental health challenges – or treatment of substance abuse.

A key challenge for the Government of Canada is that its investment in a national homelessness strategy has not been accompanied by a robust and ongoing investment in affordable housing, a key pillar in any effective response to homelessness. This will need to be addressed in coming years.

## Provincial and Territorial Responses

It can be argued that historically provinces and territories have not been as actively engaged in responding to homelessness as they could be. Provincial and Territorial governments across Canada have major responsibility for the delivery of a range of services that intersect with homelessness, including housing, health care, child welfare, corrections (shared with the federal government), energy, municipal affairs, and transportation, amongst others. Some provinces have developed plans to address homelessness (most notably, British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick), while most have not. Some have developed Affordable Housing Plans while again, others have not.

In 2010, the Province of **NEW BRUNSWICK** released its homelessness and housing strategy: [Hope is a Home. New Brunswick's Housing Strategy](#). In this document, they also laid out their "Homeless Framework: A Home for Everyone!", a strategy with the goal of reducing the need for a broad emergency response through provision of adequate housing and supports to prevent homelessness and its recurrence, and through prioritizing Housing First.

The **NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR** [Poverty Reduction Strategy and Social Housing Plan](#) has been shaped by the work of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing & Homelessness Network (developed in 2009) which has supported leadership and policy development, capacity building, research and data co-ordination and knowledge transfer and awareness. Eleven Community Advisory Boards (CABs) throughout the province work collaboratively to end homelessness.

### PROVINCIAL SPOTLIGHT – ALBERTA

The Province of Alberta is a leader in developing an effective provincial response to homelessness, that includes program and service integration, prioritizing Housing First, and a planned, evidence-based response rooted in research. It has created an [Interagency Council on Homelessness](#) designed to enhance policy and service integration by bringing together key areas of provincial government services, including health, social services, housing, corrections and child protection, for instance. The provincial government has also invested in supporting communities in developing effective responses to homelessness. In 2008 it released a [Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness](#). In the recent report, [A Plan for Alberta, Ending Homelessness in 10 Years – 3 Year Progress Report](#), the province was able to report some key gains, including:

- Over 6,600 Albertans experiencing homelessness have been provided housing and supports
- 10% reduction in emergency shelter use province wide since 2008
- 16% province wide reduction in homelessness since 2008
- Over 1,600 people have graduated from Housing First programs
- Average 80 percent housing retention rate

In the **PROVINCE OF ONTARIO**, legislative change (the Housing Services Act, 2011) is paving the way for more strategic and coordinated responses to homelessness in communities across the provinces. Communities have been given more flexibility in funding for housing and homelessness, and are preparing Ten Year Plans to support integrated service delivery models designed to reduce homelessness.

The **PROVINCE OF QUEBEC** has historically provided a robust social safety net and innovative community programming, yet the problem of homelessness persists. Major progress has been made in concerting the different levels of the government to develop collaboration and common actions. Twelve cities have developed community action plans. This constant dialogue has led to the development of new solutions focusing on coordinated interventions by cross-sectoral teams (community sector and health agencies, social services and police). The provincial government is currently working with key stakeholders to develop an effective homelessness policy to address homelessness.

## Municipal and community responses

Though local responses vary, many Canadian communities are addressing homelessness with long-term solutions in mind. Cities such as Saskatoon and Winnipeg are undertaking plans to end homelessness and a number of others are publishing annual report cards on homelessness. With examples of good practice occurring across the country, we offer just a few examples below.

### VICTORIA

The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness works in partnership across sectors, including governments, non-profits and businesses with a mission to end homelessness in Victoria by 2018. The Coalition coordinates a number of programs, including a successful Housing First initiative, Streets to Homes. By 2011, this program had successfully housed 62 participants thereby reducing homelessness, increasing participant self-sufficiency and overall health and well-being (Crewson et al., 2011).

### VANCOUVER

Vancouver's Mayor and City Council have shown strong leadership to achieve their commitment to end street homelessness by 2015. Underpinned by innovative public, private and non-profit partnerships, the city is committed to building more affordable housing throughout Vancouver. In partnership with BC Housing, Vancouver Coastal Health and Street to Home Foundation, Vancouver has invested land worth \$60 million to develop 1,500 housing units at 14 sites. Half these units are now open, with priority given to the homeless living on the street and in shelters. Further, the city has demonstrated leadership across all points of the housing continuum. Since 2008, Vancouver has partnered with BC Housing to open temporary, low-barrier winter shelters which provide the homeless population with access to shelter, food, health and support services and referrals to housing. It is through these private and public partnerships that Vancouver has seen a 66% reduction in street homelessness (Mayor of Vancouver, 2013).

### COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT – LETHBRIDGE

A community of around 90,000, Lethbridge has shown that smaller communities can also have great success in addressing homelessness. After adopting a Five Year Plan, Lethbridge has successfully implemented a broad Housing First strategy that has the homelessness sector working together to support a range of targeted Housing First programs. Lethbridge has also been an innovator in addressing Aboriginal homelessness through its integrated Housing First strategy, and in working collaboratively with Lethbridge Regional Police Service to develop an approach that moves away from the 'criminalization of homelessness' response common in so many communities, to one that engages a community policing unit in working to support homeless people to access services and supports. Lethbridge has made great strides in reducing homelessness, and in the past year saw a 50% decrease in absolute street homelessness over the past year, and a 15% decrease in emergency shelter occupancy over the same period (Social Housing in Action, 2012).

## CALGARY

Calgary has been a leader in Canada in terms of developing and implementing a strategic and coordinated response to homelessness. The first city to implement a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, Calgary has also developed an integrated service deliver model (system of care), increased the supply of affordable housing, implemented Housing First as both a system philosophy and program priority, adopted the first municipal plan to end youth homelessness and been a leader in developing a homelessness research agenda. The result has been that Calgary has seen an 11.4% reduction in homelessness from 2008 to winter of 2012 (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2012). Outlined in the 10 Year Plan, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, emphasizes long-term solutions and improved system responses in order to end homelessness by 2018. Since the initiation of the Plan, data collection has improved, shelter use has stabilized, housing first programs have shown success and affordable housing stock has increased (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011).

## EDMONTON

Homeward Trust, like the Calgary Homeless Foundation, has also been an innovator in developing effective responses to homelessness. An early adopter of a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, and a strong advocate of the Housing First approach, Edmonton moved aggressively to reduce homelessness. It has shown the strongest results for a large city in Canada, with a 30% reduction in overall homelessness since 2008 (Sorensen, 2013). What has made Edmonton a particularly noteworthy example of how to strategically address homelessness has been its focus on confronting Aboriginal homelessness, and the inclusive strategy of engaging Aboriginal communities in this task. Supported by an Aboriginal Advisory Council and with strong representation on Homeward Trust's board, Aboriginal people have had a strong say in program directions, strategic responses, service delivery models and funding decisions, all designed to address the specific needs and circumstances of Aboriginal populations, and their historic experiences of colonialism.

*Edmonton has shown the strongest results for a large city in Canada, with a 30% reduction in overall homelessness since 2008 (Sorensen, 2013).*

## SASKATOON

In 2013, United Way of Saskatoon and Area published Saskatoon's Plan to End Homelessness. It marks a coordinated effort to end homelessness through consultation and partnership with key players such as the community, homeless individuals, aboriginal leaders and the business community. Based on a list of essentials set out by the CAEH (CAEH, 2012) the Plan is underpinned by a commitment to Housing First, system mapping, governance and accountability. Further, it considers the separate needs of sub-populations such as Youth, the chronically homeless and perhaps most importantly Aboriginal people. To accompany this strong strategic direction, Saskatoon conducted a point-in-time in September 2012. The data collected from this count will form a useful baseline that will allow for the progress towards ending homelessness to be measured (United Way of Saskatoon and Area, 2013).

## TORONTO

Since the first Street Needs Assessment in 2006, Toronto has seen a 51% decrease in street homelessness (City of Toronto, 2011). This success may be attributed to Toronto's outreach program, Streets to Homes. Designed around a Housing First approach, outreach workers house approximately 600 people a year, with 87% of tenants remaining housed (Falvo, 2010). Furthermore, the City of Toronto has developed a 10 Year Affordable Housing Action Plan, which seeks to reduce lengthy wait times for rent-g geared-to-income housing, increase rental housing stock and preserve or repair existing rental units (City of Toronto, 2009). Toronto is currently moving towards a strategic plan that highlights "housing stability" as the key goal, to be achieved through targeted prevention and an intensification of Housing First. Toronto has also historically been a leader in integrating innovative harm reduction strategies into community responses.

## OTTAWA

The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (ATEH) publishes annual report cards on homelessness. Indicators on housing affordability, shelter use and income allow for long-term evaluation and measurements of progress. The most recent report card highlights an increase in the number of newly created affordable housing units. In 2012, 139 new units were introduced with an additional 747 rental supplements and housing allowances made to individuals and families. The report also notes that the number of homeless individuals in Ottawa may be stabilizing (Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, 2012).

## 4.4 Conclusion

Canada has a long way to go in order to end the homeless crisis, but it has also made some definite steps in the right direction. We can lean on our international partners in the U.S., the UK and Australia and learn from their successes (and failures) rather than reinventing the solution. A focus on Housing First, early intervention and the development of affordable housing are all keys to being able to move away from the emergency response phase of homeless service provision.

We also have a great many promising and best practices within Canada that should be used as examples. The untold stories of successes need to be shared so they can be replicated. The Homeless Hub website contains a wealth of resources and case studies to help communities learn from one another.

Changes need to occur at all levels of government and commitments of financial resources and political will to end homelessness need to be established. Maintaining people in a state of homelessness is costly; ending homelessness is the goal we should all be seeking for financial and moral reasons.

### NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT – AT HOME/CHEZ SOI

The At Home/Chez Soi project, funded by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, is steadily advancing our knowledge about the effectiveness of Housing First, how it works in different communities and strategies for implementation with different targeted sub-populations (for instance youth, Aboriginal people and newcomers). The project, implemented in five cities, has shown strong housing outcomes and cost savings (Goering et al, 2012).

- Vancouver
- Winnipeg
- Toronto
- Montreal
- Moncton

## 5 Recommendations

This report documents the challenges we are facing in addressing homelessness in Canada. While many Canadians have perhaps become too used to the sight of homeless people in communities across the country, we need not be complacent. There is a growing body of knowledge that helps us understand the nature of the problem and points the way to effective and sustainable solutions. The recommendations below highlight some of these key directions:

### **1. Communities should develop and implement clear plans to end homelessness, supported by all levels of government.**

Ending homelessness can feel like an impossible task given the overwhelming scope of the problem and its apparent complexity. But recent research and community experience with developing and implementing plans to end homelessness in Canada, the U.S., Europe and Australia, have highlighted how homelessness can be ended. Effective community plans to end homelessness are strategic documents that enable service integration and coordination in order to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place and to help those who fall into homelessness to become rehoused – with the supports they need – as quickly as possible. The success of the plan depends on collaboration amongst a wide range of planners including governments, as well as homeless-serving organizations. The renewal of HPS, as well as changes in Ontario, for instance, will require that communities develop new community plans, and these should focus on ending homelessness rather than simply managing the problem.

There are resources available to support the development of effective community plans. The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' document, *A Plan Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in 10 Years*, is designed to help create and implement an effective plan to end homelessness in your community. It provides information on the 10 Essentials including a set of criteria that will ensure the effectiveness of your 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness.

In order for communities to be successful, all levels of government must be engaged and supportive. In countries where they are showing success, there is a recognition that all levels of government not only need to be at the table, but must be engaged in the development and implementation of strategic responses. Active, strategic and coordinated engagement by all levels of government should include an alignment of strategic priorities to levels of government with key responsibilities.

Within governments, there needs to be more effective coordination of services across ministries and departments. Homelessness is a 'fusion' policy issue, and necessarily responses must involve health, corrections and justice, housing, education and child welfare, for instance. This may seem obvious, but it is one of the biggest challenges in dealing with the issue of homelessness. Because of systems failures in other departments of



government contributing to homelessness, the sector often reproduces or builds those very services and supports internally (mental health supports, addictions, etc.), when the sustainable solution is for those very sectors to make changes to address the problems. A related issue is that too many Canadian plans to address homelessness are developed by, and for, the homelessness sector. Successful responses in the U.S., Australia and the UK demonstrate that other sectors of government must be mandated (through legislation) to address the flow of people into homelessness, and that strategic responses must necessarily include other sectors of government at the table.

This means a more robust role for provincial and territorial governments, which fund and control key functions of government that impact on homelessness including housing, health (mental health, addictions), corrections, social services (including child protection and family services), education and training. If we imagine more effective, strategic and integrated responses that shift the focus from 'managing' homelessness to an emphasis on prevention and rehousing, the provinces must not only be at the table, but also actively and strategically work to coordinate policy, funding and service delivery. While the provinces of Alberta, New Brunswick, Quebec and perhaps British Columbia have all been more visibly and directly involved in responding to homelessness, few have actually developed strategic responses.

Finally, it is important to remember that in Canada, 'All levels of government' includes Aboriginal peoples (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples). Because Aboriginal people are overrepresented amongst homeless populations across the country, Aboriginal peoples and their representative governments must be seen as part of the solution, and all other levels of government must increase their commitment to reducing poverty within these communities.

## **2. All levels of government must work to increase the supply of affordable housing**

No plan to end homelessness can succeed without a commitment to expand the supply of affordable housing.

Why is affordable housing important? While solving homelessness in many cases involves more than simply providing housing, in the end it cannot be solved without an adequate supply of affordable housing. Promising practices, including prevention, rapid rehousing and Housing First, should all be priorities in any strategic plan to address homelessness. However, none are in any way possible without a range of affordable housing options.

*Canada will not see a sustained reduction in homelessness without a significant increase in the affordable housing supply.*

Ultimately, reducing homelessness is going to rely on adequate market rental, affordable rental and deep subsidy rental housing including Permanent Supportive Housing. Canada will not see a sustained reduction in homelessness without a significant increase in the affordable housing supply. The Federal government plays an important, but not exclusive, role in that housing infrastructure. We recommend that the Government of Canada work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to develop a national affordable housing strategy. That strategy should include continued direct federal investment, but may also include tax incentives for market rental housing, a low income housing tax credit program and support for alternative financing like Community Bonds.

The increased investment in affordable housing should also include an expansion of permanent supportive housing. Many individuals who become homeless have complex needs because of both visible and invisible disabilities, mental health problems and addictions. In some cases they will need permanent supportive housing if they are to avoid homelessness.

### **3. Communities – and all levels of government – should embrace Housing First**

In recent years, “Housing First” has emerged as a key response to homelessness. The basic underlying principle being that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are housed. This is as true for homeless people, and those with mental health and addiction issues, as it is for anyone. The five core principles of Housing First include:

- No housing readiness requirements
- Choice and self determination
- Individualized support services
- Harm reduction
- Social and community integration

Housing First need not only be considered a program response. It is best applied as a philosophy that underpins plans to end homelessness, as part of a broader and more strategic response that ensures that all parts of the system support the Housing First agenda and that dedicated programs deliver the service. The success of the At Home/Chez Soi project demonstrates that Housing First Works. The successful application of the model in communities across the country demonstrates how it can be done and adapted to different contexts.

There is an extensive body of research on Housing First. For a short document that explains what Housing First is, and key research on the topic, go to: [Homeless Hub: Housing First](#).

However, the most extensive literature on Housing First emanates from the At Home/Chez Soi project. Resources from this project can be found on the [Homeless Hub](#); in the coming years new resources, including a Housing First tool kit, are on the way.

### **4. Eliminating chronic and episodic homelessness should be prioritized**

Though only a small percentage of individuals experiencing homelessness will remain chronically so, this group suffers some of the worst outcomes. The chronically homeless often face higher levels of victimization, poorer health, high instances of substance abuse and mental health concerns. The longer an individual remains homeless, the more entrenched these issues become and the likelihood of effective intervention decreases. Though small in numbers, these individuals utilize a large portion of emergency services across the homeless sector but also in health, criminal justice and social services. Effective intervention for the chronically homeless requires an intensive, client-centered approach built on trust and long-term support. Though the upfront investment may be considerable, helping these individuals out of homelessness reduces the strain on costly emergency resources, and with time, proves to be cost effective. Cost savings aside, addressing the needs of the most vulnerable is the only way to end homelessness in a community.

## **5. Ending Aboriginal Homelessness should be prioritized as both a distinct category of action and part of the overall strategy to end homelessness**

Homelessness in Aboriginal communities is disproportionately high, especially in urban areas. As such, it should be prioritized in order to reduce discrimination and the legacy of cultural disruption. At the same time, strategies to end homelessness must include components that address issues of Aboriginal Homelessness (along with other distinct and marginalized groups such as racialized communities, or LGBTQ youth).

Aboriginal peoples (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples) have distinct needs both in urban and on-reserve settings. While the focus on Aboriginal homelessness is primarily seen as an urban issue, the conditions of reserve housing, poor living conditions and high unemployment, are factors that lead to people moving to an urban area. Government action, especially at the federal level, on land claims and treaty negotiations will help improve the situation for Aboriginal peoples overall.

As in Recommendation 1, Aboriginal peoples and their representative governments must be seen as part of the solution, and all other levels of government must increase their commitment to reducing poverty within these communities.

Housing initiatives and programs should be culturally aware, sensitive and appropriate. Cultural sensitivity is a key component of developing programs or housing that will meet the needs of Aboriginals in urban settings. This includes recognition of the history of discrimination including residential schools and the removal of children from their family home by the child welfare system. It also includes inclusive decision-making processes, and awareness of language and traditions.

All levels of government need to improve Aboriginal accessibility to their programs by developing culturally aware methods of outreach and engagement.

Aboriginal people should play a role in the development of policy, programs, services and housing. Principles of Aboriginal engagement should be practiced by planners, government and the service sector in developing, delivering and evaluating programs to serve the needs of the Aboriginal homeless community. Self-determination is a key aspect of Aboriginal culture that should be recognized and fostered. Housing strategies and program design should honour this from a practical and political perspective.

## **6. Introduce more comprehensive data collection, performance monitoring, analysis and research**

Research can have an impact on the solutions to homelessness by providing those working to end homelessness with a deeper understanding of the problem, strong evidence for solutions and good ideas from other countries that can be replicated and adapted locally.

Research has also helped us understand how and why people become homeless. One example is a study by Serge et al., (2002) that investigated the link between youth homelessness and the child welfare system. They found that youth who left care at an earlier age were less successful in avoiding homelessness than those who left later. This information should be used to guide child welfare policies in order to reduce the number of youth who become homeless.

## 6.1 The Government of Canada should institute a national Point in Time Count of Homelessness

We cannot measure progress on homelessness in Canada if we lack good data, and haven't established a reliable benchmark. If we wish to implement a strategy to end homelessness that emphasizes Housing First, we need to be able to measure impact, identify successful strategies and demonstrate effective outcomes. Conducting pan-Canadian Point in Time counts on a one, two or three year cycle would provide much better data, and allow communities and all levels of government to more effectively calibrate and target their responses. A national point in count should:

- Utilize the Canadian Definition of Homelessness as a common definition.
- Employ a standardized methodology to which communities should be expected to adhere.
- Conduct the count within a narrow time frame in a given year (i.e. within the same week).

## 6.2 Funders should support communities to conduct effective and reliable program evaluations

In developing more effective responses to homelessness, it is increasingly important to know what works, why it works and for whom it works. Across Canada, communities have expressed the desire for more and better interventions that can contribute to ending homelessness, or that can prevent it from happening in the first place. Solid evidence for "promising" or "best" practices must come from rigorous and effective program evaluation. Unfortunately, in Canada there has not been a historic commitment to (or investment in) evaluating the effectiveness of programs and interventions. We need to make a shift to a culture of planning and evidence-based evaluation; communities should be given the tools to achieve this.

## 6.3 Mandate the implementation of Homelessness Information Management Systems

Communities today are responding to homelessness in an absence of accurate data, largely blind to the movement of people through the system, unable to monitor the effectiveness of programs and unable to effectively coordinate programs.

The Government of Canada can dramatically improve effectiveness of local responses to homelessness by mandating the implementation of homelessness information management systems as part of community plans. An information management system is a locally administered, community wide database used to confidentially aggregate data. They record and store client-level information on the characteristics and service needs of homeless persons. An information management system is typically a web-based software application that homeless service providers use to coordinate care, manage their operations, and better serve their clients.

In mandating the implementation of an information management system, the government would not mandate the technology rather would:

- Define scope and intent of an information management system.
- Define a minimum core data set.
- Articulate minimum privacy standards (the more rigorous of Federal or Provincial privacy legislation).
- Articulate technological standards (to report to federal government).
- Allow information systems to be an allowable expense under HPS.
- Allow the Government of Canada to aggregate, analyze and report out on data collected.

HMIS systems have been in use in the United States for several years and has been used by the Calgary Homeless Foundation ([www.calgaryhomeless.com/hmis](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/hmis)). The Government of Canada has invested in a more robust and flexible information management system called HIFIS (Homelessness Individual and Family Information System) which should be among the options for community information management systems, but not required or exclusive.

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- Wellesley Institute (2010). *Wellesley Institute – Precarious Housing in Canada*. Retrieved from: [http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Precarious\\_Housing\\_In\\_Canada.pdf](http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Precarious_Housing_In_Canada.pdf)

## Footnotes

- Figure reproduced from City of Toronto, 2006 "Rental Housing Supply and Demand Indicators". Profile Toronto. City of Toronto, City Planning and Policy Research.
- Data sources for **Table 1: Affordable Housing in Canada**
  - CMA Population, 2011 Census**  
Based on the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) figures. According to CMHC a CMA "is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centered on a large urban area (known as the urban core). The census population count of the urban core is at least 10,000 to form a census agglomeration and at least 100,000 to form a census metropolitan area."  
Source: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm?fpv=3867>
  - Homeownership Rate, 2006**  
Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2008). Canadian Housing Observer: "Ownership Rates, Canada, Provinces, Territories and Metropolitan Areas, 1971–2006. Retrieved from: [http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob/data/upload/Table8\\_EN\\_w.xls](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob/data/upload/Table8_EN_w.xls)

- **Vacancy Rates, October 2012**  
Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2012). Rental Market Report: Canada Highlights. pp.5-6.
- **Average Rents, October 2012**  
Canada's listed average rents only represent the average rent across Canadian CMAs.  
Source: CMHC (2012). Rental Market Statistics.
- **Renters Core Housing Need, 2006 Census Data**  
CMHC (2011). Characteristics of Households in Core Housing Need, Canada, Provinces, Territories and Metropolitan Areas, 2001, 2006. Retrieved from: [http://www.cmhc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob/data/data\\_024.cfm](http://www.cmhc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob/data/data_024.cfm).
- **Renters Severe Housing Need, 2006 Census Data**  
Source: CMHC (2010). Issue 8—Households in Core Housing Need and Spending at Least 50% of Their Income on Shelter. 2006 Census Housing Series.

### 3. Data sources for **Table 2: Affordable Housing in Canada**

- **Unemployment Rate, May 2013**  
Statistics Canada (2013). Table 282-0116 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by census metropolitan area based on 2006 census boundaries, 3-month moving average, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, monthly (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Retrieved from: <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&retrLang=eng&id=2820116&paSer=&pattern=&stByVal=1&p1=1&p2=37&tabMode=dataTable&csid=>
- **LICO and Market Basket Measure, 2009**  
Murphy, B., Zhang, X. and Dionne, C. (2012). Low Income in Canada: a Multi-line and Multi-index Perspective. Income Research Paper Series. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, pp.59-61.
- **Minimum Wage, 2012**  
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2013). Hourly Minimum Wages in CANADA for Adult Workers. Retrieved from: <http://srv116.services.gc.ca/dimt-wid/sm-mw/rpt2.aspx?lang=eng&dec=5>
- **Income Assistance Rates**
  - **British Columbia**  
The Province of British Columbia (2007). Rate Tables Income Assistance - Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, Province of British Columbia. Retrieved from: <http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/mhr/ia.htm>.
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  - **Saskatchewan**  
Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services (2012). Saskatchewan Assistance Rates. Retrieved from: <http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/SAP-rateCard.pdf>
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  - **Ontario**  
City of Toronto (2012). City of Toronto: Employment and Social Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.toronto.ca/socialservices/foodrent.htm>.
  - **New Brunswick**  
Human Development Council (2012). Experiencing Homelessness in Saint John and New Brunswick. Saint John: Human Development Council, p.8.
  - **Nova Scotia**  
Nova Scotia Housing and Homelessness Network (2012). Halifax Report Card on Homelessness 2012. Halifax.



#### 4. How is food insecurity measured in Canada?

Food insecurity is measured by Statistics Canada through the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), a cross-sectional survey that collects health related information from about 60,000 Canadians per year. The survey consists of 18 questions asking the respondent whether he/she or other household members experienced the conditions described, which range in severity from experiences of anxiety that food will run out before household members have money to buy more, to modifying amount of food consumed, to experiencing hunger, and at greatest extremes, going whole days without eating. These questions distinguish the experiences of adults from those of children, recognizing that in households with children, adults may compromise their own food intakes as a way to free up scarce resources for children.

In putting together this table, Tarasuk's team (Proof, 2013) classified households as either food secure or marginally, moderately or severely food insecure, based on the number of positive responses to the questions posed. Food secure households are those who gave no indication of income-related problems of food access. Those who are marginally food insecure have reported some concern or problem of food access over the past 12 months. Households classified as moderately food insecure have reported compromises in the quality and/or quantity of food consumed among adults and/or children. Those classed as severely food insecure have reported more extensive compromises, including reduced food intakes among adults and/or children because of a lack of money for food.

5. 'Total households' excludes those households with missing values for food security. That is, they did not provide a response to one or more questions on the household food security module. For CMAs other than Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver household numbers have been rounded to the nearest 50.

#### 6. Estimating the number of homeless people in Canada on a given day.

Estimating the number of people who are homeless on a given day in Canada is inherently challenging, even with strong data. The calculation of homelessness presented in this report is only a ball park estimate, and so there should be caution in quoting this figure. The reason is that there is very little reliable data on homelessness either at a pan-Canadian or community level. Canada, unlike other countries including the United States, does not conduct coordinated point-in-time counts across the country. In addition, as suggested in Footnote iii, very few communities conduct point in time counts, and when they do, they are using different definitions and categories of homelessness, (some include provisionally accommodated individuals but most do not), utilize different methodologies, and conduct them at different times of year.

As such, creating this estimate required that we rely on a broad range of data sources, some (Segaert, for example) much more reliable than others. Our estimate of those who are provisionally accommodated is particularly problematic. Our estimate of those in temporary institutional accommodation draws from a small sample of point in time counts, and no consistent definition was used.

#### 7. Comparing Point in Time Counts

In our investigation, we found a small number of Canadian communities have conducted reliable point in time counts of homelessness in the past ten years. Major cities such as Montreal, Hamilton, Ottawa and Winnipeg have not conducted such counts. Some cities conduct counts on a regular cycle allowing them to measure progress over time (Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto) while others do not. In comparing the data from the different counts that do exist, one should exercise some caution, as these counts are not coordinated in any way (that is, communities decide on a process independent of what other communities are doing), they typically use different definitions and categories of homelessness, (some include provisionally accommodated individuals but most do not), employ different methodologies, and conduct them at different times of year. Comparing between counts thus is highly problematic and speculative. It is recommended that in the future, the Government of Canada encourage communities to coordinate point in time counts, using similar definitions and methodologies.

8. Again it must be stressed that comparisons between municipalities are problematic because the figures reported here represent different indicators and measurement.

#### 9. Data sources for **Table 4: Point in time counts of homelessness in select Canadian cities**

- **City Population, 2011 Census**

Figures are based on City population rather than CMA population.

- **Emergency Shelter Beds, 2011**

As of 2011 the Shelter Capacity Report includes statistics for transitional housing, VAW shelters and emergency shelters however the figures included in Table 4 are for emergency beds only.

Source: Homelessness Partnering Secretariat (2012). 2011 Shelter Capacity Report. Ottawa: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

- **Point-in-time count data**

Point-in-time counts are conducted differently throughout the country, therefore the data yielded is difficult to compare. As a baseline, each of the listed cities enumerate the unsheltered and sheltered population separately, though how they define those categories may differ. Further, some cities count homeless individuals in other accommodations such as transitional housing, jails, hospitals, motels, VAW shelters and campsites. As such, we have included an 'Other' category that encompasses either some or all of these indicators. It is important to note that the PIT counts listed are for select cities only, rather than an exhaustive list. Further, communities such as Vancouver and Toronto have not yet published the findings for their most recent counts.

- **Vancouver**  
Thomson, M., Woodward, J., Billows, S. and Greenwell, P. (2012). 6th Homeless Count in City of Vancouver. Vancouver: Eberle Planning and Research.
- **Kelowna**  
Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (2011). Knowledge for Action: Hidden Homelessness in Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nelson and Nanaimo.
- **Calgary**  
Calgary Homeless Foundation (2012). Point-in-time Count Report.
- **Red Deer**  
OrgCode Consulting, Inc (2012). Red Deer Point In Time [PIT] Homeless Count.
- **Edmonton**  
Sorensen, M. (2013) 2012 Edmonton Homelessness Count. Edmonton: Homeward Trust Foundation.
- **Lethbridge**  
City of Lethbridge (2012). "Bringing Lethbridge Home" 2012 Lethbridge Homeless Census. Lethbridge: Social Housing in Action.
- **Saskatoon**  
Chopin, N. and Wormith, D. (2008). Count of Saskatoon's Homeless Population: Research Findings. Saskatoon: Community-University Institute for Social Research.  
Data from the more recent 2012 Saskatoon PIT count can be found in the 2013 Saskatoon Plan to End Homelessness, located here: <http://www.unitedwaysaskatoon.ca/documents/P2EHReport-Final.pdf>
- **Toronto**  
City of Toronto (2009). Street Needs Assessment Results 2009.

10. It should be noted that because the Segart study does not include people staying in Violence Against Women shelters, the percentage of adult males relative to other demographic groups including adult females, children and youth is overestimated).

11. This table is reproduced with permission from: Belanger, Y., Weasel Head, G., & Awosoga, O. (2012) Assessing Urban Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness in Canada. Ottawa: National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) and the Office of the Federal Interlocuter for Métis and Non-Status Indians (OFI), Ottawa, Ontario

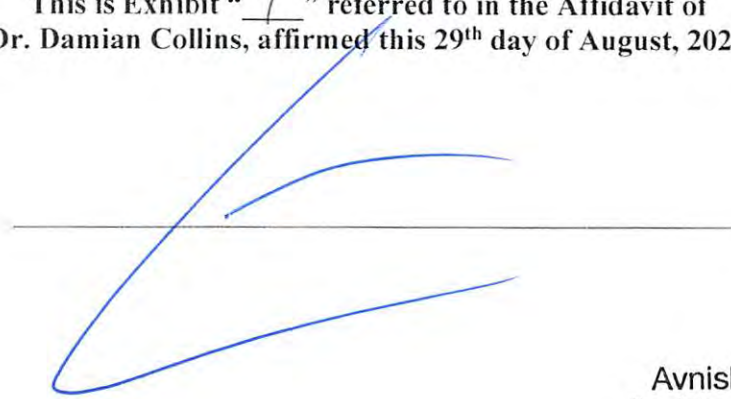
**12. How we calculated the Annual Cost of Homelessness**

The At Home/Chez Soi project has come up with a calculation of the unit costs of homelessness that we believe to be the most accurate and methodologically sound estimates produced in Canada to date (Latimer, et al., 2013). Preliminary findings estimate the mean annual cost to be \$42,484 per person, with a range of \$0 to \$350,000 annually. The service cost estimate included institutional costs such as emergency shelter stays, visits to hospital or time spent incarcerated, as well as the use of ambulatory services such as doctors visits, social services, etc. This research undoubtedly provides the most reliable estimate of the cost of homelessness per individual.

In creating our calculation, we applied the mean of participant costs within the bottom 90% of the At Home/Chez Soi sample (\$29,971) to a reasonable estimate of the size of the transient homeless population in Canada (180,000) cited in Figure 3. We came up with an annual cost to the Canadian economy of \$5,594,780,000. Using the same logic, we calculated the cost of chronic homelessness to be \$1657,980,000, based on an estimate of the size of this population (20,000) and a mean annual cost of the 90% percentile as being \$82,899. Our resulting estimate for the annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy is in Canada is \$7,052,760,000.

A word of caution about these estimates. First, the sampling used by At Home/Chez Soi was not random, as the selection criteria was to identify participants who had mental illness or addictions challenges, which suggests that higher needs individuals within the homeless population are overrepresented. The second caution is we have to be careful in estimating savings that would be generated by housing this population, for many will be high service users once housed, and may require supports (including income, social services, health supports, etc.) for the rest of their lives.

This is Exhibit "7" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

# The New Logics of Homeless Seclusion: Homeless Encampments in America's West Coast Cities

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*University of California, Berkeley*

Since the late 1990s, scores of American cities have witnessed the re-emergence of large-scale homeless encampments for the first time since the Great Depression. Commonly portrayed as rooted in the national economic downturn and functionally undifferentiated, this paper demonstrates that large-scale encampments are rather shaped by urban policies and serve varied and even contradictory roles in different localities. Drawing on interviews and observations in 12 encampments in eight municipalities, this study reveals four distinctive socio-spatial functions of encampments shaped by administrative strategies of city officials and adaptive strategies of campers. I demonstrate how large-scale encampments paradoxically serve as both tools of containing homeless populations for the local state and preferred safe grounds for those experiencing homelessness. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications of homeless seclusion for social analysis and policy, arguing that exclusion and seclusion are two sides of the same coin of the management of marginality in the American city.

## INTRODUCTION: THE COMPARATIVE IMPERATIVE OF HOMELESS RELEGATION

Homeless camps have long been a part of America's urban landscape. Their ebb and flow followed the booms and busts of business cycles (Roy 1935) and the seasonal rhythms of farm work (N. Anderson 1923) until the early 1970s. After that, the street homeless and their camps became a permanent fixture in most cities of the United States as the country experienced a period of economic decline, the de-institutionalization of its mental health institutions, and welfare state retrenchment (Jencks 1995). Homeless camps during this period tended to remain smaller and more dispersed than those of the pre-war era, as local law-enforcement agencies would sweep into action when they perceived an area was dominated by the homeless (Snow and Mulcahy 2001). The camps also took the form of short-lived political events in staking "tent-cities" on the steps of city halls, the lawn of the White House, and on contentious parcels of public land to press political demands (Wagner and Gilman 2012).

Yet, during the rapid economic expansion of the 1990s and early 2000s, dozens of U.S. cities experienced the rise of durable homeless encampments on a scale unseen since the

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Great Depression. Several persisted for years, often comprised of 50 or more individuals. In 18 reported cases across the United States, upward of 100 lived in the camps (NCH 2010; NLCHP 2014a). This new trend of homeless encampment, marked by increased size and durability, during a period of economic growth, rather than decline, suggests that a new logic of urban relegation is at work and an alternative sociological explanation.

Social scientists have long studied various forms of homeless habitation on the streets (N. Anderson 1923; Duneier 2000; Hopper 2003; Snow and Anderson 1993), in shelters (Cloke et al. 2010; Desjarlais 1997; Dordick 1997; Lyon-Callo 2008; Sutherland and Locke 1936), and squats (Bailey 1973; Katz and Mayer 1985; Pruijt 2003). Yet we know very little about homeless camps (exceptions include Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Gowan 2010; Wasserman and Clair 2010), and little at all on the recently emerging large-scale formations. The few studies that do exist on large-scale encampments survey a diverse and limited terrain. On the one hand, there are those that detail the development of encampments by homeless people and their allies as forms of protest against housing and homeless policies, such as the tent city protests in Chicago and San Jose (Wright 1997), the radical politics associated with the Tompkins Square encampment (Smith 1996), and the occupations that mobilized groups of homeless people across a number of U.S. cities in the 1980s and 1990s (Cress and Snow 2000; Wagner and Gilman 2012). On the other hand, there are those who have examined the development of large encampments in terms of homeless people making do with the derelict and under-utilized zones of the city left to them. Examples include the homeless shantytown in Tucson, Arizona, at the center of Snow and Mulcahy's article on the spatial constraints of homeless survival (2001), and the various stories on the "Tunnel People" who inhabited the abandoned Amtrak yards in the bowels of New York City (Toth 1995; Voeten 2010). Describing encampments as politicized sites of protest, on the one hand, and zones of neglected poverty, on the other, the existing studies point to the discontinuity in both the form and functions of these new islands of marginality and the limits of localized case studies.

Lacking a broader comparative framework and larger number of cases, these earlier studies are unable to explain the variations in encampments, and why they have re-emerged most intensely at this historical juncture. This study overcomes these limitations through empirical innovation and theoretical extension. First, by examining 12 encampments in eight municipalities on the west coast within a single analytic framework, this study provides the first comparative examination of variegated forms of homeless encampment in the United States. Second, by deciphering the seclusionary strategies of local state agencies and homeless people in large-scale encampments, the study revises and extends existing theories of urban seclusion, exclusion, and regulation of advanced marginality in the modern metropolis.

This article builds on Wacquant's (2010) conception of social seclusion and Snow and Anderson's (1993) theory of homeless agency to analyze the various logics of homeless seclusion shaping encampments. Through a dual conception of administrative spatial practices of the local state and adaptive spatial practices of homeless people, I delineate the principles that define four types of *homeless seclusion*, which encompass, differentiate, and explain the various forms of encampment. I conclude by considering the theoretical implications of these peculiar institutions, which I argue function both as new socio-spatial contraptions of homeless containment for the state as well as preferable safe ground to the dominant institution of homeless seclusion in the United States, namely, the shelter.

## PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY

To understand why and how certain cities come to develop encampments of this scale and to identify what functions they serve, I carried out interviews with city officials, non-profit actors, and residents of the camps between 2009 and 2011 along with observations from repeated site visits. This time-lapse allowed me to trace the ongoing development of homeless containment and adaptation within each of the encampments. As I was interested only in camps that had maintained a degree of permanence and scale, in distinction to the more common smaller and temporary camps, I completed a thorough review of local media reports through the LexisNexis database to identify currently existing camps in the United States comprised of 50 or more campers that had existed for more than a year. After identifying and reviewing 32 cases that fit this criterion as of August 2009, the west coast region was selected because it contained both the highest concentration of encampments and greatest variety of settlement types. The particular encampments within the region were selected to insure that every type of legal status and management model within the broader census was interrogated in more than a single case. In 2010, my initial empirical findings of the camps were published as a policy report for the National Coalition for the Homeless, which presents the basic attributes of the sample (see Table 1).

Of those interviewed, 14 were city officials, 23 were affiliated with nonprofit service providers or advocates connected to the encampments, and 32 were camp residents. The study also draws on 3 months of embedded ethnography in which I lived in the archipelago of homeless encampments in Fresno, California. Although I only touch on the ethnographic data within this broadly comparative article, living in the nonprofit sponsored Village of Hope, surrounding illegal encampments, and local shelter offered an important perspective for understanding the key differences of homeless seclusion. The experience of living in the encampments under similar material conditions as those of the homeless—in a tent or hut, eating donated food, showering at the service center, and spending only money earned from recycling—gave me a proximate and visceral understanding of the encampments and their moral life-worlds that remained invisible in the interviews.

## TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF HOMELESS SECLUSION

The *exclusionary* spatial policies and practices of local governments, which undergird the formation of large-scale homeless encampments, have been thoroughly studied by sociologists and geographers of the city, who have examined the “hardening of public space” (Dear 2001; Davis 1990; Soja 2000), new modes of surveillance (Coleman 2004; Flusty 2001), “antisocial behavior laws” (Duneier 2000; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010; Mitchell 1997; Vitale 2008), and novel techniques of banishment (Beckett and Herbert 2011). Although the recent intensification of criminalizing homelessness is widespread (NLCHP 2014b), a growing number of commentators argue that the prevailing framework risks obscuring the increasingly varied and complex geographies of urban poverty and its corresponding social control in ignoring the regulation of the homeless beyond the boundaries of redeveloping downtowns (see DeVerteuil et al. 2009; Walby and Lippert 2012; Yarwood 2007). As Stuart (2013) notes in his recent article on policing Los Angeles’ skid

TABLE 1. Overview of Pacific Coast Tent Cities

Camp	Location	No. of Residents	Year Est.	Permanent/ Mobile		Legal Status	Sponsorship	Structures
				Permanent site	Mobile			
Dignity Village	Portland, OR	60	2000	Permanent site		City ordinance	Self-sponsored nonprofit network	Wooden tiny houses Tents
Tent City 3	Seattle, WA	100	2000	Mobile		City ordinance	Nonprofit faith network	Tents
Tent City 4	Seattle Metro Area	100	2006	Mobile		Local ordinances	Nonprofit faith network	Tents
Nickelsville	Seattle, WA	100	2008	Mobile		Not sanctioned	Self-sponsored nonprofit network	Tents
Camp Quixote	Olympia, WA	50	2007	Permanent Site		Local ordinances	Nonprofit faith network	Tents
American River (Safe Ground) Village of Hope	Sacramento, CA	250 (50)	1930s–(2009)	Permanent Site (Mobile)		Not sanctioned	No formal Sponsorship	Tents
Community of Hope	Fresno, CA	66	2004	Permanent Site		Temporary use permit	Nonprofit service provider	Wooden Sheds
New Jack City & Little Tijuana	Fresno, CA	60	2007	Permanent Site		Temporary use permit	Nonprofit service provider	Wooden Sheds
Temporary Homeless Service Area (Camp Hope)	Fresno, CA	400	2002	Permanent Site		Not sanctioned	No formal Sponsorship	Tents, Tarps, Wooden Structures
Temporary Homeless Service Area (Camp Hope)	Ontario, CA	70 (450)	2007	Permanent Site		Temporary use permit	City and county government	Tents

An article search through the Lexis Nexus database similar patterns of re-emerging encampments with over 50 inhabitants during the study period in Athens, GA; Gainesville, FL; St. Paul, MN; St. Petersburg, FL; Nashville, TN; Chattanooga, TN; Camden, NJ; Lakewood, NJ; Providence, RI; Chattanooga, TN; St. Louis, MO; Huntsville, AL; Lowell, MA; Lubbock, TX; Albany, CA; Reno, NV; Las Vegas, NV; San Jose, CA; San Diego, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Sierra Vista, AZ; Columbus, Ohio; Ann Arbor, MI; Eugene, OR; Dale City, VA; Detroit, MI; New Orleans, LA; Westhaven, CT; Louisville, KY; Fort Worth, TX; La Cruces, NM; Colorado Springs, CO.

Source: Tent Cities in America: Pacific Coast, National Coalition for the Homeless, 2010.

row, recent studies tend to focus on the process by which the homeless are excluded from *prime spaces* (Snow and Anderson 1993)—spaces that are primarily used and valued by mainstream society—and fail to account for the related seclusionary policies and practices, which sustain, sanction, and control the daily lives of individuals within the *marginal spaces* into which homeless are being expelled. Rather than document more examples of the same, this paper examines the practices and outcomes of *homeless seclusion* in the marginal spaces of encampments and attempts to explain their variegated and contradictory functions for the local state and those experiencing homelessness in the U.S. metropolis.

To do this, I draw on Wacquant's conception of social seclusion, which he defines as the process through which "particular social categories and activities are corralled, hemmed in, and isolated in a reserved and restricted quadrant of physical and social space" (2010: 166). In making the argument against scholars who confusingly collapse the conceptions of the "ghetto" and "ethnic cluster" into a single category of social space, Wacquant draws out a two-dimensional analytic grid depicting degrees of high and low social hierarchy and selective and forced isolation, to distinguish numerous modalities of seclusion. I follow a similar method of analysis built on the premises of Wacquant's framework to disentangle differences within the one-dimensional conception of the "homeless camp." First, Wacquant focuses on the ways populations, institutions, and activities are secluded, isolated, or confined, that complements the more prevalent studies, which examine the pervasive tactics of exclusion (Beckett and Herbert 2011; Merry 2001; O'Malley 1992). Second, Wacquant's dual conception of seclusion as both a product of imposed constraints *and* elective choice, eschews the all too frequent trend in the literature of recognizing only the repressive components of confinement, while ignoring its productive aspects (Wacquant 2008, 2011) critical to understanding the co-constitutive roles of homeless people's preference to camp amidst varied administrative constraints.

Figure 1 presents an analysis of divergent forms of homeless seclusion, which serves as the guiding map of the paper. There are two settings, legal and illegal, and within each, forms of seclusion are distributed along two basic dimensions. The vertical axis of institutionalization and informality gauges the degree to which camps are managed and supported by institutions of the state and/or nonprofit service agencies. Encampments that are formally recognized through zoning ordinances and serviced by contracted nonprofits would be located near the top of the axis, whereas those under threat of eviction and without basic services such as water and sanitation would be at the bottom. The horizontal axis describes the extent to which campers are able to independently exercise power over their encampment outside of state impositions of direct management or repression. These conceptual axes in turn form four quadrants, each of which depicts what I will go on to elaborate as distinct forms of homeless seclusion: contestation, toleration, accommodation, and co-optation.

Although these forms of homeless seclusion can be minimally parsed out along these two dimensions, the purpose of this typology is not simply descriptive, but also analytic. It offers a lens through which one can explain the distinctive logics and practices of each type. To do this, I follow Snow and Anderson (1993), who examine the survival strategies of homeless people within four distinctive though overlapping and interacting constraints: organizational, political, moral, and spatial constraints. This article considers the *adaptive strategies* of homeless people and their allies within each of these



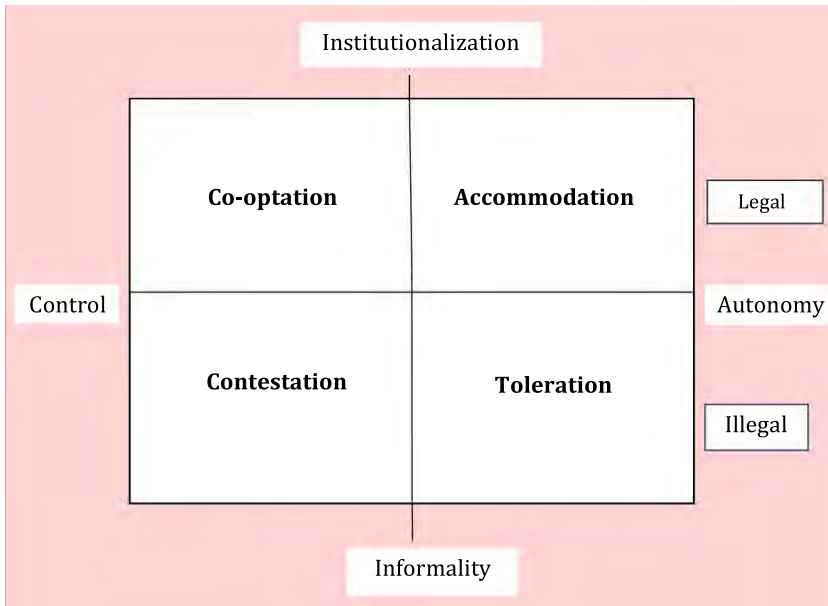


FIG. 1. Typology of Homeless Seclusion.

constraints. Snow and Anderson's concept of adaptive strategies adds a critical component of agency or resistance in distinguishing encampments absent in Wacquant's heavy focus on the administrative strategies of the state. Thus, this analysis combines the local state's *administrative strategies* that constrain the *adaptive strategies* of homeless people.

## CONTESTATION

In the summer of 2008, Seattle's Mayor Greg Nickels issued police orders to crack down on rough sleepers. Targeting primarily camping groups, police moved with little warning, often confiscating and destroying residents' belongings. With inadequate shelters and two legal tent cities already filled to capacity, homeless people joined together and formed a protest camp in South Seattle named Nickelsville. The encampment formed after a month of planning, weekly organizing meetings, two rallies, a die-in, and a car wash with a local homeless advocacy group. Like Nickelsville, all of the camps in the Northwest first organized through activist repertoires to protect against displacement and dispersion by local law enforcement. After forming an initial encampment, the authorities evicted the campers *en masse*, but rather than dispersing, they relocated collectively on new territory. It is this resilience against attempts of dispersal, the explicit political program of the camps, and their emergence through militant struggle with city authorities that distinguishes the process of contestation to other forms of seclusion.

### Administrative Strategies

Unlike the other three forms of homeless seclusion, wherein local governments tolerate and often actively support secluded zones for homeless people, seclusion through contestation is a reaction to an administrative strategy of *dispersion*. In these cases, local governments utilize police “sweeps” to deconcentrate and make invisible homeless populations, through a number of city ordinances against street drinking, panhandling, camping, rough sleeping, park use, and broad antisocial behavior (Beckett and Herbert 2011; NLCHP 2014b). Yet the encampments re-emerge. They are merely geographically and/or temporally displaced, reconsolidating to defend against future attacks. However, it would be wrong to interpret the police sweeps as simply the neutral enforcement of legislation. Interviews showed instead that the reasons for dispersing camps were foremost political, depending on *material* and *symbolic* rationales given varying urban conditions.

The most prevalent reasons for clearing camps that city officials gave were proximate material concerns: the fears of heightened crime in the area of the camps, reductions of adjacent property values, retailers’ anxieties that homelessness was driving customers away, and resident complaints of scavengers sorting through trash. These same arguments were also the prime cause of concern expressed in the city-council hearings on anti-homeless ordinances and legalization of encampments. However, in Fresno, Seattle, and Sacramento, the camps were so thoroughly marginalized on fallow and abandoned land that evidence of proximate effects was difficult to pinpoint, despite the official claims. For instance, Nickelsville’s most frequent encampment site, located on the ironically named street Marginal Way, was hidden from sight by a forested border off of an industrial service road. Sacramento’s Safe Ground encampment was tucked deep in the woods along the American River, invisible even from the traveled trails. In Fresno, a buffer of rail yards and abandoned warehouses guarded its tent city district, and Portland and Ontario’s camps were both situated between airports and landfills.

In short, the availability of space to occupy with ample invisibility is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for durable encampments. When I pressed city officials on the evictions from the sites in Fresno, Sacramento, and Seattle, where material threats to property values and profitability were not apparent, they then justified the dismantling of camps on symbolic grounds, citing public perceptions of insecurity and preservation of their city’s or administration’s reputation. Even though most residents had never set eyes on these areas firsthand, the visual spectacle captured through media had the effect of mobilizing city administrators to fight perceptions of a crisis of homelessness. The homeless policy manager of Fresno concisely explains this *politics of visibility*:

You have to understand Fresno’s homeless problem is much bigger than the camps South of Ventura, but when people see these large shantytowns growing on TV, even if our numbers (of homeless) are declining, they assume the city is tolerating illegalities and we get pressure to clean up, even though that area is completely abandoned.

The media’s gaze simultaneously stokes the insecurity of local residents and reveals the social problems unaddressed by city administration, leading officials to take

action. However, all they do is disperse the campers to less visible circumstances. Despite most journalists' intentions of ameliorating the plight of campers by raising awareness of their plight, officials in both Sacramento and Reno similarly cited the media uproar that drew international attention to their cities as the triggering factor to evict the camps. The use of the term "illegalities," as opposed to poverty, is also telling. It casts criminality rather than economic circumstances as the primary social problem of homelessness.

These instances suggest that from the view of urban managers, it is not the mere existence of homelessness, but rather its public visibility, which turns the unhoused into symbols of incivility and objects of policy action. This supports Snow and Mulcahy's (2001) finding that the dichotomous conception of space as maintaining both a "use" and "exchange" value (Logan and Molotch 1987) neglects the symbolic dimension, which attributes a political value. However, the cases of Sacramento and Seattle demonstrate that even marginal spaces have political value, something Snow and Mulcahy relate only to prime and transitional spaces. Therefore, the dismantling of camps is not merely aimed at protecting proximate property values and local business, as highlighted by scholars studying the regulation of homelessness in prime spaces (Beckett and Herbert 2011; Duneier 2000; Mitchell 1997; Vitale 2008). They are also part-and-parcel of a broader penal-welfare strategy designed to project governmental competency in poverty management by reinforcing an image of law and order while concealing the failures of the welfare state (Wacquant 2009).

### Adaptive Strategies

Unlike the recent experiments in legalized encampments, the tactic of setting up tent cities as protest and civil disobedience by homeless people and their allies in the United States has existed for decades. The erection of tent cities to protest homelessness first spread across the United States in the 1980s (Wagner and Gilman 2012: 56). The community group ACORN staged tent cities in 15 cities, "Reaganvilles" were set up outside of Boston's City Hall and the White House, and protest camps persisted into the 1990s and 2000s as political spectacles in symbolic prime spaces to draw attention to homelessness (Snow and Mulcahy 2001; Wagner and Cohen 1991; Wright 1997). Although there were some camps that had been tolerated and became politicized only when threatened with eviction, as was the case in the radicalization of Tompkins Square Park (Smith 1996), most protest encampments were political events by design demanding affordable housing, the decriminalization of homelessness, and humane shelters. With the exception of "Justiceville" in Los Angeles, which lasted from 1985 to 1993 before it was transformed into transitional housing, the vast majority of these earlier cases lasted only a matter of days and weeks, and only in a small handful of cases, months. The contested camps in this study follow in this tradition of political protest, but have persisted far longer, and all began from the start with the goal of permanently safeguarding a space for their existence. Both Seattle's Nickelsville and Sacramento's Safe Ground continue to politicize their encampment in the face of inadequate shelters and housing, whereas Camp Quixote, Dignity Village, and Tent Cities 2 and 3 all initially formed through protests before settling into relatively de-politicized forms of seclusion.



**Nickelsville, Seattle, Washington**



What is distinctive about contested seclusion is that camps come to serve as both safe grounds *and* vehicles of political mobilization, utilizing tactics and discursive frames of nascent social movements (Tilly 2008). As one Nickelodian (the self-coined term for Nickelsville residents) explained, “We’re not simply homeless here, we are activists for the entire population of homeless in this city.” A community meeting I attended included discussions about media outreach and city council decisions, writing letters to officials, and political strategizing with the local nonprofit SHARE/WHEEL, an advocacy group comprised of homeless and formerly homeless individuals that provides financial and political support to the camp. Donated pink tents were used to attract media attention, to “make visible Seattle’s homeless,” as one advocate put it. Similarly, Sacramento’s Safe Ground encampment, an offshoot of the American River encampment, holds bi-weekly meetings with homeless advocates and legal counsel in a local service provider’s boardroom to discuss not only the needs of the camp, but how to support campaigns around homeless issues in the city. Central to both of these camps and other encampments that began as protests is the role of housed allies in advocacy groups. All the durable encampments featured in this study faced high turnover of residents, with most campers staying a number of months and only a small, though often active and committed group staying for more than a year. Because of this turnover, the role of advocacy groups in all the camps under contestation proved instrumental to their emergence and survival.

Through this process of contestation, collectivities of campers were brought into existence by the very strategies that sought to disperse them. On the eve of an eviction in Nickelsville, a camper described how the struggle with city authorities both generated the “community” and became a binding glue among its members, explaining, “It’s just a game of cat and mouse, but this game has built this community.” Residents across all forms of encampment stressed the moral resources and sense of purpose that the camps provided them, in contrast to the chaotic streets and demeaning shelters. However, in the contested camps this sense of empowerment carried a uniquely political inflection, as campers viewed themselves as part of a collective struggle and advocates for a cause.

Although the question of how to organize the dispossessed for political action remains a perennial one among activists and poverty scholars, encampment has proven to be a uniquely successful, albeit limited strategy. Contested camps succeed in drawing media

attention to issues of homelessness, provide homeless people with moral resources of political and social purpose, and win legal recognition for a single site or housing vouchers for a few. Yet they remain limited by their temporary journalistic limelight and their tendency to provide benefits for only a small number of campers, rather than the homeless population at large.

## TOLERATION

The streets and rail yards surrounding Fresno's rescue mission have long hosted a spattering of small homeless camps. It was only in 2002, however, that the camps agglomerated into semi-permanent shantytowns and tent cities comprised of dozens and eventually hundreds of campers. It was at this time that the city council passed and began enforcing new anti-homeless laws, including a sit-lie law and a no shopping cart law, in an effort to revitalize its urban core with the opening of Chukanski Park, a minor league ballpark built in the central business district. Marked by the strictly policed boundary of South Ventura Street, which divides the "tent city" and commercial district, as depicted in the photos, the city enforces a two-sided place-based policy of stark proximate segregation. In the higher rent districts of the downtown, police carry out an emboldened punitive approach, while simultaneously taking an unprecedented hands-off toleration of homeless habitation within the abandoned industrial zone. This double-edged process of exclusion and seclusion led to the initial formations of large-scale camps in Fresno, Ontario, Sacramento, and Ventura as well as the majority of reported cases not included in this west coast sample (NLCHP 2014a).



**American River Encampment, Sacramento, CA**



**New Jack City, Fresno, CA**

## Administrative Strategies

Seclusion through toleration creates encampments that are sanctioned by the lack of enforcement, but not by law. These spaces are not exempt from the exclusionary laws that make it illegal to camp, sit, lie down, or beg, but such ordinances are selectively enforced. Why might a city administration tolerate such an encampment rather than dispersing homeless campers as done in most U.S. cities? Although none of the city managers claimed that the tolerated encampments were "by design," neither did they speak

of the encampments as purely social problems to be battled, nor as failures of the administration in addressing homelessness, as in contested contexts. Instead, interviewed officials pointed to a number of pragmatic benefits of tolerating the encampments within the context of limited policy options and political will, in *entrepreneurial*, *managerialist*, and *social-welfare* registers.

First, the encampments were viewed as complementary tools to the exclusionary ordinances in accomplishing the goals of anti-homeless ordinances. Ontario's housing director noted the drastic fall in complaints by businesses after sanctioning an abandoned field for the use of homeless people, and Fresno's homeless policy manager claimed the camp had "taken pressure off of the downtown parks and pedestrian mall." A primary impetus for exclusionary laws comes from business and development interests. In particular, Business Improvement Districts are frequently the primary organizations involved in bringing such ordinances onto the legislative agenda and implementing their enforcement through private security forces (Deener et al. 2013; Duneier 2000; Vitale 2008). In the cities featured in this study, these special interests were vigilant in the enforcement of ordinances within the prime spaces of their own commercial territory, but were unconcerned about their application in marginal spaces of the city.

Second, and related to the economic benefits of homeless policy, is the reduction in law enforcement costs to the city administration, a benefit mentioned by all the city officials interviewed in cities with tolerated or legal encampments. Ventura's Community Service Manager described the toleration of encampments along the riverbed before legalizing one of the encampments as an example of "smart, pragmatic government" that avoided costly expenditures of time and money "chasing homeless all over town, when we all know they have nowhere to go." What was striking about the justifications of camps in lowering enforcement costs was the lack of any evidence or mention of crime reduction. In every case, the policing benefits were framed in managerialist terms of cost-savings in policing, a hallmark of the new entrepreneurial form of urban governance that increasingly translates social and political problems into economic problems of management (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Hackworth 2006; Harvey 1989).

Third, in every case, city officials justified their policy of toleration in terms of the social welfare of homeless people. Many portrayed their city's toleration of large encampments as charitable signifiers of sympathy, tolerance, and even a progressive approach to homeless management in acknowledging the rights of the homeless as local citizens. Yet, these justifications of compassion were always contextualized within the limits of assistance. All of the city officials I spoke with noted that the camps were not "ideal" or "end" solutions to homelessness, but, recognizing their city's limited shelter capacity, the dangers of the street, and antisocial behavior ordinances, saw them as "making do, without making things worse," as Ventura's Community Service Manager put it.

This trio of logics, found in each of the municipalities that tolerated camps, resulted in and justified a general strategy of *flexible enforcement*, in which exclusionary ordinances that legislate behaviors across all places and people became spatially specified and targeted at particular people in their enforcement. The police not only ignored blatant violations of anti-homeless ordinances in the tolerated encampments, but also turned their back

on criminalized activity that occurred within the designated homeless zones, unless complaints from non-homeless locals arose. During my fieldwork in Fresno, the city not only tolerated camping and shopping carts, both criminalized by city ordinances, but also actively ignored an open-air drug market and fires on the sidewalks even in the presence of officers. This liberal lack of enforcement in tolerated encampments proves to be a *pull* for a number of homeless, as it is often accompanied by an enforced *push* by police and private security officers who instruct homeless persons to return to their assigned area of town. Officers told several of the campers interviewed in Fresno to move “South of Ventura,” the road dividing the “tent-city district” and CBD. Similar instances of spatial assignment were reported in Sacramento before the American River eviction and in Ventura. This flexible enforcement of rules in encampments demonstrates that exclusion and seclusion are two sides of the same coin, as city officials’ toleration of encampments in marginal spaces is complementary, rather than contradictory to the exclusionary tactics of homeless criminalization in prime spaces.

### Adaptive Strategies

Alongside the punitive pushes and pulls that shape this form of seclusion is also the pull of assistance. Those residing in tolerated encampments realized that congregation improved access to food, services, and jobs. Once reaching a critical mass, church groups and charities would begin serving food within the camps, people would drop off donations, and others would stop by to hire day labor. This would then lead to greater numbers of campers and even greater provision of services. In Fresno’s tent-city district, it was not uncommon to have 10 or more feedings by charities on weekends. In the cases of Sacramento and Fresno, the location of the encampments was primarily determined by their proximity to the city’s homeless service providers, which offered food, showers, and medical assistance. Therefore, camps organized through toleration often create or extend pre-existing “service-dependent ghettos” (Wolch and Dear 1987): areas with concentrations of socially marginal people, which, once in place, tend to be reinforced. Service providers take advantage of efficiencies due to agglomerations of socially marginal people, and service users are attracted by the services and by the presence of others in their social network.

Besides the external pull of NGOs is the internal pull of what many campers described as a more dependable and stable community than that of a nomadic existence. One important finding from the initial surveys carried out in the summer of 2009 (NCH 2010) was that, in all 12 encampments, a majority of residents would be classified as “chronically homeless,” which the U.S. government defines as a person with a disability who has been homeless for over a year or experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the past 4 years (HUD 2013). In the cities featured in this study, the “chronically homeless” comprised between 10% and 20% of the total homeless population. However, in stark contrast to the media frenzy surrounding tent cities in 2009 that presented these encampments as products of the financial crisis filled with middle class recent recession victims, all of the camps featured in this study contained a disproportionate number of “chronically homeless” as compared to the streets or shelters. Although there was still relatively high turnover within each of the encampments—more had been in a particular camp for months, rather than years (at least continuously)—the encampments served those who had been without a home far longer than most who

experience homelessness. These people desired a more permanent place on their own terms.

Without the constant threat of eviction, the stability of these encampments had various effects on the social organization of the tolerated camps in contrast to their contested counterparts. As opposed to their disorderly slum-like portrayals in the media, several encampments displayed a high degree of social organization, subdividing along lines of ethnicity, criminal records, and lifestyles. In Fresno, African Americans settled the abandoned Pacific Union rail yard first, but as the Latino population grew within a corner of the camp, it splintered off onto an adjacent site of its own and soon grew much larger. This camp became known as Taco Flats or Little Tijuana among its residents. It eventually absorbed a growing number of recession victims, including a ring of poor whites that tended toward the edge of the site. The camp had a central eating area known as the Cantina that served donated food indiscriminately to the entire community. The encampment drew resources from housed family members and the camp residents who worked in the informal labor market and on the surrounding agricultural lands. The predominantly African American camp, referred to by its residents as New Jack City, named after Van Peebles' film about the crack epidemic of the early 1990s, contained a much thicker web of family relations and friendships from the economically depressed and racially segregated neighborhoods they grew up in.

The encampments also divided along penal lines. Forty sex offenders under special parole conditions and regulated by GPS monitors shackled to their ankles camped under a bridge one mile away from the larger camps of Little T and New Jack City, wherein roughly half the residents had also spent time in prison or jail. This division was initially enforced by parole officers who dropped off and required parolees to be back at the camp by curfew or be returned to jail. However, the division was reinforced by the campers themselves, as the stigma associated with sex crimes raised fears among the sex offenders of being found out and violently abused. In this way, the segregation on the street mirrored the segregation between California's special needs prisons—which contain sex offenders, gang dropouts, and other categories of criminals who are threatened within the general prison population—and the State's mainline prisons, which hold the rest. Finally, the camps were subdivided by community standards of behavior. There were drug- and alcohol-free areas, family friendly zones where children could safely visit, and various groupings based on drugs of choice.

These social subdivisions, which formed thanks to the stability absent in contested seclusion and allowed by the lack of institutional regulation applied in accommodative and co-opted forms of seclusion, reveal the broader social functions of encampments. These differences are elided under the popular and generic label of "homeless camp." New Jack City served as the receptacle for the social fallout of Fresno's crumbling ghettos, Little T was a migrant labor camp for an agricultural county's reserve army, and all of the camps were the primary drop-off point and holding ground for unemployed ex-cons from California's hyperactive prison system. Although all the encampments perform similar instrumental functions for the bloated penal state, meager welfare state, and predatory low-wage employers, their division of labor in the production of marginality is most clearly delineated in the spaces of toleration, wherein their functional and social differentiation is inscribed in the spatial segregation of encampment.



## ACCOMMODATION

Portland's Dignity Village began in the winter of 2000 as a contested protest camp under a bridge. Today it is a well-developed eco-village that governs itself on a contracted piece of public property through its own 501c3 nonprofit headed by a democratically elected board of campers. With wooden cottages, gardens, a library, kitchen, and electricity, it is far from a tent city. The camp also sells donated goods and firewood on-site and asks campers to contribute small amounts of money each month to pay the camp's utility bills. Self-managed, self-funded, and legally recognized, the campers maintain their dignity through their autonomy and self-reliance. With legal sanctions through zoning and city ordinances, accommodated encampments like Dignity Village distinguish themselves from tolerated encampments with their legal recognition and non-profit status. They are distinct from co-opted camps in their preservation of campers' autonomy in decision-making and participation in the camp. Along with Dignity Village, the first of its kind, Tent City 4 and Tent City 3, Camp Quixote, and the Village of Hope are all durable instances of this form of homeless seclusion.

### Administrative Strategies

Why and how have certain municipalities and counties formally recognized these camps through law? In the case of toleration, city officials justified tolerance as a best practice among limited alternatives, but refused to formally legitimate the camps on the grounds of increased liability, expenditures, and conflicts with health and zoning codes. However, after pressing officials on the solutions utilized in other municipalities to overcome these concerns, it was revealed that underneath these technical barriers were a variety of political reservations in legalizing camps. Fresno's homeless policy manager expressed the bipartisan unpopularity of sanctioning encampments that was similarly found in other administrations:

Camps aren't popular with the right or left. Liberals criticize them as inadequate welfare and see the city failing to provide adequate shelter. Conservatives see the camps as a sort of magnet for the region's homeless and a sign that the government is being too soft.

These political barriers to legalization were only overcome when a church or non-profit presented city officials with a proposal that included a plan for the provision and management of the camp. This allowed city officials to divert the issues of technical responsibilities and criticisms of governmental neglect to a third party. In Fresno and Ventura there was relatively little resistance to legalized encampments. In each case, unused city-owned land was simply rezoned as temporary campsites or special permits were granted to service providers to use their own private land for camps (see Loftus-Farren 2011). However, in Seattle, Kings County, and Olympia, the political battles for legalization were contentious and ended up becoming centered on issues of church rights rather than homeless rights. Church groups claimed that the state could not evict the poor from their property under the Federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act designed to allow religious institutions to avoid burdensome zoning restrictions. This legal argument, shifting the contention from the rights

of the poor to the rights of the church, moved local governments into negotiations. What resulted were ordinances that allowed for encampments, but placed restrictions on their populations, the length of stay at any given location, and applied various health and safety standards. The homeless people in these encampments are no longer perceived as “out of place,” but rather in a proper place, as local governments subsume what had formerly been a spatial tactic of resistance into an official state strategy of poverty management.

### Adaptive Strategies

The administrative strategy of legalization is accompanied by the adaptive strategy of institutionalization negotiated between the camp residents and nonprofit partners. Portland’s Dignity Village is unique in that its camp comprises its own nonprofit, whereas the other encampments under accommodative seclusion are instead adopted or managed by churches or external nonprofits. The dominant model, operating in Seattle, Kings County, and Olympia, is one in which encampments migrate to different church properties every 90 days, as seen in the image of Tent City 4. Because the primary political barrier to legalizing a permanent camp proved to be NIMBY (Not in my backyard) complaints, as it is with the siting of shelters (see Wolch and Dear 1987), the regulated rotation of encampment diffused most public opposition. The churches cover the cost of utilities and provide volunteer labor during the camps’ stay, whereas local nonprofits serve as the camps’ fiscal agents and provide food and administrative support. Campers share chores, follow mutually agreed upon standards of behavior, and meet weekly to discuss camp business and make collective decisions.



**Tent City 4, Redmond, WA**



**Dignity Village, Portland, OR**

Besides offering greater material benefits and comforts compared to their illegal counterparts, these encampments also provide a far greater degree of security than the streets or the shelter. Each of the encampments in this category provided around the clock security administered by the residents with a consensus that violators would be expelled. During the summer I lived in the encampments of Fresno, violence was pervasive in the illegal camps, where three murders and almost daily instances of domestic abuse occurred. No one would stray far from her tent without leaving a lookout for fear of being robbed.

During the same time, within the Village of Hope, the legal and nonprofit sponsored encampment, there was only one reported incident of robbery and domestic abuse. One camper, who had been homeless on the streets and shelters in Fresno for 2 years, explained: "It's sad, but you can't trust anyone on the streets or in the shelters, even the staff. This is the only place I've felt like I can leave my spot without worrying that my stuff will still be here the next day."

This form of seclusion also provided particularly important subjective resources in maintaining a sense of self-worth among the campers. Encampments of accommodation provide this sense in the most basic ways, by allowing individuals to live in a safe and clean environment, maintain and organize a personal space, and contribute to a larger community. As Dignity Village's mission statement expresses: "Dignity functions as a dynamic self-help environment that provides a participatory framework for supporting each other, while simultaneously encouraging individual residents to more effectively help themselves at a personal level." As opposed to the politically charged names of "Hooverville," "Nickelsville," "Reaganville," and "Justiceville," the names of the encampments under accommodation—"the Village of Hope," "Dignity Village," and "Camp Quixote"—instead reflect the maintenance of self-worth as the explicit goal of this form of seclusion. Although each of these camps was initially organized through contested seclusion as highly political demonstrations, once accommodated through legalization and institutionalization politicization of the camps were largely blunted and transformed their missions from political change to personal transformation.

This sense of self-worth was not only preserved through the participatory and autonomous relations provided in this form of seclusion, but was also gained through a sense of social distinction that the spatial confines of the camp conferred on its residents. Snow and Anderson's (1987) classic study of homeless identity found that a substantial proportion of identity talk was consciously focused on homeless people distancing themselves from other homeless individuals and the institutions serving them, which implied a social identity inconsistent with their desired self-conceptions. In a number of interviews, encampments were used to distinguish and distance those in the camps from those on the streets and in the shelters with whom they associated the typical negative stereotypes of homelessness. The 100 residents of Fresno's Village of Hope lived in garden sheds surrounded by a gated fence marked with a "no loitering" sign. Many "Villagers," a name adopted by the residents, spoke of working security as "paying rent" and referred to themselves as "residents." As one long-time villager explained:

We in the village are a different class of homeless. I mean, we're not 'street homeless.' Those other homeless could be in here if they wanted to, but they're just lazy bums. They don't want to follow a few rules and help out in the community.

A similar distinction was made from those in the shelter, who were frequently characterized as dependent and institutionalized. Just as ethnographic studies have found sharp judgments within poor neighborhoods between "street" and "decent" or "upstanding" cultures (E. Anderson, 1990; Hannerz; 1969; Patillo-McCoy, 2000; Small, 2004), the legal camps symbolically solidify social distinctions among the homeless.

## CO-OPTATION

Flying into Ontario's International Airport, in the heart of California's inland empire, one can spot less than a mile from the tarmac what could easily be mistaken as a military refugee or disaster relief camp. Enclosed by a perimeter chain-link fence, a settlement of 70 identical army tents in ordered rows sticks out of the never-ending suburban landscape. Located in an old neighborhood marked by aging buildings and abandoned orchards, what used to be one of California's largest squatting settlements referred to by its campers as "Camp Hope" was turned into a secured holding ground for the region's homeless who had been evicted from all other public places. Officially renamed the Temporary Housing Services Area (THSA), a nominal turn mirroring the camp's bureaucratic refashioning, the "area" is now supervised by a private security force while campers are required to carry special state-issued ID cards and are prohibited from bringing visitors within the gates. This form of seclusion occurs when the local state takes over preexisting encampments. It is the rarest form of seclusion and the three camps in this study that have resulted from this process—Ontario's THSA, Ventura's River Haven Community, and Fresno's Community of Hope—vary dramatically. Nonetheless, the camps share two key traits. First, the government initiatives were designed to formalize, institutionalize, and give order to what were seen as unruly, dangerous, and unclean homeless settlements. Second, unlike the camps governed by the homeless themselves, the co-opted camps have rule regimes that reflect similarly existing state-run institutions such as the shelter and jail or transitional housing.

## Administrative Strategies

According to officials, the government-led programs of camp reform were premised on three interconnected goals. The first was to upgrade the health and sanitation services on the sites, providing amenities such as fresh water, toilets, and garbage disposal. The second was to rid the encampments of illegal activities. A third goal was to re-gear the camp's function toward moving people out of homelessness. As Ontario's director of Housing Services explained:

Rather than actively solving our own community's homeless problem, we're simply sustaining the region's homeless. Once our agency stepped in, we were able to provide a healthier and safer environment for those who actually wanted to do something about their homeless situation, and for those who are actually from our community.

These encampments were no longer simply available for the down-and-out who needed a place to rest, but rather exclusively for the "deserving poor," willing to submit to various behavioral requirements, mimicking the authoritarian trends within the shelters that attach work and behavioral requirements to their beds (Gowan 2010; Lyon-Callo 2008).

"Camp Hope," as its residents referred to it, comprised some 450 homeless people from the region. It arose as a result of the city tolerating the occupation of an empty city-owned lot. Although the encampment was located far from residences and businesses, the sheer scale of the settlement eventually raised public complaints, and the city responded by gating the property, upgrading the site, and hiring a service provider

to manage the camp under government supervision, expense, and regulation. In return for these improvements, the city only allowed back those who could prove an earlier residential connection to the city and would follow a set of stringent requirements including rehabilitation or work. These stipulations sought to make clear that camping was not a right, but a privilege, and only a temporary one at that, as a time limit was applied to an individual's length of stay. As a result, the city was better able to assist certain individuals, the 120 who returned after the eviction, whereas the other 300 were banished from the site at the exact moment the city began cracking down on rough sleeping around the downtown.

Another instance of co-optation that emerged under different circumstances, but followed a similar process, was Ventura's River Haven Community. River Haven did not initially begin as an informal illegal encampment as Camp Hope did, but as a government-recognized encampment under democratic management of campers. However, as the camp showed no signs of moving on, city officials began questioning the goals of the partnership and decided on a plan of "improvement" that evicted all of the former residents and set up in its place a transitional housing program. Like Ontario's THSA, the camp is now managed by a city-appointed service provider and is comprised of twenty U-Domes, rented by its residents for \$300–\$500 a month. The encampment has set limits on lengths of stay and requires its residents to utilize a case manager. As seen in the images, both Ventura's River Haven and Ontario's THSA reflect an institutionalized order, devoid of the personal touches of Dignity's cottages, or the illegal encampment's bricolage of structures.



**Temporary Homeless Service Area, Ontario, CA**



**River Haven, Ventura, CA**

In sum, co-opted seclusion is a double-edged sword: a strategy of repressive exclusion masked by its simultaneous productive seclusion. The strategy has proved a useful socio-spatial tool of local government in dispersing the perceived "undeserving" homeless, cleaning out environmentally degraded sites, and staging camp reforms as a progressive government action in tandem. Legitimizing its actions through aesthetic improvements and enhanced services for the lucky few allowed to remain, the local governments veiled the banishment of the vast majority of campers and hid the persistence of poverty in their jurisdictions. Therefore, co-optation, like contestation, is similarly a space of seclusion marked by intense social control that utilizes dispersion as a key spatial strategy

in managing marginality. Only co-optation does so alongside a highly controlled form of containment. Following in the tradition of urban renewal and poverty deconcentration programs like HOPE VI, co-optation aims to beautify and enhance living conditions within a particular urban area by providing improvements for a select few, while evicting a greater number of residents in the process, targeting sites of poverty rather than poverty itself (Goetz 2003; Popkin et al. 2004).

### Adaptive Strategies

Unlike the other forms of seclusion, the internal organization of camps is directly regulated by the local state. There was no participation required in the maintenance of the camps outside their personal space, and none of the residents described their camp as a “community.” At River Haven, all of the residents interviewed expressed gratitude for this mezzanine option of housing in the high rent county, claiming that if it were not for the encampment, they would be back in a tent by the riverbed. Similarly, many of those in Ontario’s THSA were happy that the county cleaned up the area and were glad that they no longer had to compete with “outsiders” for low-wage work and limited supported housing.

However, Ontario and Ventura’s encampments must also be recognized as a form of spatial control, primarily designed to disperse the informal encampments they replaced and exclude the particular groups of homeless. Several campers who returned to Ontario’s revamped camp left shortly after, explaining that they felt as if they were going back into a shelter and referred to the new highly securitized environment as “degrading,” “prison-like,” and even “a concentration camp.” Many refused to forfeit their dogs and their ability to host friends, or were simply unable to comply with the strict codes of behavior that excluded some because of mental health issues or addiction. In converting Camp Hope into a cheaper form of outdoor shelter, the state largely duplicated the shelter itself, the seclusionary institution most homeless were trying to escape through camping in the first place, neutralizing the empowering and morally redemptive adaptive actions found in the other forms of homeless seclusion.

### Synthesis

In sketching these processes of homeless seclusion, this paper has clarified a central paradox in the vision and division of large-scale homeless encampments. *They are both tools and targets in the management of marginality*, in some cases vilified, in others valorized. It was found that the key factor pushing encampments toward the institutionalized pole was a combination of an adaptive strategy by which advocacy and faith groups brought legal threats and/or offered political, fiscal, and organizational support for a permanent encampment. This succeeded only when such causes aligned with administrative logics of reducing costs in the enforcement of anti-social behavior laws, staging governmental competency, and shedding welfare responsibilities to third parties. When these strategic alliances and governmental logics were lacking, encampments remained merely tolerated or contested, vulnerable to the upsurge of public agitation and swings of political sentiments. In Table 2, I delineate the key external constraints (administrative strategies) and internal components (adaptive strategies) of each form of homeless seclusion.

TABLE 2. Typology of Homeless Seclusion

	Legality	Regulation	Support	Organization
<b>Contestation</b> +Control	Illegal	Challenged through dispersion Officials do not support	Advocacy supported	Mobilized as political action Sweeps and evictions prevent institutionalization and stable autonomy Mutually enforced community standards of behavior
-Autonomy +Informality institutionalized				
<b>Toleration</b>	Illegal	Flexible enforcement (combination of dispersion/concentration)	Charitable and NGO supported	Concentrated by enforcement and proximity to services Subdivided and organized micro-communities within encampment Mutually enforced community standards of behavior
-Control +Autonomy		Officials do not publicly support		
+Informal institutionalized				
<b>Accommodation</b>	Legal	Light regulation through ordinances and public private partnerships Officials publicly support	Charitable and NGO administered	Formal procedures of application and acceptance Centrally organized Self-managed security and maintenance Democratically chosen and mutually enforced community standards of behavior
-Control +Autonomy -Informal				
+Institutionalized				
<b>Co-optation</b>	Legal	Managed and administered by city/county	City/county administered	Client/provider relationship: internal organization mirrors shelter or supportive housing Imposed rules and city provided services
+Control -Autonomy -Informal +Institutionalized				

## CONCLUSION: SECLUSIONARY AND EXCLUSIONARY SYMBIOSIS

This paper has demonstrated the diverging logics and practices of homeless seclusion. In contrast to the one-dimensional and functionally undifferentiated portrayals of encampments in journalistic and academic accounts, encampments cannot be reduced to zones of containment for homeless people to exist in the revanchist city (Bourgois and Schoenberg 2009; Smith 1996) or to mere modes of “resistance” to neoliberal governance (Wagner and Cohen 1991; Wright 1997). Instead, this analysis has demonstrated the existence of a variety of encampments shaped by four distinct, though interrelated, forms of homeless seclusion. Building from the earlier research on homeless encampments, which only considered their illegal and contentious forms, this study demonstrates how in the situations of toleration, accommodation, and co-optation, seclusionary encampments become a spatial strategy of the local state in managing homelessness. Although the structural dilemmas in U.S. cities of affordable housing, mental health treatment, and incarceration undergird the persistence of homelessness, this paper suggests that the existence and form of large-scale encampments are not a general phenomena of poverty concentration, but are rather co-structured by policies of the state and adaptive strategies of homeless people and their allies in particular urban contexts. In this concluding section, I consider these new forms of urban relegation in relation to the existing strategies of poverty exclusion and seclusion, and their implications for theories and policies of managing marginality.

First, this study has shown that exclusion and seclusion are two sides of the same coin of tactics of social control aimed at managing *populations* and the regulation of *spaces* rather than the individual (Merry 2001; O’Malley 1992). Adding to the scores of studies on exclusion and policing in prime spaces of the city, the case of homeless encampments shows how the wedding of exclusionary and seclusionary policing served the common goal of neutralizing the “homeless threat” within marginal spaces of the city. The popular fixation in both empirical research and theories of social control that increasingly emphasize new tactics of exclusion and banishment in the prime areas of the city too often ignores the seclusionary dimension embedded in every exclusionary act. So too do policymakers, whose conversion of poverty to a spatial problem has precluded place-based solutions that address the deeper roots of poverty and the new spatial dilemmas they create.

Second, encampments can only be fully accounted for in relation to their seclusionary sibling designed to manage marginality: the shelter. Scholarship and policy discussions on encampments and shelters tend to be confined to the institution under examination, although each is inextricably conditioned by the other. This paper has highlighted the ways shelters structured both the regulation and adaptation of encampments. A central demand of the protest camps was expanded and reformed shelters, although local governments took the shelter as the model for co-opted encampments. In encampments of toleration and adaptation, the residents claimed to be camping because they found the shelters’ constraints, treatments, and dangers to be de-humanizing and infantilizing. Campers complained of spending large portions of their days waiting in lines, strict curfews, an inability to stay with their significant other, demeaning treatment by staff, the inability to store their belongings, and restrictions on pets, as similarly found by other scholars (Desjarlais 1997; Dordick 1997; Gounis 1992).



Although many in the encampments expressed the sense of “territorial stigmatization” (Wacquant 2007) as documented in public housing projects, ghettos, and other sites of urban relegation, the encampments nonetheless served as socio-spatial markers of distinction to what they perceived as the more stigmatized shelter.

The most common statistic that circulates among activists and politicians who support the toleration of encampments is the mismatch between shelter capacity and homeless counts. They claim that there are simply not enough beds for all of the homeless and therefore, it is absurd to criminalize them. However, these arguments too often conveniently ignore the fact that shelters are frequently unfilled, particularly in the warmer seasons, as was the case in Fresno, Ventura, Portland, and Seattle, thus converting an issue of quality into one of pure quantity. When asked why they “chose” to camp as opposed to other alternatives, the camp residents referred to the shelter in nearly every case, but rarely ever to its inaccessibility. Instead, they referred to the material and moral benefits of the camps over the shelters. Therefore, encampments are not simply the product of inadequate shelter capacity, a form of homeless habitation that would simply disappear if more beds were made available indoors. They are rather preferred safe grounds that offer various moral and material benefits denied in the shelter.

The paradoxical function of homeless seclusion, serving as a spatial tool of containment for the local state and a preferred safe ground for homeless people, reveals the new repressive and productive logics of urban relegation at the root of contemporary homeless encampments. Although this paper has only considered the more durable and larger forms of encampments, the administrative and adaptive strategies are similarly implicated in the form and functioning of the pervasive smaller camps throughout the United States. Across U.S. cities, exclusionary techniques of banishment and seclusionary programs of shelter continue to work in consort and continually fail to solve the homeless problem, but instead merely move it around. A robust analytic concept of homeless seclusion as an organizational device for spatial enclosure and control of a stigmatized group *and* as a preferred alternative to state-funded shelters offers a way out of the semantic morass and empirical confusion created through the political, journalistic, and folk notions of the “homeless camp.” By spotlighting the nexus of administrative and adaptive logics and practices of homeless seclusion allows us not only to describe, differentiate, and explain the diverse forms of encampments, but also the means to grasp the structural and functional relations between the punitive policies of social exclusion and welfare assistance that are increasingly applied to addressing homelessness in American society.

### Acknowledgments

I thank Loïc Wacquant, Judit Bodnar, Sandra Smith, Alexandra Kowalski, Teresa Gowan, three *City & Community* reviewers, and Hilary Silver for helpful comments on earlier drafts. Research was supported generously through a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship.

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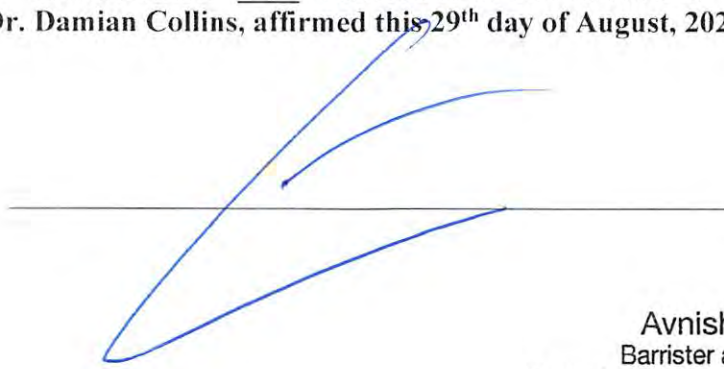
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**La Nueva Lógica de Reclusión de los Campamentos de Personas Sin Techo: Un Estudio Comparativo de Campamentos a Gran Escala de Personas Sin Techo en el Oeste de Estados Unidos.**

**Resumen**

Desde los finales de los 90, algunas ciudades norteamericanas han sido testigo por primera vez desde La Gran Depresión del resurgimiento de campamentos a gran escala de personas sin techo. Comúnmente retratados como enraizados en la recesión económica nacional y como indiferenciados funcionalmente, este artículo demuestra que estos campamentos a gran escala son formados por políticas urbanas y que cumplen roles variados e incluso contradictorios en lugares distintos. En base a entrevistas y observación en doce campamentos en ocho municipalidades, este estudio revela cuatro funciones socio-espaciales típicas de campamentos formados por estrategias administrativas de oficiales de la ciudad y estrategias adaptativas de los acampadores. Demuestro cómo campamentos a gran escala paradójicamente sirven tanto como instrumentos para contener a personas sin techo para el gobierno local y como lugares seguros para los que experimentan el no tener hogar. El artículo concluye con una discusión sobre las implicancias del auge de la reclusión de las personas sin techo para el análisis social y las políticas públicas, y se argumenta que la exclusión y reclusión son dos caras de la misma moneda de las tácticas disciplinarias de control social.

This is Exhibit “8” referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta



## Prevalence and Causes of Urban Homelessness Among Indigenous Peoples: A Three-Country Scoping Review

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To cite this article: Jalene Tayler Anderson & Damian Collins (2014) Prevalence and Causes of Urban Homelessness Among Indigenous Peoples: A Three-Country Scoping Review, *Housing Studies*, 29:7, 959-976, DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2014.923091](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2014.923091)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2014.923091>



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# Prevalence and Causes of Urban Homelessness Among Indigenous Peoples: A Three-Country Scoping Review

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(Received April 2013; accepted April 2014)

**ABSTRACT** *A scoping review was carried out to investigate the prevalence and causes of urban homelessness among Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Relevant information was sought from both academic and grey literatures. Data on prevalence were sourced from homeless count reports. Analysis reveals Indigenous peoples are consistently over-represented within urban homeless populations, often by a factor of 5 or more. Literature addressing causation is limited, with just 35 relevant studies identified. These were reviewed to build a thematic and contextual account of urban Indigenous homelessness. Eight key themes were evident, which encompass different cultural understandings of housing and mobility, as well as complex and often traumatic relationships between settler states and Indigenous peoples. Individually and collectively, these factors greatly complicate Indigenous peoples' access to safe, affordable and adequate urban housing. Broad similarities between the three case study countries suggest opportunities for further comparative research as well as policy transfer.*

**KEY WORDS:** Homelessness, housing need, migration, Indigenous peoples, scoping review

## Introduction

Over the last 10–15 years, a combination of factors has led to increased urban homelessness in many high-income countries: housing costs have risen faster than incomes, while broader economic and policy forces have often exacerbated housing need (Collins, 2010). In some contexts, these forces have produced acute levels of homelessness, with Canada experiencing a crisis of proportions unseen “since the Great Depression of the 1930s” (Laird, 2007, p. 6). Indigenous peoples can be a significant presence among burgeoning urban homeless populations (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008; Laird, 2007; Leggatt-Cook, 2007). The prevalence of homelessness among Indigenous peoples in settler societies may reflect enduring inequalities and systematic

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social and political barriers (Baskin, 2007; Habibis, 2013), but this issue has yet to receive sustained attention in the academic literature. In particular, no international comparative work has been undertaken to chart similarities and differences between countries.

Indigenous homelessness in cities may be understood as both part of a larger urban housing crisis, and as a distinct phenomenon with unique complexities “embedded within colonization, dispossession, and attachment to land, poverty, family and identity” (Parsell, 2010, p. 16). Colonization, in this context, refers to complex sets of discriminatory actions, disciplinary strategies and unequal power relations that originated with formal colonial regimes (under imperial oversight), and set in place “the governmental framework of the modern state, within which colonization proceeded” (Harris, 2004, p. 179). Colonial practices continue post-independence, including via bureaucratic and legalistic control of Indigenous peoples, governments’ naming and mapping practices, and justifications of historical as well as contemporary inequalities (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Emsley, 2010; Harris, 2004). As such, colonization is a critical part of the context for analysis of Indigenous peoples’ housing needs.

To determine what is known about the prevalence and causes of urban homelessness among Indigenous peoples, we conducted a three-country scoping review. This involved systematic searches of the academic and grey literatures from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These countries were selected on the basis of four broad similarities that enable meaningful comparison. First, each has distinct Indigenous minorities: the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada<sup>1</sup>; the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia; and the Maori of New Zealand. Second, these minorities are predominantly urbanized: the proportion of Indigenous peoples living in cities ranges from 53 per cent in Canada (Peters, 2010) to 72 per cent in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008) and 86 per cent in New Zealand (Meredith, 2009). Third, they share a legacy of British colonization, and with it the systematic alienation of land from Indigenous peoples via acts of law, trade and violence (Harris, 2004)—taken to particular lengths in Australia via application of the pernicious legal doctrine of *terra nullius* (unowned land) (Banner, 2005). Related to this history is the status of all three countries as predominantly English-speaking—although Canada and New Zealand are bilingual (recognizing French and Maori, respectively). Fourth, common experiences of displacement and the associated collapse of traditional methods of productive capacity have left Indigenous peoples in these countries relatively disempowered, and more likely to experience deprivation than members of other ethnic groups (Emsley, 2010).

## Methods

This article reports on a scoping review—a methodology that seeks to “map” fields of interest in which studies employ a variety of designs, and in which the quality of those studies is not a primary concern (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). Scoping reviews entail broad-based inquiry, accommodate grey literature, produce contextual accounts of the current state of knowledge and can support policy recommendations (Levac *et al.*, 2010). In addition, they are appropriate for investigations in areas where the range of available material is initially uncertain, as was the case with this study.

This research was guided by the five-part framework for scoping reviews set out by Arksey & O’Malley (2005). First, we developed two inter-linked scoping questions: (1) *To what extent are Indigenous peoples currently over-represented among the urban homeless*



*in Canada, Australia and New Zealand?* (2) *What is known about the causes of urban homelessness for Indigenous peoples in these three countries?* These enabled us to examine both descriptive and analytical accounts of Indigenous urban homelessness, while limiting the search to urban centres in the three countries.

The second step was to identify the relevant literature. We began by searching for reports of urban homeless counts conducted in Canada, Australia and New Zealand between January 2005 and March 2012. These are exclusively grey literature, authored by councils or non-governmental agencies and published online. Using the Google search engine, we identified reports for 18 Canadian cities, 2 Australian cities (as well as a nationwide survey) and 1 New Zealand city. Where multiple counts for a city had been conducted since 2005, only the two most recent were retrieved, given our concern to analyse current data.

A search of academic databases was then undertaken. This was organized by country, and combined the keywords “homeless\*” and “city OR urban” with the specific terms for each country’s Indigenous peoples noted above, as well as more general terms (“indigenous” OR “aborigin\*”). A broader timeframe (January 2000–March 2012) was adopted for this search, as the concern of the second scoping question was to reflect on causes of homelessness, rather than contemporary data. Initially, we searched Scopus, Web of Science and Academic Search Complete, but these returned very few relevant references. Therefore, we repeated the search procedure in Google Scholar. Scanning the first 100 results associated with searches for each country (i.e. 300 total), we found 44 studies that were potentially suitable for inclusion. For each of these 44, we then utilized the “related articles” functionality, and again searched the first 100 findings. This yielded another 17 unique articles. Finally, we entered the search terms into the general Google search engine, and through the same approach we found an additional 52 studies.

In the third step, we read both the homeless count reports and the articles to determine which merited inclusion in the review. The only criterion for retaining homeless counts was that they included ethnicity data for the homeless people enumerated, with one or more categories for Indigenous peoples. No such information was reported in counts from five Canadian cities, and these were excluded. For the research articles, exclusion criteria were developed iteratively; studies were omitted if they did not focus on at least one of the three research countries, were strongly biomedical in nature, did not address urban contexts or did not directly consider Indigenous homelessness. [Table 1](#) provides a descriptive overview of the articles retained for analysis.

Fourth, we charted the data. With respect to scoping question 1, this involved extracting relevant numerical findings from the homeless count reports, and calculating the proportion of homeless people in each classified as Indigenous. We then compared this proportion with the overall prevalence of Indigenous people in the corresponding urban

**Table 1.** Overview of articles from the academic and grey literatures included for analysis

Country focus	Academic sources	Grey sources	Totals
Canada	11	5	16
Australia	4	6	10
New Zealand	4	1	5
Two or more of the above	3	1	4
Totals	22	13	35

populations in 2006, as specified in official sources (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2010; Statistics New Zealand, 2009). With respect to scoping question 2, our analysis centred on identifying explanations for Indigenous homelessness in studies from across the entire data-set. This involved searching for empirical and conceptual accounts of how and why Indigenous peoples experience urban homelessness.

Fifth, we collated findings for presentation in this article. Information relevant to the first scoping question is organized by country—so as to provide a detailed account for each. Explanations relevant to the second scoping question were organized thematically. Specifically, we identify eight explanations for urban Indigenous homelessness that were most prevalent in the research.

## **Results**

### *Prevalence of Indigenous Urban Homelessness*

As noted above, homeless count reports frequently include information relating to the ethnicity of enumerated persons, and as such provide a basis for calculating the prevalence of Indigenous homelessness. Point-in-time counts are the most common method of quantifying homelessness in cities. This method provides a “snapshot” of the homeless population of a city, based on searches within designated public spaces and facilities over a specific period of time (typically one day or part thereof). Although widely used, this approach has inherent limitations. In particular, it is unlikely to enumerate homeless people who remain relatively “hidden” in private spaces, such as those staying temporarily with friends or relatives (Collins, 2010).

Homeless counts are further complicated by variable definitions of homelessness. Agencies undertaking homeless counts (e.g. councils and NGOs) are free to adopt their own working definitions, and determine to what extent they wish to count beyond “those who literally lack shelter” (Collins, 2010, p. 935). Accordingly, we did not adopt a definition of homelessness for the purposes of this review, but took note of how each count defined the term.

### *Prevalence in Canada*

Since 2005, homeless counts have been conducted in many large and mid-sized Canadian cities. However, the types of data collected vary greatly between cities and—as noted above—not all counts in Canada report on ethnicity. Those that did, and were therefore included in this study, were from 13 urban areas: Vancouver, Victoria, Prince George, Nanaimo and the Upper Fraser Valley (British Columbia); Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge and Edmonton (Alberta); Saskatoon (Saskatchewan); Toronto (Ontario); Halifax (Nova Scotia); and Whitehorse (Yukon). In the cases of Vancouver and Victoria, counts were found for both the named cities, and the larger urban regions of which they are part.

The homeless count reports considered here classified Indigenous peoples as either a single ethnic category (10 cities), as Indian, Inuit or Métis (two cities), or as members of more specific groupings (e.g. Cree, Ojibwa) (one city). In recording ethnicity, the majority of homeless counts relied upon participant self-identification, consistent with understandings of ethnic identity as a quality that is self-perceived and connected to personal

**Table 2.** Dimensions of homelessness emphasized in Canadian cities' homeless counts

	No secure personal residence	Living in the street and/or in shelters	Housing stress/at risk	Temporary stay with others	Living on the street only	No stated definition
Vancouver	X					
Victoria	X					
Prince George		X	X			
Nanaimo						X
Fraser Valley	X					
Calgary	X					
Edmonton		X				
Lethbridge		X		X		
Red Deer		X		X		
Saskatoon					X	
Toronto	X	X				
Halifax		X		X		
Whitehorse			X			

cultural affiliation (Aspinall, 2001). However, in Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge, the ethnicity of homeless individuals was “determined” based on the observations made by volunteers undertaking the count. Very little description (or justification) of this approach was provided, and there was no indication that procedures were in place to facilitate consistency between observers.

Definitions of homelessness for the purposes of counting varied widely. Reports for 12 of 13 cities included definitions, and each was distinct (even with minor variations in expression disregarded). Nevertheless, two key ideas recurred, as highlighted in Table 2: the notion that homelessness is characterized by the lack of a personal residence with secure tenure, and the understanding that it involves living on the streets and/or in homeless shelters. In three cities, there was also explicit recognition that people who are residing temporarily with friends/family may be homeless. By contrast, a particularly narrow definition was adopted in Saskatoon, where the count focused solely on rough sleepers.

Results for Canadian cities are shown in Table 3. It is notable that over-representation was found in every count across all 13 cities, and in all but three instances Indigenous peoples were at least *five times* more prevalent in the homeless population than in the general population. Particularly remarkable are the findings for Toronto, where counts in both 2006 and 2009 identified over 5000 homeless people. Of these, 15–16 per cent were identified as Indigenous—in a city where Aboriginal peoples make up just 0.5 per cent of the total population. This suggests a rate of over-representation above 30. Very high rates of over-representation were also found in two other centres where Indigenous peoples constitute very small minorities (<2 per cent) of the total populations: Halifax and Vancouver.

### *Prevalence in Australia*

Homeless counts were found for two Australian centres: Melbourne (Victoria) and Adelaide (South Australia). In Melbourne, these were conducted in 2009 and 2010, and

**Table 3.** Canadian homeless count data and estimates of over-representation for Indigenous peoples

City	Year	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
		Homeless individuals—total counted	Homeless individuals—ethnicity recorded	Homeless individuals—Indigenous ethnicity	Indigenous as per cent of homeless population (C/B)	Indigenous as per cent of total population	Indigenous over-representation among homeless (D/E)
Vancouver (City)	2010	1715	310	93	30	1.9	15.8
Vancouver (Region)	2011	2650	1468	394	26.8	1.9	14.1
Victoria (Gty)	2005	700	163	70	42.9	3.8	11.3
Victoria (Region)	2007	1242	798	203	25.4	3.4	7.5
Prince George	2010	361	360	238	66.1	11.4	5.8
Nanaimo	2007	173	140	49	35	5.2	6.7
	2008	115	97	35	36.1	5.2	6.9
Fraser Valley	2008	465	296	95	32.1	5.7	5.6
	2011	345	188	53	28.2	5.7	4.9
Calgary	2006	3436	3239	593	18.3	2.5	7.3
	2008	4060	3081	527	17.1	2.5	6.8
Edmonton	2008	3079	2834	1156	40.8	5.3	7.7
	2010	2421	2275	863	37.9	5.3	7.2
Lethbridge	2005	92	87	47	54	4.7	11.5
Red Deer	2006	99	97	33	34	4.4	7.7
	(1)						
	2006	106	106	27	25.5	4.4	5.8
	(2)						
Saskatoon	2008	260	54	26	48.1	9.9	4.9
Toronto	2006	5052	1927	312	16.2	0.5	32.4
	2009	5086	2026	283	15.4	0.5	30.8
Halifax	2009	158	158	19	12	1.4	8.6
	2011	127	127	19	15	1.4	10.7
Whitehorse	2010	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18.7	3.9

considered only those without shelter. Relatively few homeless people (75–101) were identified, in the context of a city with a population over 4 million. In Adelaide, counts were conducted in 2010 and 2011, and also centred on the unsheltered homeless. Indigenous peoples constitute a small percentage of the total populations in both cities: 0.4 per cent in Melbourne and 1.2 per cent in Adelaide.

Beyond exclusively urban contexts, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) identified 104 676 people across Australia experiencing a degree of homelessness (from rough sleeping through to inadequate accommodation with insecure tenure). This included 9248 who identified as Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders—equating to 8.9 per cent of the total homeless population. Although analysis of these data did not distinguish between those in cities and those in rural areas, it merits inclusion here (see Table 4) on account of its comprehensive character, and attention to ethnicity.

**Table 4.** Australian homeless count data and estimates of over-representation for Indigenous peoples

City (or state/territory)	Year	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
		Homeless individuals—total counted	Homeless individuals—ethnicity recorded	Homeless individuals—Indigenous ethnicity	Indigenous as per cent of homeless population (C/B)	Indigenous as per cent of total population	Indigenous over-representation among homeless (D/E)
Melbourne	2009	75	30	3	10	0.4	25
	2010	101	50	6	12	0.4	30
Adelaide	2010	73	69	11	15.9	1.2	13.3
	2011	51	51	10	19.6	1.2	16.3
ABS National Count							
NSW	2006	27 374	27 196	1961	7.2	2.2	3.3
VIC		20 511	20 511	777	3.8	0.6	6.3
QLD		26 782	26 677	2148	8.1	3.6	2.3
WA		13 391	13 333	1496	11.2	3.8	2.9
SA		7962	7854	858	10.9	1.7	6.4
TAS		2507	2488	207	8.3	3.4	2.4
ACT		1364	1351	149	11	1.2	9.2
NT		4785	4781	1652	34.6	31.6	1.1
Australia		104 676	104 188	9248	8.9	2.5	3.6
Total (urban and rural)							

*Prevalence in New Zealand*

Urban homelessness has begun to gain recognition as an issue in New Zealand (Laurenson & Collins, 2006; Leggatt-Cook, 2007). However, homeless counts have only been conducted in one city—Auckland—with ethnicity data reported only for the unsheltered homeless. The 2008 count found 91 homeless, and 43 of the 76 for whom ethnicity was recorded were Maori. The 2009 count identified 76 homeless, and 41 of the 64 for whom ethnicity was recorded were Maori. It is unclear from these reports how ethnicity was determined. These numbers suggest a fivefold rate of over-representation, as indicated in Table 5.

*Summary*

Homeless counts are an under-utilized source of secondary data in urban homelessness research. This is likely due to a lack of standardization in definitions, methods and reporting styles. The flexible nature of homeless counts enables communities to adopt procedures as they see fit, but also renders direct comparison between centres problematic. It follows that findings such as those presented in Tables 3–5 must be interpreted tentatively. Nevertheless, the homeless counts considered here represent the best available information on the prevalence of urban homelessness across the three review countries, and paint an unambiguous picture of over-representation for Indigenous peoples. Critically, they enable us to establish that for Canada, Australia and New Zealand,

**Table 5.** Auckland (New Zealand) homeless count data and estimates of over-representation for Indigenous people

City	Year	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)
		Homeless individuals—total counted	Homeless individuals—ethnicity recorded	Homeless individuals—Indigenous ethnicity	Indigenous as per cent of homeless population (C/B)	Indigenous as per cent of total population	Indigenous over-representation among homeless (D/E)
Auckland	2008	91	76	43	56.6	11.1	5.1
	2009	76	64	41	64.1	11.1	5.8

Indigenous peoples are at greater risk of homelessness than the general population in *all cities for which recent data exist*. In extreme cases (Toronto, Melbourne), Indigenous peoples are up to 30 times over-represented among the urban homeless.

### Causes of Urban Homelessness for Indigenous Populations

The volume of literature addressing the causes of urban homelessness for Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia and New Zealand is modest. As noted above, a comprehensive search for relevant work published over a 12-year period yielded just 35 relevant studies. An overarching observation in this body of work links Indigenous homelessness to general social indicators such as education, employment and health status. Broadly put, Indigenous peoples in all three case study countries experience worse average outcomes in these areas than non-Indigenous groups. This, in turn, makes them more likely to experience poverty, marginalization and difficulties in accessing support services—thereby increasing their vulnerability to homelessness.

By way of example, relatively low rates of educational attainment are widely recognized as contributing to homelessness among Indigenous peoples (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Johnson, 2009; Leach, 2010; Memmott & Chambers, 2007; Peters & Robillard, 2009; Weasel Head, 2011). This not only reduces employment opportunities, but is also linked to poor literacy and numeracy skills, which impede securing housing. Similarly, there is broad recognition that, overall, Indigenous peoples have more complex physical and mental health needs than many other groups. Health challenges both reflect and contribute to insecure and inadequate housing (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Johnson, 2009; Memmott & Chambers, 2007; Social Data Research, 2005).

However, low levels of education, insecure employment and poor health are general risk factors for homelessness, and not particular to Indigenous populations. In addition, focusing on these indicators does not address critical questions, such as *why* Indigenous peoples are consistently disadvantaged, and *how* this disadvantage might be linked to unique or distinctive Indigenous experiences. In the following section, we address these questions by highlighting eight key explanations for Indigenous urban homelessness that are grounded in the cultural, political and geographical factors that characterize “being Indigenous” (Alfred & Cornthassel, 2005), including shared “structural and systematic legacies of settler-colonialism” (Habibis, 2013, p. 767). In so doing, we do not seek to downplay general social indicators, but rather to contextualize them.

*Disjuncture Between Indigenous and Settler Cultures*

Several cultural factors are identified as unique and important contributors to Indigenous homelessness. Foremost among these are distinct Indigenous conceptions of what it means to have stable and secure housing, and their disjuncture from the dominant models within settler societies. Specifically, it is emphasized that extended family structures are central to Indigenous cultures. This contributes to a tendency for relatives to share dwellings for varying periods of time (Groot *et al.*, 2011; Memmott *et al.*, 2005). Such sharing is a cultural norm, and not considered a state of insecure housing. In the Australian context, Habibis (2011, p. 404) explains that unplanned visits of indeterminate duration “take place in a context of detachment from the formal economy and embeddedness in reciprocal kinship networks that normalise the unannounced arrival of a guest.” In Canada, Aboriginal urban youth have said that cycling between the homes of relatives is a normal activity, and a way of life distinct from homelessness (Ruttan *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, service providers in New Zealand note the Maori concept of *whanau* (kinship group) means that “bouncing from family to family, or from area to area, is not necessarily a pathologised thing” (Johnson, 2009, p. 58).

Extended family can share urban housing for short periods of time, as when accommodation in cities is required for reasons such as bereavements or seasonal employment. This willingness to accept visitors, sometimes in large numbers, is simultaneously a useful hedge against rough sleeping among Indigenous peoples, and a source of strain in maintaining housing (Birdsall-Jones *et al.*, 2010). Sharing accommodation can also be longer term, as when individuals migrate to an urban area to seek permanent work (Groot *et al.*, 2011), and when family members pool financial resources to secure shelter collectively (SIIT, 2000). However, loss of housing is a common outcome of such living scenarios. First, eviction from rental housing often results due to difficulties in managing tenancies (Cooper *et al.*, 2005) and controlling guests (Memmott *et al.*, 2005), and lease conditions that prohibit sharing housing for any length of time (Birdsall-Jones *et al.*, 2010). Second, there are problems related to household overcrowding, which can over-burden domestic services (Memmott & Chambers, 2007) and create conflicts within the household (Bukowski & Buetow, 2011), as well as between neighbours (Habibis, 2011). A structural factor commonly underpinning such issues is the “mismatch” between urban housing and the cultural needs of Indigenous families (Johnson, 2009; Maes, 2011). For example, houses are seldom designed in flexible ways that accommodate high levels of mobility and shifting number of residents (Cooper *et al.*, 2005).

A tendency for some Indigenous peoples to feel like “outsiders” in urban areas is also noted in the literature, even in cities located within their traditional territories (Weasel Head, 2011). This can be related to a sense of isolation: urban housing tends to be more private and self-contained than traditional living arrangements, and Indigenous urban residents may also experience cultural isolation related to minority status and distance from support services (Cooper *et al.*, 2005). These factors can perpetuate marginalization and disadvantage (Memmott *et al.*, 2005).

**Mobility**

An important factor contributing to Indigenous homelessness is a high degree of mobility (Habibis, 2011), often characterized by repeated movements between cities and rural

“homelands” (Letkemann, 2004). Reasons for movement from rural reserve lands to cities are especially well documented in Canada: it is commonly undertaken for reasons relating to socio-economic conditions on reserve (e.g. limited economic opportunities and poor housing conditions), changing family and relationship contexts, as well as institutionalization, incarceration or school attendance in an urban area (Letkemann, 2004; Peters & Robillard, 2009; Weasel Head, 2011). Seasonal shifts in living conditions and employment opportunities also contribute (Distatio *et al.*, 2005).

A similar context exists for those in rural Aboriginal settlements in Australia, with violent or difficult relationships, family conflict, poor housing and infrastructure, extreme weather and limited economic opportunities identified as push factors (Fisher, 2012). Recent policy interventions in many of those settlements, which have heightened social control—including via prohibitions on alcohol, also encourage out-migration (Habibis, 2011; Parsell, 2010). At the same time, access to healthcare, education and employment commonly draws Indigenous Australians to urban centres. Less detail is available in the New Zealand context, most likely because the Maori population is already overwhelmingly urbanized (Meredith, 2009). This said, Groot *et al.* (2011) record that many urban Maori retain connections to tribal homelands, with some moving between the two locales over the course of their lives. As in Canada and Australia, this movement reflects ethics of relatedness and care, and a sense of home that is not limited to sedentary occupation of one place.

Critically, in Canada and Australia, Indigenous peoples leaving rural homelands for cities do not necessarily escape poor living conditions. Rather, those making this move commonly encounter difficulties in accessing safe, affordable and adequate housing in urban centres (Peters & Robillard, 2009; SIIT, 2000). Habibis (2011) suggests that some Indigenous migrants to cities can initially experience living without shelter as a “choice”. However, their alternatives are often so limited—due to factors such as a lack of housing options and limited tenancy skills—that such practices are appropriately conceptualized as involuntary.

The struggles often associated with urban living contribute to cyclical mobility patterns for Indigenous peoples. Specifically, their mobility is not limited to a “continuous and inevitable out-migration” from rural areas to cities (Peters & Robillard, 2009, p. 668), but often has a circular quality, with return migration to rural homelands prompted by enduring social obligations. A prominent example is the need to return to rural communities following a bereavement (Roberts & Burgess, 2004), which can lead to prolonged absences from the city and a subsequent loss of urban housing (Ruttan *et al.*, 2010). In Canada, Letkemann (2004) found Indigenous individuals identifying with a semi-nomadic lifestyle and valuing the ability to subsist and strategically relocate. Cooper & Morris (2005), in a study of Indigenous families’ tenancies in Australia, report that many women and children had itinerant lifestyles, characterized by few possessions and more-or-less continuous mobility between urban areas and rural Aboriginal communities. Such studies suggest that some Indigenous people both prefer and choose a highly mobile lifestyle. However, urban housing is intended primarily for sedentary populations, and opportunities for affordable temporary and short-term accommodation in cities are very limited, which compounds the risk of homelessness (Distatio *et al.*, 2005; Habibis, 2011).



### *Accessing and Maintaining Housing*

Difficulties in securing urban housing are emphasized throughout the literature for Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In the first instance, accounts of these difficulties emphasize general social factors, and specifically low-income. By virtue of the Indigenous populations of all three countries being disproportionately poor and under-employed (Leach, 2010), they are less able to purchase housing in cities than other ethnic groups (Walsh *et al.*, 2011), leaving them reliant on the rental sector. Here, however, they are often vulnerable to high rental costs (Bukowski & Buetow, 2011; Maes, 2011) and low availability of suitable stock (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Distatio *et al.*, 2005; Richards, 2009). Further to this is the common problem of lengthy waiting lists for subsidized, affordable housing (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Cooper & Morris, 2005).

Beyond these general financial barriers to housing is a set of factors grounded in more culturally specific experiences. These include discrimination by landlords, as well as conflicts between the standardized, impersonal (“bureaucratic”) expectations of public housing providers and the cultural needs of Indigenous households, particularly in terms of obligations to extended family. Such conflicts can result in evictions—often in response to perceived over-crowding, “particularly where a drinking and/or a substance abuse lifestyle is present” (Birdsall-Jones *et al.*, 2010, p. 3)—as well as to high levels of rent arrears and property abandonment (Habibis, 2011). In addition, several studies report a reluctance among some Indigenous households to engage with public support services. In Australia, Cooper & Morris (2005) find that Indigenous women often lack the confidence, knowledge and literacy skills necessary to speak with housing providers. In Canada, Weasel Head (2011) highlights a lack of trust towards government agencies among Indigenous peoples, as a result of trauma and suffering due to assimilation policies and other acts of colonization.

### *Discrimination*

Racial discrimination is recognized as a major contributor to homelessness for Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia, although it goes unmentioned in the small number of New Zealand studies. The literature records that Indigenous individuals commonly report discrimination by private landlords, as well as by public sector housing providers. The results of such discrimination include increased wait times for housing, as well as high rates of application rejection and eviction.

In Australia, Cooper & Morris (2005) note that Indigenous women frequently encounter discrimination when trying to access housing, particularly but not exclusively in the private rental market. Cooper *et al.* (2005) report a similar situation extending to Indigenous men. In Canada, Walsh *et al.* (2011) found that private landlords in one urban centre often assumed Indigenous women had addictions, and were therefore reluctant to rent to them. In another Canadian city, Indigenous individuals stated that landlords only rent to them as a last resort (Weasel Head, 2011). Even *within* organizations that exist to support the needs of vulnerable Indigenous populations, instances of discrimination may occur (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Distatio *et al.*, 2005).

One Australian study found evidence of neighbourhood-level discrimination, including some residents laying complaints against Indigenous households in an attempt to have them move or evicted (Cooper *et al.*, 2005). More extreme examples, including racist

graffiti and violence, were noted for Indigenous people living in public housing placed in predominantly white neighbourhoods.

### *Colonialism and Indigenous Relationships with the State*

The lasting and diverse effects of colonialism on Indigenous populations are emphasized in discussions of homelessness in all three countries. These highlight harmful colonial actions and practices, including historical warfare, displacement and alienation of lands, as well as more contemporary social policies aimed (directly or otherwise) at assimilation and control (Johnson, 2009; Leach, 2010; Ruttan *et al.*, 2008). Outcomes relevant to homelessness include disempowerment, cultural erosion, social deprivation, loss of social and psychological well-being, and diminished political power and collective rights.

Loss of Indigenous lands is highlighted across the literature. In New Zealand, Johnson (2009) links this to a loss of voice and dignity among Maori, and to sustained socio-economic inequality. In Australia, Memmott & Chambers (2010) argue that the taking of land and waterholes, combined with a series of legislative measures that restricted freedom of movement up to the 1970s, left many Indigenous peoples disconnected from their families and traditional territories. In Canada, colonial processes centred on the *Indian Act 1867* (as subsequently amended) and various treaties pushed Indigenous groups onto reserves, and severely limited their access to other lands and resources (Leach, 2010).

The dehumanizing effects of colonial policies and practices continue to affect many Indigenous peoples. The foremost example in the literature is Canada's residential school system. Leach (2010, p. 12) characterizes it as "one of the most disempowering acts of colonization," as it removed as many as five generations of Aboriginal children from homeland and family, and subjected many to abuse. In numerous studies in Canadian cities, a family history of residential school attendance is identified as a major reason for contemporary homelessness. In Ruttan *et al.*'s (2008) study of homeless young women, nearly all respondents cited their grandparents' attendance at residential school as a factor contributing to instances of family violence and substance abuse that eventually led to homelessness. Sider (2005) also notes a very high proportion of homeless Indigenous people with familial experience of residential schools, drawing the conclusion that attendance is a contributing factor to homelessness, even when it directly affected only prior generations. Its multigenerational effects include cultural loss and physical displacement (Wente, 2000), as well as alienation from formal education systems (Leach, 2010).

In Australia, the "stolen generations"—children removed from Indigenous families and committed to colonial institutions—receive some attention in the homelessness literature. Discussing this issue, Cooper *et al.* (2005, p. 259) highlight the "distress—grief, anger, frustration, and depression—[that] persists through generations, creating a deep distrust and avoidance of services." Other studies (Cooper & Morris, 2005; Roberts & Burgess, 2004) observe that the experience of the stolen generations reduced many Indigenous peoples' ability to sustain tenancies, via effects such as mental ill-health, drug and alcohol dependence, and a lack of parenting and life skills. New Zealand did not experience an analogous process, and this is reflected in the literature. Nevertheless, Johnson (2009) highlights concerns about colonialism, noting that homeless Maori often understand themselves as victims of the state, and are distrustful of its institutions. Specifically, they link their current situation to experiences such as removal from childhood family homes by social services, followed by inappropriate placements, abuse and marginalization.

Negative interactions with state institutions are also highlighted by the over-representation of Indigenous peoples among the incarcerated populations in the three countries (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Ellis, 2010; Walsh *et al.*, 2011). Imprisonment is itself a risk factor for homelessness, in that release is generally accompanied by economic hardship, often made more problematic by severed social ties and cultural connections. Imprisonment can also diminish life skills, while a prison record reduces opportunities for employment.

### *Drug and Alcohol Addiction*

Addiction is a well-recognized pathway into homelessness (Richards, 2009). This connection exists for a variety of reasons. For example, addiction is a known risk factor for inability to maintain tenancies (Cooper *et al.*, 2005). In addition, it is often associated with problematic behaviours that limit access to the houses of friends and family (Birdsall-Jones *et al.*, 2010), thereby increasing the likelihood of street homelessness (Memcott & Chambers, 2007). It also frequently co-occurs with mental illness (Bukowski & Buetow, 2011; Memcott *et al.*, 2005).

The prevalence of addiction among Indigenous urban homeless populations is acknowledged in all three countries. Many studies considered here report that a substantial majority of homeless participants (in some cases, 100 per cent) were addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, although they do not explicitly compare such findings with rates for other groups of homeless people. They do however emphasize the unique historical, cultural and social circumstances that can exacerbate drug and alcohol use among Indigenous peoples. Specifically, addiction is commonly conceptualized as a means for “coping with”—or at least “numbing the pain of”—trauma, abuse, grief and stress (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Groot *et al.*, 2011; Maes, 2011; Sider, 2005).

Weasel Head (2011, p. 116) links addiction within a Canadian Indigenous community to “long-term suffering and profound losses experienced in their formative years and throughout their lives.” This implicates the residential schools system, the outcomes of which have been passed down inter-generationally, contributing to ongoing abuse, victimization and addiction (Ruttan *et al.*, 2008). In such contexts, disentangling the contributions of “historical factors”, “childhood experiences” and “contemporary circumstances” to addiction becomes fraught with difficulty—and perhaps inappropriate given the level of interconnection. Drug and alcohol use is also linked with the high levels of mobility noted above, particularly as a mechanism for coping with moving to an unfamiliar city (Cooper *et al.*, 2005). In Australia and New Zealand, it often has an important social function related to survival and solidarity within groups of urban Indigenous street people (Johnson, 2009; Memcott *et al.*, 2005).

### *Violence and Abuse*

Instances of violence and abuse—particularly against women and children/youth—are repeatedly identified as reasons for Indigenous homelessness in all three study countries. In an Australian study, a majority of homeless women attributed their circumstances to domestic violence or sexual abuse by a family member (Memcott *et al.*, 2005). Cooper *et al.* (2005) offer a similar finding, and highlight further negative outcomes: women may be held responsible for rent or property damage even if they are forced to flee due to

violence, leading to debt and problems in accessing new housing. Furthermore, re-housing after a violent event is not generally a fast process, and may involve periods of insecure shelter (Cooper *et al.*, 2005).

Violence and abuse during childhood and youth are also recognized as a cause of homelessness. First, escaping abuse in a home environment may lead directly to insecure housing or living on the streets. For example, Groot *et al.* (2011) profile a Maori woman who escaped her childhood home after repeated episodes of abuse, remaining homeless for many years to follow. Similar accounts are highlighted throughout the literature (Birdsall-Jones *et al.*, 2010; Cooper & Morris, 2005; Weasel Head, 2011). Second, childhood physical and sexual abuse has long-term emotional and psychological effects. Indigenous informants in a Canadian study identified such abuse as a factor contributing to drinking binges and subsequent homelessness (Sider, 2005), while in Johnson's (2009) New Zealand work, abuse by parents in early childhood was linked to the onset of mental illness.

### *Child Welfare System*

The removal of Indigenous children from their homes and families by government agencies is discussed in the literature for all three countries in terms of negative consequences for children and their parents, which can contribute to homelessness for either or both. In a study of homeless Aboriginal youth in a Canadian city, Baskin (2007) notes a recurring theme of profoundly negative experiences growing up in adoptive homes, foster homes, group homes and other similar contexts. In New Zealand, Johnson (2009) identifies a common history among homeless Maori of removal from abusive homes by social services, followed by inappropriate or neglectful placements in state care. Such adverse experiences often lead directly to street life at a relatively young age, and contribute to maladaptive coping strategies (e.g. alcohol dependence), which pose long-term barriers to securing housing. Memmott *et al.* (2005) report similar outcomes among homeless Aboriginals in Sydney, Australia.

In Canada, a considerable number of children were forcibly removed from their homes in the 1960s and placed with non-Aboriginal families, which led to isolation from culture and extended family (Ruttan *et al.*, 2008). This policy has been linked to a host of problems, including homelessness, for this now adult generation of Aboriginal individuals, due in particular to the ways in which it worked to destabilize identity and contributed to painful experiences (Ruttan *et al.*, 2010). There are parallels here with the residential schools system and stolen generations discussed above, both of which had assimilation as an overt goal. Moreover, as those examples illustrate, disruption of family structure and the removal of children can have multi-generational consequences.

Parents of children forcibly removed from their homes also experience negative outcomes. Sider (2005) draws attention to those who turn to alcohol or drugs over an inability to cope with losing care of children, which increases their vulnerability to homelessness. Similarly, an Australian study identified homeless parents who linked loss of housing to the removal of their children by government officials (Roberts & Burgess, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

The intent of this scoping review was to provide an overview of the extent to which Indigenous peoples are over-represented among the urban homeless in Canada, Australia

and New Zealand, and then to synthesize what is known about the reasons for their homelessness. Answering the first question depended upon homeless count data. Our review found that counts employ variable definitions of homelessness (complicating inter-city comparisons), and may adopt methods of determining ethnicity that are ethically as well as practically problematic. Nevertheless, these efforts at enumeration provide a basis for “quantifying the problem”—something often highly valued in housing and social policy (Cloke *et al.*, 2001).

Cities for which suitable homeless count data were available varied in size from globalized metropolitan agglomerations such as Toronto, Melbourne and Auckland, to small Canadian centres with populations under 100 000. Across these diverse contexts, over-representation was found in *every case*; in many instances, the prevalence of Indigenous peoples among the homeless was at least five times higher than their prevalence in the corresponding urban populations. Over-representation has previously been established at the national and state/territory scales for Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011), but not for Canada or New Zealand, where no equivalent data exist. In identifying and analysing homeless counts in cities, this study highlights the importance of acknowledging, and addressing, Indigenous experiences in formulating policy responses to urban homelessness.

Given that over-representation can be estimated from publicly available sources—albeit for a small number of centres in Australia and New Zealand—the relative paucity of academic and grey literature commenting on causation is surprising. In identifying and discussing eight key themes from that literature, we sought to piece together an explanatory framework for Indigenous urban homelessness. This framework looks beyond social indicators, which are indicative of general disadvantage in the housing market, to highlight factors grounded in Indigeneity. It reveals *systematic* difficulties for Indigenous peoples seeking secure, affordable and appropriate accommodation in urban centres that transcend national borders.

Explanations for these difficulties are often grounded in complex intersections of historical and contemporary factors. Broadly put, historical colonialism (including egregious acts of dispossession and assimilation) is implicated in these difficulties via inter-generational trauma. In addition, the ability to access and maintain urban housing is further compromised by the contemporary experiences of individuals and households, and enduring disconnects between Indigenous and settler cultures. With respect to housing in particular, Indigenous cultures are shaped by concepts of kinship and mobility that differ from the norms within settler societies; this problematizes policy responses that are “predicated on the needs of a sedentary population, rather than those generated by the more fluid relationships to place that characterize Indigenous lifeworlds” (Habibis 2011, p. 402).

In highlighting important similarities between the three case study countries, there is the risk of being insufficiently attentive to uniqueness and nuance. Certainly stark differences exist in the level of attention the issue of Indigenous homelessness has received across the three countries. At one end of the spectrum, relatively detailed information is available for Australia, encompassing a national count (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011), as well as especially rich examples of grey literature (Memmott *et al.*, 2005) and academic work (Habibis, 2011). At the other end, information for New Zealand is sparse, likely due in part to an unwillingness to recognize homelessness as a problem in that country (Laurenson & Collins, 2006; Richards, 2009). In terms of the several themes for

which little New Zealand information is available, this may reflect genuine contextual differences—or simply a lack of consideration.

Our account of urban Indigenous homelessness necessarily reflects the strengths and limitations of the existing literature. In analysing this work, we have sought to provide a new framework for international, comparative investigation of the diverse causes and experiences of urban homelessness. Attentiveness to Indigenous experiences reveals important similarities between Canada, Australia and New Zealand that could open doors to policy transfer. When cities and other jurisdictions work independently to develop policies to address urban homelessness, they may overlook the housing-related experiences and needs of Indigenous peoples altogether, or at best make vague commitments to providing culturally appropriate services. With greater communication between policy-makers, notions of international best practice could develop—in terms of both conceptualizing Indigenous urban homeless and developing appropriate mechanisms to address it. Critically, to move away from colonial legacies of control (Habibis, 2013), these responses must involve Indigenous institutions, knowledge and leadership in local communities.

## Acknowledgement

The authors thank Sean Robertson for his feedback on an early draft.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> The *Constitution Act* of 1982 recognizes the Indian, Métis and Inuit as the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. However, outside of this context, the term “First Nation(s)” is preferred to the colonial term “Indian”.

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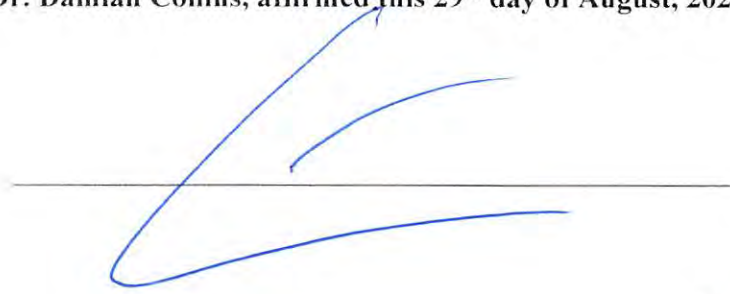
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This is Exhibit “9” referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

# THE CASE AGAINST CRIMINALIZING HOMELESSNESS: FUNCTIONAL BARRIERS TO SHELTERS AND HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS’ LACK OF CHOICE

JOY H. KIM\*

*In 2018, the Ninth Circuit ruled in Martin v. City of Boise that the city’s ordinance criminalizing individuals for sleeping or camping outdoors in public space—an increasingly popular method for cities to regulate the homeless—is unconstitutional under the Eighth Amendment’s Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause. Martin was not the first case in which a court struck down an anti-homeless ordinance under the Eighth Amendment. However, it was the first to deem it unconstitutional for a city to punish a homeless person for sleeping outside when shelters are not “practically available,” even if they technically have available beds. The court in Martin said the shelters at issue were not practically available because they were religiously coercive. This Note argues, however, that courts reviewing criminalization measures should consider whether shelters are practically available to homeless individuals for reasons beyond religious coercion. Many functional barriers to shelter deprive homeless individuals of a meaningful choice, and the Eighth Amendment prevents governments from punishing individuals for matters beyond their control. Courts should make individualized inquiries when considering the constitutionality of criminalization measures to assess whether individuals experiencing homelessness truly have a meaningful “choice” in sleeping outside. However, the constitutional infirmities behind criminalization measures, the highly factual inquiries required of courts to determine their constitutionality, and their exacerbation of homelessness underscore the need for cities to stop criminalizing homelessness.*

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\* Copyright © 2020 by Joy H. Kim, J.D., 2020, New York University School of Law. I am deeply grateful to Professor Kenji Yoshino for guiding and encouraging me far beyond what I expected of an advisor. Many thanks to the attorneys at the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty for their tireless advocacy and for shaping me as an advocate. Thank you to the editors of the *New York University Law Review*, especially my primary editor Diana Y. Rosen. Thank you to Eric Wang, Maia Cole, Linnea Pittman, Tim Duncheon, Joy Chen, and Samantha Morris for your feedback and friendship. And thank you to my ever-supportive parents, Young-Joo and Joseph.

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INTRODUCTION

On a single night in January 2019, 567,715 people were experiencing homelessness<sup>1</sup> in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Of these individuals, sixty-five percent were sheltered and thirty-five percent were unsheltered.<sup>3</sup> These figures are likely a drastic undercount,<sup>4</sup> but even so, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

<sup>1</sup> Advocates who have written about this topic prefer “person experiencing homelessness” over the term “homeless person” in an effort to “emphasize that homelessness is a transitory experience and not an identifier.” SUZANNE SKINNER, *HOW BARRIERS OFTEN PREVENT MEANINGFUL ACCESS TO EMERGENCY SHELTER* 1, n.1 (Sara K. Rankin ed., 2016). This Note sometimes uses the term “homeless person” or “homeless individual” for brevity. Though this Note does not wish to make homelessness a person’s sole identifier, this Note also argues that in the vast majority of cases, being homeless is not volitional and therefore should be treated as a status under the Eighth Amendment. See *infra* Section I.B.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. DEP’T OF HOUS. & URBAN DEV., 2019 ANNUAL HOMELESS ASSESSMENT REPORT (AHAR) TO CONGRESS 8 (2020) [hereinafter AHAR 2019], <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* Under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) definition, sheltered homelessness encompasses those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs that combine shelter with supportive services for up to twenty-four months, or safe havens that provide services for “hard-to-serve individuals.” *Id.* at 2. In contrast, HUD defines unsheltered homelessness as “refer[ring] to people whose primary nighttime location is a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for people . . . .” *Id.* at 3.

said that homelessness increased in 2017 for the first time in seven years.<sup>5</sup> There has been a particular increase in the occurrence of unsheltered homelessness. Between 2018 and 2019 alone, there was a nine percent increase in the number of unsheltered individuals, meaning there were an additional 16,826 unsheltered individuals.<sup>6</sup> The increasing prevalence of unsheltered homelessness, coupled with the high occurrence of chronic homelessness,<sup>7</sup> has led to its rising visibility.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the lack of both temporary shelter and permanent housing for the skyrocketing number of unsheltered homeless people, cities increasingly have passed laws that give unsheltered individuals no choice but to violate them.<sup>9</sup> These “criminalization” laws may be neutral on their face, but have the effect of targeting homeless individuals by criminalizing acts associated with being homeless such as sleeping, sitting, lying, panhandling, and loitering in public spaces.<sup>10</sup> In

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<sup>4</sup> One reason for this undercount is that the counting process only captures homeless people who are visible. NAT'L LAW CTR. ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY, DON'T COUNT ON IT: HOW THE HUD POINT-IN-TIME COUNT UNDERESTIMATES THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS IN AMERICA 11 (2017). And though HUD provides guidelines for Continuums of Care (COCs) to conduct their annual counts, the COCs can have drastically disparate procedures and results. *See id.* at 8, 10; Alastair Boone, *Why Can't We Get an Accurate Count of the Homeless Population?*, PAC. STANDARD (Mar. 5, 2019), <https://psmag.com/social-justice/why-cant-we-count-the-homeless-population> (describing how heavily publicized counts of homeless individuals tend to be unreliable).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. DEP'T OF HOUS. & URBAN DEV., 2017 ANNUAL HOMELESS ASSESSMENT REPORT (AHAR) TO CONGRESS 1 (2017), <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> AHAR 2019, *supra* note 2, at 9.

<sup>7</sup> Chronically homeless individuals as defined by HUD fall into two categories: individuals who have been “continuously homeless” for at least one year and have a disability, or individuals who have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years that add up to at least twelve months of being homeless. *Id.* at 2. A disability for purposes of defining chronic homelessness entails diagnosis “with one or more of the following conditions: Substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability . . . , post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments resulting from brain injury, or chronic physical illness or disability.” Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing: Defining “Chronically Homeless,” 80 Fed. Reg. 75791, 75793 (proposed Dec. 4, 2015) (to be codified at 24 C.F.R. pts. 91 & 578).

<sup>8</sup> *See* Sara K. Rankin, *Punishing Homelessness*, 22 NEW CRIM. L. REV. 99, 102–03 (2019) (“In other words, chronic homelessness is the most visible category . . . because, unlike most cases of homelessness that are briefly episodic or transitional, people experiencing chronic homelessness are homeless more frequently and for longer periods of time.”); *see also* AHAR 2019, *supra* note 2, at 4 (documenting that two-thirds of chronically homeless individuals were living outdoors in 2019).

<sup>9</sup> *See infra* notes 11–13 and accompanying text. *See generally* Terry Skolnik, *Homelessness and the Impossibility to Obey the Law*, 43 FORDHAM URB. L.J. 741 (2016) (noting the repercussions of homeless individuals’ inability to comply with laws that disparately impact them).

<sup>10</sup> *See* Rankin, *supra* note 8, at 107 (defining criminalization as “laws that prohibit or severely restrict one’s ability to engage in necessary life-sustaining activities in public, even

2019, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty conducted a survey of 187 cities to illustrate the prevalence of laws criminalizing homelessness.<sup>11</sup> Such laws come in various forms: 37% of cities surveyed ban camping, 21% ban sleeping in public, 55% ban sitting and lying down in public, 35% ban loitering, loafing, and vagrancy, and 38% ban begging citywide.<sup>12</sup> And these are not stagnant trends. The existence of city-wide bans in every category previously listed has increased since 2006: City-wide bans on camping increased by 92%, sleeping by 50%, sitting and lying down by 78%, loitering, loafing, and vagrancy by 103%, and begging by 103%.<sup>13</sup>

Homelessness is a notable example of how local governments have entrusted too much to the police where social workers or other professionals would be better equipped, which is the thrust of the recently invigorated movement to defund the police.<sup>14</sup> Criminalizing homelessness is far from a constructive solution.<sup>15</sup> It is focused on reducing the visibility of homelessness by forcing homeless individuals out of public spaces,<sup>16</sup> sometimes with the threat of arrest.<sup>17</sup> Cities

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when that person has no reasonable alternative”); see also Hannah Kieschnick, Note, *A Cruel and Unusual Way to Regulate the Homeless: Extending the Status Crimes Doctrine to Anti-Homeless Ordinances*, 70 STAN. L. REV. 1569, 1574–77 (2018) (providing examples of criminalization ordinances).

<sup>11</sup> NAT’L LAW CTR. ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY, HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS: ENDING THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS IN U.S. CITIES 9, 12–13 (2019) [hereinafter HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS].

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* The percentage of cities banning these activities in particular public places, rather than banning them in all public places citywide, is even higher in all categories: 57% for camping, 39% for sleeping, 60% for loitering, loafing, and vagrancy, and 65% for begging. *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> See Matt Vasilogambros, ‘If the Police Aren’t Needed, Let’s Leave Them Out Completely,’ PEW: STATELINE (June 23, 2020), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/06/23/if-the-police-arent-needed-lets-leave-them-out-completely> (“For decades, cities have asked police to manage social problems such as mass homelessness, failed schools, and mental illness . . . But it has not worked. The resources that have swelled police departments across the country should be redirected to community-based programs.”).

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Rankin, *supra* note 8, at 109 n.52 (detailing the significant costs of criminalization practices); *id.* at 114–15 (describing how sweeps of homeless encampments merely displace individuals without combating homelessness).

<sup>16</sup> See *id.* at 103 (“By virtue of their sustained visibility in public space, chronically homeless people are the primary target of ordinances punishing homelessness. These laws, fueled by the stigma of visible poverty, function to purge chronically homeless people from public space.”); see also Don Mitchell, *Anti-Homeless Laws and Public Space: II. Further Constitutional Issues*, 19 URB. GEOGRAPHY 98, 103 (1998) (explaining that the goal of these laws “is to create a public space free of the nuisances of homeless people . . . deflecting attention from roots and causes of homelessness into questions about ‘order’ and ‘civility’ in public spaces”).

<sup>17</sup> Rankin, *supra* note 8, at 107–08. For example, individuals without a fixed address comprised about half of arrests in Portland, Oregon in 2017, most of which resulted from

achieve this by criminalizing sleeping and/or camping within their own borders and pushing homeless individuals to surrounding municipalities.<sup>18</sup> To be sure, criminalization of homelessness is not confined to formal laws. Some cities criminalize homelessness through more informal mechanisms, such as clearing homeless encampments<sup>19</sup> or using police to reduce the visibility of homelessness on subways.<sup>20</sup> These strategies are not necessarily documented in written policies or ordinances, and are thus more difficult to legally challenge. Even if a city does not have laws on the books obviously targeting the homeless, they may use other laws—such as for illegal dumping or shopping cart possession—to cite homeless individuals.<sup>21</sup> This Note primarily focuses on challenges to formal criminalization laws prohibiting acts clearly associated with being homeless, but generally advocates against all criminalization measures against the homeless.

Because criminalization laws have devastating consequences on individuals experiencing homelessness, including the exacerbation of homelessness and criminalization of poverty,<sup>22</sup> advocates have attempted to strike down these laws under the Eighth Amendment's Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause, arguing that homelessness is a status and that individuals cannot be prosecuted for life-sustaining conduct.<sup>23</sup> Existing literature discusses the inherent problems with criminalization measures<sup>24</sup> and the extension of the Eighth

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an open warrant. PORTLAND CITY AUDITOR, POLICY REVIEW: PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU SHOULD IDENTIFY ITS ROLE IN RESPONDING TO THE CITY'S HOMELESS CRISIS 4, 7 (2019); *see also* U.C. BERKELEY LAW POLICY ADVOCACY CLINIC, CALIFORNIA'S NEW VAGRANCY LAWS 5 (2016) (finding increasing vagrancy arrests in California). Excessive police force can also ensue from homeless individuals' increased contact with police, as shown in Los Angeles, where one in three cases of police use of force in 2019 was against a homeless person. Matt Tinoco, *Why Armed Cops Are the First Responders for the Homelessness Crisis*, LAIST (June 29, 2020, 6:00 AM), <https://laist.com/2020/06/29/los-angeles-police-homeless-why.php>.

<sup>18</sup> *See* Sarah Gerry, *Jones v. City of Los Angeles: A Moral Response to One City's Attempt to Criminalize, Rather than Confront, Its Homelessness Crisis*, 42 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 239, 239, 250–51 (2007) (discussing the impact of a Ninth Circuit decision on Los Angeles's restrictive homelessness policy).

<sup>19</sup> *See infra* notes 171, 224–29 and accompanying text.

<sup>20</sup> *See infra* note 51 and accompanying text (describing how New York City police have recently cracked down on homelessness in subways).

<sup>21</sup> *E.g.*, Cynthia Hubert, *Sacramento County Cleared Homeless Camps All Year. Now It Has Stopped Citing Campers*, SACRAMENTO BEE (Sept. 18, 2018, 4:27 PM), <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/homeless/article218605025.html>.

<sup>22</sup> *See infra* Section IV.B (explaining how laws drive individuals experiencing homelessness further into poverty and involvement in the criminal justice system).

<sup>23</sup> *See infra* Section I.B (summarizing cases assessing whether homelessness is a status under the Eighth Amendment).

<sup>24</sup> *See infra* notes 234–43 and accompanying text.

Amendment status crimes doctrine to homelessness.<sup>25</sup> This Note will contribute to this literature by calling for a more expansive definition of “practically available” shelter that would render a criminalization ordinance unconstitutional under the Eighth Amendment after a recent Ninth Circuit case, *Martin v. City of Boise*.<sup>26</sup> The *Martin* court ruled that the City of Boise violated the Eighth Amendment by prosecuting individuals for “involuntarily sitting, lying and sleeping in public” when no sleeping space was “practically available in any shelter” at the time of the plaintiffs’ arrests.<sup>27</sup>

Importantly, beds were technically available at Boise shelters when the *Martin* plaintiffs were arrested.<sup>28</sup> Previous cases within and outside the Ninth Circuit had relied on the unavailability of beds to find an Eighth Amendment violation, since homeless individuals have no choice but to sleep outside when shelters are full.<sup>29</sup> The *Martin* court broke new ground by noting that while Boise shelters technically offered beds, those beds were problematically conditioned on religious observance, rendering them not practically available. In doing so, it drew a crucial distinction between technically available beds and practically available beds.<sup>30</sup> Within the Ninth Circuit, *Martin* in fact has impacted how cities respond to homelessness, as some governments have stopped enforcing criminalization ordinances in response to the ruling.<sup>31</sup> *Martin*’s impact is also evidenced by local governments’ protests against the decision; for example, cities and counties throughout the Ninth Circuit have filed amicus briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court opposing the *Martin* decision.<sup>32</sup> Although the

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<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Jamie Michael Charles, Note, “America’s Lost Cause”: *The Unconstitutionality of Criminalizing Our Country’s Homeless Population*, 18 PUB. INT. L.J. 315, 333–35, 340–44 (2009) (arguing the unconstitutionality of criminalization ordinances under the Eighth Amendment); see also Kieschnick, *supra* note 10, at 1578–605 (providing an overview of the application of the Eighth Amendment to anti-homeless ordinances).

<sup>26</sup> *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F.3d 1031 (9th Cir. 2018), *amended by* 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019) (en banc) (internal citations omitted).

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 1048–49.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 1041.

<sup>29</sup> See *infra* notes 83–84 and accompanying text.

<sup>30</sup> *Martin*, 902 F.3d at 1042 (acknowledging that homeless individuals may be “denied entry to a . . . facility for reasons other than shelter capacity. If so, then as a practical matter, no shelter is available”).

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Scott Greenstone, *How a Federal Court Ruling on Boise’s Homeless Camping Ban Has Rippled Across the West*, IDAHO STATESMAN (Sept. 16, 2019, 5:00 AM), <https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/local/community/boise/article235065002.html> (summarizing changes in cities’ practices throughout the Ninth Circuit after *Martin*).

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Matt Stiles, ‘Fed Up’ with Homeless Camps, L.A. County Joins Case to Restore Its Right to Clear Them, L.A. TIMES (Sept. 17, 2019, 4:56 PM), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-09-17/la-county-supervisors-homeless-boise-case-amicus-brief-supreme-court-challenge> (reporting that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to file an amicus brief with the Supreme Court). For a summary of the

Supreme Court ultimately denied review,<sup>33</sup> it is possible that other circuits or the nation's highest court will soon grapple with the constitutionality of criminalization ordinances as both the existence of homelessness and the criminalization thereof are increasing.<sup>34</sup> And though *Martin* is only binding on the Ninth Circuit, the reality is that more than half of the country's unsheltered homeless population resides in California,<sup>35</sup> and the four states with the largest percentage of unsheltered status among homeless individuals are in the Ninth Circuit.<sup>36</sup> Thus, *Martin* has a widespread impact on the treatment of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

While the *Martin* court looked to factors beyond technical shelter availability to determine the constitutionality of an anti-homeless ordinance, the court claimed to have a narrow holding.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, attempts to strike down anti-homeless ordinances after *Martin* have been unsuccessful.<sup>38</sup> In light of this tension, this Note demonstrates that not all shelters are a viable choice for persons experiencing homelessness, enumerating instances in which homeless individuals are forced to choose between criminal consequences and staying in a shelter that is coercive, unhealthy, or otherwise unsafe.<sup>39</sup> The ultimate

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“polarizing response to *Martin*,” see Sara K. Rankin, Hiding Homelessness: The Transcarceration of Homelessness 1–5 (Jan. 28, 2020) (unpublished manuscript), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3499195>.

<sup>33</sup> *City of Boise, Idaho v. Martin*, SCOTUSBLOG, <https://www.scotusblog.com/cases/cases/city-of-boise-idaho-v-martin> (last visited May 20, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> See *infra* Part IV (considering how future courts should rule on the constitutionality of anti-homeless ordinances under the Eighth Amendment).

<sup>35</sup> AHAR 2019, *supra* note 2, at 12. This is not to minimize the presence of homelessness in other areas of the country, but the particular concentration of unsheltered homelessness in California presents unique problems. As of 2016, California's most populous cities had an average of more than ten anti-homeless laws each. U.C. BERKELEY LAW POLICY ADVOCACY CLINIC, *supra* note 17, at 3.

<sup>36</sup> AHAR 2019, *supra* note 2, at 13 (listing California, Oregon, Hawaii, and Nevada as the states with the highest percentage of unsheltered status among individuals experiencing homelessness). See also *Map of the Ninth Circuit*, U.S. CTS. FOR THE NINTH CIR., [https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/content/view.php?pk\\_id=0000000135](https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/content/view.php?pk_id=0000000135) (last visited May 21, 2020).

<sup>37</sup> *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F.3d 1031, 1048 (9th Cir. 2018), *amended by* 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019) (en banc) (“Our holding is a narrow one.”).

<sup>38</sup> See *infra* notes 171, 224–29 and accompanying text (noting that some cities are increasingly using methods that would technically comply with *Martin*, but still criminalize homelessness).

<sup>39</sup> While this was true before the COVID-19 outbreak, the unhealthy conditions of many homeless shelters and the vulnerability of being unsheltered especially came to light during the pandemic. City officials rushed to move homeless people into hotels, out of shelters, and off the streets, but the vast majority of individuals still lack safe housing. See Sarah Holder & Kriston Capps, *No Easy Fixes as Covid-19 Hits Homeless Shelters*, CITYLAB (Apr. 17, 2020), <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2020/04/homeless-shelter-coronavirus-testing-hotel-rooms-healthcare/610000> (describing the response of various cities to the COVID-19 crisis's impact on homeless individuals). High rates of homeless individuals have tested and will continue to test positive for the virus. See DENNIS P.



goal of this Note is to advocate for courts, when assessing the constitutionality of criminalization ordinances, to consider these ways in which shelters may not be “practically available” for some individuals, and to call on cities to stop criminalizing homelessness altogether.

Part I summarizes the status crimes doctrine under the Eighth Amendment in cases involving the criminalization of homelessness. This Part describes how *Martin* differed from prior cases by introducing the idea that the availability of shelter beds, which determines whether homeless individuals had a choice to not sleep outside, depends not on technical availability but practical availability. Next, Part II explores the context in which the *Martin* court determined that homeless individuals in Boise did not have a choice but to sleep outside—namely when they were required to meet religious requirements to stay in a shelter. Part III goes beyond the Establishment Clause issues in *Martin* and explores some of the other reasons why a shelter may not be practically available to an individual experiencing homelessness, especially those with disabilities, substance use disorders, or LGBT identities. Finally, Part IV of this Note argues courts should make individualized inquiries when assessing whether homeless individuals in a particular case truly had a choice to sleep outside. This Part also argues that criminalization ordinances should be overturned legislatively, not only because they are constitutionally and morally suspect, but also because they are costly and impractical.

## I

### EIGHTH AMENDMENT CHALLENGES TO ANTI-HOMELESS ORDINANCES

The Eighth Amendment’s Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause has often been a vehicle for challenging the criminalization of

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CULHANE, DAN TREGLIA, KENNETH STEIF, RANDALL KUHN & THOMAS BYRNE, ESTIMATED EMERGENCY & OBSERVATIONAL/QUARANTINE CAPACITY NEED FOR THE U.S. HOMELESS POPULATION RELATED TO COVID-19 EXPOSURE BY COUNTY; PROJECTED HOSPITALIZATIONS; INTENSIVE CARE UNITS & MORTALITY 6, 12 (2020), [https://works.bepress.com/dennis\\_culhane/237](https://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/237) (predicting that over 21,000 people experiencing homelessness—4.3% of the U.S. homeless population—could require hospitalization and over 3400 will die from COVID-19); Michael Gartland, *At Least 40 Homeless New Yorkers Have Died Because of Coronavirus*, N.Y. DAILY NEWS (Apr. 20, 2020, 4:20 PM), <https://www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-coronavirus-homeless-deaths-40-20200420-nckj4fvjpcvjehbmz7rdujbum-story.html> (stating that as of April 19, 2020, 615 homeless people had tested positive in New York City); Lisa Mullins & Lynn Jolicoeur, *Testing Reveals ‘Stunning’ Asymptomatic Coronavirus Spread Among Boston’s Homeless*, WBUR (Apr. 14, 2020), <https://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2020/04/14/coronavirus-boston-homeless-testing> (finding that thirty-six percent of individuals entering a Boston homeless shelter tested positive).

homelessness.<sup>40</sup> In such cases, advocates argue that laws prohibiting sleeping and camping in public impermissibly criminalize the status of being homeless because homeless individuals have no choice but to sleep outdoors when there is no shelter available, which violates the Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause.<sup>41</sup> Section I.A first highlights the misunderstandings government actors may have when seeking solutions to homelessness. Then, Section I.B summarizes the origins of the status doctrine and describes how certain courts treat homelessness as a status under the Eighth Amendment. Lastly, Section I.C discusses the ways in which *Martin* both reiterated the reasoning of prior decisions while also contemplating a situation in which shelter is not “practically available” to an individual arrested for sleeping outdoors even when beds were technically available.

### A. *Myths and Misunderstandings About Choices Available to Individuals Experiencing Homelessness*

When addressing the ever-pressing crisis of homelessness, advocates must combat policymakers’ and judges’ false intuitions about what causes and solves homelessness. Courts and other government actors—both at the local and national levels—often have a limited understanding of the viable choices available to individuals experiencing homelessness.<sup>42</sup>

Some argue that if anti-homeless laws are struck down, this will lead to a “constitutional right to camp in public places,” as stated by one of the attorneys appealing Boise’s case to the Supreme Court.<sup>43</sup> Arguments like this miscomprehend the choices available to individuals experiencing homelessness and perpetuate a false narrative that people choose to sleep outside over better alternatives. Even those who purport to advocate for the homeless can perpetuate this narrative. For example, the mayor of Sacramento, California wrote an op-ed calling for the right to shelter in the state along “with the obligation to use it.”<sup>44</sup> His view that “[l]iving on the streets should not be consid-

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<sup>40</sup> See Kieschnick, *supra* note 10, at 1578, 1582–83 (noting that federal and state courts have recognized the Eighth Amendment as a limitation on anti-homelessness measures).

<sup>41</sup> See *infra* notes 76–82 and accompanying text.

<sup>42</sup> It is particularly important to recognize the limited understanding of government officials, regardless of party affiliation, about choices available to individuals experiencing homelessness. See *infra* notes 52–54 and accompanying text.

<sup>43</sup> Greenstone, *supra* note 31 (quoting Theane Evangelis, one of the lead counsel that represented Boise on its appeal to the Supreme Court).

<sup>44</sup> Darrell Steinberg, *Building More Permanent Housing Alone Won’t Solve Homelessness in California*, Opinion, L.A. TIMES (July 17, 2019, 3:15 AM), <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-07-16/op-ed-building-more-permanent-housing-alone-wont-solve-homelessness-in-california>. Steinberg also opposed Sacramento’s

ered a civil right”<sup>45</sup> misses the point that for some individuals experiencing homelessness, sleeping on the street is the only possible option for the reasons explained in Part III.

It is also worth stating that the right to shelter, while an important step in mitigating unsheltered homelessness, does not necessarily decrease the occurrence of overall homelessness. New York City, which first established a right to shelter in 1981,<sup>46</sup> has seen the highest levels of homelessness since the Great Depression,<sup>47</sup> with single adults spending an average of 429 nights in shelters.<sup>48</sup> As of May 25, 2020, there were 53,393 homeless individuals in New York City shelters.<sup>49</sup> New York City has also seen crime and health hazards at many of its shelters.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the right to shelter does not necessarily mitigate the use of criminalization measures. For example, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo asked the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority to address the “increasing problem of homelessness on the subways” as part of its Reorganization Plan, which included the addition of five hundred uniformed officers.<sup>51</sup>

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participation in the Supreme Court amicus brief for *Martin* and called on governments to seek humane alternatives instead. Benjamin Oreskes, *Homeless People Could Lose the Right to Sleep on Sidewalks if Western Cities Have Their Way*, L.A. TIMES (Sept. 25, 2019, 3:23 PM), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-09-25/boise-homeless-encampment-amicus-brief-supreme-court-appeal-cities>. This example demonstrates that those opposing criminalization measures may not understand that requiring homeless individuals to use shelters may also be problematic.

<sup>45</sup> Steinberg, *supra* note 44.

<sup>46</sup> See Callahan v. Carey, 909 N.E.2d 1229, 1320 (N.Y. 2009) (describing the 1981 consent decree that established a right to shelter for homeless men); Robin Herman, *Pact Requires City to Shelter Homeless Men*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 27, 1981), <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/08/27/nyregion/pact-requires-city-to-shelter-homeless-men.html>. A court extended the consent decree to homeless women in 1983. See Eldredge v. Koch, 469 N.Y.S.2d 744, 744 (App. Div. 1983) (holding that the consent decree’s reasoning and outcome is equally applicable to homeless women’s shelters).

<sup>47</sup> *Basic Facts About Homelessness: New York City*, COAL. FOR THE HOMELESS, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city> (last visited May 25, 2020).

<sup>48</sup> COAL. FOR THE HOMELESS, STATE OF THE HOMELESS, at 8 (2018).

<sup>49</sup> *DHS Daily Report*, N.Y.C. OPEN DATA, <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Social-Services/DHS-Daily-Report/k46n-sa2m> (last visited May 27, 2020).

<sup>50</sup> See SKINNER, *supra* note 1, at 17–18 (noting the presence of numerous health hazards and instances of crime in shelters); Nathan Tempey, *Inside the Notorious Privately Run Homeless Shelter That Costs NYC Millions*, GOTHAMIST (July 14, 2015, 3:02 PM), [https://gothamist.com/2015/07/14/we\\_always\\_care\\_about\\_money.php](https://gothamist.com/2015/07/14/we_always_care_about_money.php) (reporting “mice and roach infestations, collapsing ceilings, fires, grimy halls, violent crime and burglaries, and lobby doors that don’t lock” at a family shelter).

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Andrew Cuomo, N.Y. Governor, to MTA Board of Directors (July 12, 2019), <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-issues-letter-mta-board-directors-urging-them-address-part-reorganization-plan>; see also Lauren Aratani, *‘I’m Just Sleeping’: Police Crack Down on Homeless in New York’s Subways*, GUARDIAN (Oct. 12,

Recently, President Trump brought homelessness into the national dialogue. In July 2019, he blamed cities “run by very liberal people” for allowing homelessness to occur, stating “[t]he people there are living in hell . . . . [P]erhaps they like living that way. They can’t do that. We can’t ruin our cities.”<sup>52</sup> However, it is false that “liberal” governments have been too lax in policing the homeless.<sup>53</sup> Both sides of the aisle are at fault for criminalizing homelessness instead of addressing its root causes. And though the President could have created a national strategy for addressing homelessness, he merely endorsed the same policing tactics that “liberal” governments have tried for years. The White House Council of Economic Advisers stated in a report that “increasing the tolerability of sleeping on the streets . . . increases homelessness,” and called on the police to enforce anti-camping laws and to connect individuals to services.<sup>54</sup>

These examples show how decisionmakers’ rhetoric about homelessness seeks to diminish the visibility of homelessness rather than address its root causes. Policing is seen as the answer to more immediate reductions in visibility. But punishing individuals experiencing homelessness for sleeping outdoors—regardless of whether shelter beds are technically available in local shelters—is often the equivalent of punishing individuals for having no choice but to sleep outdoors.<sup>55</sup>

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2019, 2:00 AM), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/oct/12/new-york-homeless-subways-police-crackdown>.

<sup>52</sup> Nick Givas, *Exclusive: Trump Shares Plans to Combat Homelessness and Mental Illness in Interview with Tucker Carlson*, FOX NEWS (July 1, 2019), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-tucker-exclusive-interview-homelessness>. For factual inaccuracies in Trump’s interview about homelessness, see Jill Colvin, *Trump’s Claim About DC Homeless Raises Eyebrows*, AP NEWS (July 3, 2019), <https://www.apnews.com/36eba40cbcd64d93921e1d75aa7e751a>, and Michael D. Shear, *Trump Expresses Shock at Homelessness, ‘a Phenomenon That Started Two Years Ago,’* N.Y. TIMES (July 2, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/02/us/politics/trump-homeless.html>.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Chris Herring, *Democrats Hate Trump’s Plan for Homelessness. But It’s Their Plan, Too*, WASH. POST (Sept. 18, 2019, 10:33 AM), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/democrats-hate-trumps-plan-for-homelessness-its-their-plan-too/2019/09/18/b3c31a5c-d98e-11e9-a688-303693fb4b0b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/democrats-hate-trumps-plan-for-homelessness-its-their-plan-too/2019/09/18/b3c31a5c-d98e-11e9-a688-303693fb4b0b_story.html) (noting prominent Democratic politicians in California who pushed criminalization policies); see also PORTLAND CITY AUDITOR, *supra* note 17 at 3–7; U.C. BERKELEY LAW POLICY ADVOCACY CLINIC, *supra* note 17, at 2–7.

<sup>54</sup> COUNCIL OF ECON. ADVISERS, *THE STATE OF HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA* 16–19 (2019) (suggesting that unsheltered homelessness increased in the 1980s due to the “decriminalization of many status crimes, such as public inebriation and vagrancy” (quoting PETER H. ROSSI, *DOWN AND OUT IN AMERICA: THE ORIGINS OF HOMELESSNESS* 34 (1989))); see also Jeff Stein, *As Trump Prepares Big Push on Homelessness, White House Floats New Role for Police*, WASH. POST (Sept. 16, 2019, 7:24 PM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/09/16/trump-prepares-big-push-homelessness-white-house-floats-new-role-police>.

<sup>55</sup> For more examples of when government actors fail to see the functional inaccessibility of shelter, see Rankin, *supra* note 32, at 15–21.

The next Section demonstrates how punishing individuals for a matter over which they have no choice violates the Eighth Amendment.

*B. Homelessness as a Status Under the Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause*

According to the Supreme Court, the Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause “limits the kind of punishment that can be imposed on those convicted of crimes, . . . proscribes punishment grossly disproportionate to the severity of the crime, . . . [and] imposes substantive limits on what can be made criminal and punished as such.”<sup>56</sup> Those limitations include criminalizing a person’s status, which means an individual is punished not for her conduct but for the very fact of being something.<sup>57</sup> One example of a status crime is vagrancy, which has been used for more than six centuries to target the poor in public spaces.<sup>58</sup> The Supreme Court struck down a vagrancy law for vagueness in *Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville*.<sup>59</sup> However, much of the status crimes doctrine arises from cases involving addiction.<sup>60</sup>

First, the Supreme Court in *Robinson v. California* overturned a statute criminalizing addiction for violating the Eighth Amendment.<sup>61</sup> The Court differentiated status from conduct in that the former “is chronic rather than acute; that it continues after it is complete and subjects the offender to arrest at any time after he reforms.”<sup>62</sup> But the question of whether criminalizing the act of being intoxicated in a public place criminalized the status of addiction divided the Court six years later in *Powell v. Texas*.<sup>63</sup> A four-justice plurality in *Powell* interpreted *Robinson* to mean that a state may not criminalize status or the act of “being,” which allowed for punishing the conduct of drunkenness in public.<sup>64</sup> The four-justice dissent determined that criminalizing public drunkenness was an Eighth Amendment violation

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<sup>56</sup> *Ingraham v. Wright*, 430 U.S. 651, 667 (1977) (internal citations omitted).

<sup>57</sup> See *Robinson v. California*, 370 U.S. 660, 666–67 (1962) (striking down a law criminalizing the “status” of addiction rather than purchase, sale, possession, or other specific acts).

<sup>58</sup> Harry Simon, *Towns Without Pity: A Constitutional and Historical Analysis of Official Efforts to Drive Homeless Persons from American Cities*, 66 TUL. L. REV. 631, 633–34 (1992).

<sup>59</sup> 405 U.S. 156, 162 (1972).

<sup>60</sup> See Mitchell, *supra* note 16, at 99–100 (summarizing Supreme Court jurisprudence regarding the status of addiction).

<sup>61</sup> 370 U.S. at 666.

<sup>62</sup> *Id.* at 662–63.

<sup>63</sup> 392 U.S. 514 (1968).

<sup>64</sup> *Id.* at 532–33.

under *Robinson*, as it criminalized “a condition [Powell] is powerless to change.”<sup>65</sup>

Justice White, the decisive fifth vote for the plurality,<sup>66</sup> determined that Powell could have avoided public drunkenness in this particular case, and in doing so dodged the constitutional question.<sup>67</sup> In a footnote, he distinguished himself from the rest of the plurality in stating that the key question is not about whether public drunkenness is a status or conduct, but about “whether *volitional* acts brought about the ‘condition’ and whether those acts are sufficiently proximate to the ‘condition’” to penalize that “condition.”<sup>68</sup> In his separate concurrence, Justice White highlighted a situation where penalizing someone for being drunk in public *would* constitute cruel and unusual punishment—when that person is homeless, for they have no realistic choice but to live in public places.<sup>69</sup>

Since *Robinson* and *Powell*, advocates for the homeless have brought cases asserting homelessness as a status that cannot be criminalized under the Eighth Amendment. But courts disagree over how to reconcile *Robinson* and *Powell* and how to distinguish status from conduct.<sup>70</sup> More, state and federal courts are far from reaching consensus on whether homelessness constitutes a status. When it seemed possible that the Supreme Court would review *Martin*, counsel for the City of Boise highlighted that courts diverge on whether homelessness is a status.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Id.* at 567 (Fortas, J., dissenting).

<sup>66</sup> Some circuits consider Justice White’s opinion to be controlling under the *Marks* rule while others consider it dicta. Compare *Manning v. Caldwell*, 930 F.3d 264, 280 & n.13 (4th Cir. 2019) (deeming Justice White’s opinion to be decisive (quoting *Marks v. United States*, 430 U.S. 188 (1977) (“When a fragmented Court decides a case and no single rationale explaining the result enjoys the assent of five Justices, the holding of the Court may be viewed as that position taken by those Members who concurred in the judgments on the narrowest grounds.”))), with *United States v. Sirois*, 898 F.3d 134, 138 (1st Cir. 2018) (describing Justice White’s opinion as “only a concurring opinion. . . . [O]ne that has yet to gain any apparent relevant traction”).

<sup>67</sup> See *Powell*, 392 U.S. at 552–54 (White, J., concurring); Mitchell, *supra* note 16, at 99 (“Justice White cast the ninth vote on the merits of the particular case rather than on the constitutional issues raised.”).

<sup>68</sup> *Powell*, 392 U.S. at 550 n.2 (White, J., concurring) (emphasis added).

<sup>69</sup> *Id.* at 551 (“For all practical purposes the public streets may be home for these unfortunates, not because their disease compels them to be there, but because, drunk or sober, they have no place else to go and no place else to be when they are drinking.”); see also *Manning*, 930 F.3d at 281, 285–86 (relying on Justice White’s language to strike down a habitual drunkard statute as unconstitutionally vague).

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., Kieschnick, *supra* note 10, at 1582–90 (highlighting the split among courts between extending *Robinson* to conduct or limiting it to pure status). But see Mitchell, *supra* note 16, at 99–101 (deeming the discussion of involuntariness in *Powell* to be “irrelevant” in challenging anti-homeless laws on Eighth Amendment grounds).

<sup>71</sup> Reply Brief for Petitioner at 6–9, *City of Boise v. Martin*, No. 19-247 (Nov. 13, 2019).

Some courts have declined to treat homelessness as a status for a number of reasons. Some refuse to treat homelessness as a status because statutes criminalizing homelessness often target specific types of conduct such as sleeping, lying, or sitting.<sup>72</sup> One court ruled that homelessness is not a status because it is a condition that depends on the discretionary acts of others, namely the government's provision of sufficient housing.<sup>73</sup> In another instance, the Eleventh Circuit held that a challenged ordinance did not punish status because shelter space was available, meaning individuals could choose to sleep indoors.<sup>74</sup> These decisions generally emphasize that homelessness involves some level of choice and thus cannot be a status.

In contrast, courts that construe homelessness as a status tend to focus on its involuntary nature.<sup>75</sup> In *Jones v. City of Los Angeles*, the Ninth Circuit ruled that a municipal ordinance prohibiting sitting, lying, or sleeping at all times in all public places when no shelter was available violated the Eighth Amendment.<sup>76</sup> The court found that while “[h]omelessness is not an innate or immutable characteristic, nor is it a disease, such as drug addiction or alcoholism,” the status of being homeless and the status of being an alcoholic were sufficiently analogous to consider homelessness a status.<sup>77</sup> That shelter may sometimes be available or that a person's homelessness is not permanent does not foreclose treating homelessness as a status.<sup>78</sup>

In particular, the involuntariness of sleep and its necessity for survival have led some courts to consider homelessness as a status when individuals have no choice but to sleep in public. The *Jones* court found that “sitting, lying, and sleeping . . . are universal and unavoidable consequences of being human.”<sup>79</sup> In *Johnson v. City of Dallas*, a district court in Texas noted that “being does not exist without sleeping,” and thus criminalizing sleeping punishes homeless individuals for a status that “forc[es] them to be in public.”<sup>80</sup> A Florida dis-

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<sup>72</sup> See *Tobe v. City of Santa Ana*, 892 P.2d 1145, 1166–67 (Cal. 1995) (reversing lower court's ruling that homelessness is a status like addiction or an illness, and determining instead that the City of Santa Ana's ordinance criminalized conduct).

<sup>73</sup> *Joyce v. City of San Francisco*, 846 F. Supp. 843, 857 (N.D. Cal. 1994).

<sup>74</sup> See *Joel v. City of Orlando*, 232 F.3d 1353, 1362 (11th Cir. 2000) (holding that the ordinance prohibiting camping on public property did not punish status in violation of the Eighth Amendment because space was available at a local shelter).

<sup>75</sup> See *infra* notes 78–83 and accompanying text.

<sup>76</sup> 444 F.3d 1118, 1136 (9th Cir. 2006), *appeal dismissed and vacated as moot upon settlement*, 505 F.3d 1006 (9th Cir. 2007).

<sup>77</sup> *Id.* at 1137.

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*; see also *supra* note 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Jones*, 444 F.3d at 1136.

<sup>80</sup> *Johnson v. City of Dallas*, 860 F. Supp. 344, 350 (N.D. Tex. 1994), *rev'd on other grounds*, 61 F.3d 442 (5th Cir. 1995). *Johnson* was reversed on standing grounds.

trict court in *Pottinger v. City of Miami* included eating and sitting among a list of life-sustaining conduct that homeless individuals must undertake in public that is “inseparable from their involuntary condition of being homeless.”<sup>81</sup>

Several scholars have also argued that courts should be more willing to find Eighth Amendment violations in statutes targeting individuals experiencing homelessness.<sup>82</sup> But in practice courts tend to find Eighth Amendment violations only when the facts are egregious, showing that the number of homeless individuals exceeded the number of available beds in the jurisdiction by thousands.<sup>83</sup> In *Jones*, the gap between homeless individuals and available beds reached almost 50,000.<sup>84</sup> It certainly is the case that many cities lack sufficient shelter space to accommodate the number of individuals experiencing homelessness. But even when shelters have space, or even when a city such as New York provides a right to shelter, there are a variety of reasons a person experiencing homelessness may not be able to sleep in a shelter.<sup>85</sup> Many of these reasons stem from shelter policies that bar certain populations based on sexual orientation or criminal records. Additionally, shelter may not be accessible to individuals with disabilities or other health conditions.

### C. *Martin v. City of Boise*

*Martin* opened a door for finding a criminalization ordinance unconstitutional as applied to homeless individuals without a factual finding that the number of homeless individuals technically exceeds the number of available beds. Six plaintiffs, current or former residents of Boise, alleged that between 2007 and 2009 they were cited by Boise police for violating one or both of the following ordinances<sup>86</sup>: (1) Boise City Code § 9-10-02 (“Camping Ordinance”), which made it a misdemeanor to use “any of the streets, sidewalks, parks, or public places as a camping place at any time”; and (2) Boise City Code § 6-

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<sup>81</sup> 810 F. Supp. 1551, 1564 (S.D. Fla. 1992).

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., Charles, *supra* note 25, at 340–44 (arguing for an extension of the status crimes doctrine to homelessness because of its involuntariness); Kieschnick, *supra* note 10, at 1591–605 (same).

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., *Pottinger*, 810 F. Supp. at 1564 (stating that for 6000 individuals experiencing homelessness in Miami there were approximately 700 available shelter beds, a figure that includes 200 “program beds,” for which an individual “must qualify”); see also *infra* note 84 and accompanying text.

<sup>84</sup> 444 F.3d at 1122. This disparity is drastic even with the fact that HUD has historically undercounted homeless populations. See *supra* note 4 and accompanying text.

<sup>85</sup> See *infra* Part III.

<sup>86</sup> *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F.3d 1031, 1035 (9th Cir. 2018), *amended by* 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019) (en banc).



01-05 (“Disorderly Conduct Ordinance”), which prohibited “[o]ccupying, lodging, or sleeping in *any* building, structure, or public place, whether public or private . . . without the permission of the owner or person entitled to possession or in control thereof.”<sup>87</sup> An amendment to the challenged Ordinances in 2014 precluded the City from enforcing them when shelters were full.<sup>88</sup> But even if the shelters were not at capacity, individuals could be turned away for other reasons such as exceeding stay limits or failing to participate in a mandatory religious program.<sup>89</sup> For example, the River of Life shelter had a seventeen-day limit for males.<sup>90</sup> After this limit, individuals had to either leave the shelter or enter the Discipleship Program—an “intensive, Christ-based residential recovery program.”<sup>91</sup> Plaintiff Robert Anderson said he was required to attend chapel before dinner at the River of Life shelter.<sup>92</sup> Thus, he slept outside instead of staying at a shelter that did not align with his religious beliefs.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to previous cases where the evidentiary record demonstrated a significant gap between the number of homeless individuals and available shelter beds,<sup>94</sup> the barrier here was a religious one. The *Martin* court determined that the ordinances violated the Eighth Amendment because they also violated another constitutional provision—the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment.<sup>95</sup> The court considered there to be no beds available on the night of plaintiff Anderson’s arrest because he had to choose between enrolling in a program “antithetical to his . . . religious beliefs” or risk arrest under the ordinances.<sup>96</sup> The court found that Boise could not force the plain-

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<sup>87</sup> *Id.* (emphasis added).

<sup>88</sup> *Id.* at 1039.

<sup>89</sup> *Id.* at 1037, 1041.

<sup>90</sup> *Id.*

<sup>91</sup> *Id.* at 1037.

<sup>92</sup> *Id.* at 1038.

<sup>93</sup> *Id.*

<sup>94</sup> See *Jones v. City of Los Angeles*, 444 F.3d 1118, 1131–32 (9th Cir. 2006) (distinguishing that case from another that had “only the conclusory allegation that there was insufficient shelter” (citing *Joyce v. City & County of San Francisco*, 846 F. Supp. 843, 849 (N.D. Cal. 1994))), *appeal dismissed and vacated as moot upon settlement*, 505 F.3d 1006 (9th Cir. 2007); *Cobine v. City of Eureka*, 250 F. Supp. 3d 423, 431 (N.D. Cal. 2017) (finding the factual record to be underdeveloped as to whether homeless plaintiffs had no choice but to sleep outside); *Johnson v. City of Dallas*, 860 F. Supp. 344, 350 (N.D. Tex. 1994) (“For many of those homeless in Dallas, the unavailability of shelter is not a function of choice; it is not an issue of choosing to remain outdoors rather than sleep on a shelter’s floor because the shelter could not provide a bed that one found suitable enough.”), *rev’d on other grounds*, 61 F.3d 442 (5th Cir. 1995).

<sup>95</sup> 902 F.3d at 1041 (citation omitted) (“A city cannot, via the threat of prosecution, coerce an individual to attend religion-based treatment programs consistently with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.”).

<sup>96</sup> *Id.*

tiff to choose between sleeping outside at risk of prosecution or participating in a religious program at a local shelter.<sup>97</sup> Even though shelter beds were technically available at the time of plaintiffs' arrests,<sup>98</sup> the lack of "practically available" shelter meant that the ordinances violated the Eighth Amendment.<sup>99</sup>

This is not to say that *Martin* failed to follow precedent. It relied upon an evidentiary record that clearly showed homeless plaintiffs' lack of choice in sleeping outdoors. Instead of relying on quantitative evidence of the disparity between the number of homeless individuals and the number of available beds, however, the court relied on evidence that the plaintiffs lacked a meaningful choice when faced with the options of either sleeping outside at risk of prosecution or staying at a shelter where they would be required to renounce their religious beliefs.

The Ninth Circuit denied rehearing en banc.<sup>100</sup> But in her en banc concurrence, Judge Marsha Berzon, the panel opinion's author, again emphasized the narrowness of the court's ruling: "[T]he opinion only holds that municipal ordinances that criminalize sleeping, sitting, or lying in *all* public spaces, when *no* alternative sleeping space is available, violate the Eighth Amendment."<sup>101</sup> But as the opinion stands, it contemplates a situation in which an individual experiencing homelessness may have no choice but to sleep outside and face criminal punishment, even when there technically are shelter beds available. The opinion also does not allow cities in the Ninth Circuit to force individuals to choose between sleeping outside at risk of prosecution or staying in a shelter that violates their religious freedoms. In light of the fact that many cities rely on religious shelters to provide beds for individuals experiencing homelessness,<sup>102</sup> Part II explores what type of religious shelter might be so coercive as to be an Establishment Clause violation.

## II

### RELIGION AS AN EXAMPLE OF SHELTER INACCESSIBILITY

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of

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<sup>97</sup> *Id.*

<sup>98</sup> *Id.* There was also no known citation of a homeless individual for sleeping or camping on public property when the shelters were at capacity. *Id.* at 1039.

<sup>99</sup> *Id.* at 1049.

<sup>100</sup> *Martin v. City of Boise*, 920 F.3d 584, 588 (9th Cir. 2019).

<sup>101</sup> *Id.* at 589 (Berzon, J., concurring) (citation omitted).

<sup>102</sup> See *infra* Section II.A.

religion.”<sup>103</sup> Though there were technically beds available at the time of the plaintiffs’ arrests in *Martin*, the court narrowly focused on the distinction between technically available and practically available shelter beds in the context of *religious* shelters.<sup>104</sup> Because these beds were in shelters that mandate participation in religious programming, the court found that Boise cannot criminalize homeless individuals for sleeping outdoors when their only other option was to stay in a shelter that required participation in religious services.<sup>105</sup>

Section II.A surveys the role of religious institutions in providing services for individuals experiencing homelessness and local governments’ dependence on them. Then, Section II.B considers what type of program might constitute impermissible religious coercion under the Establishment Clause after *Martin*, especially since many shelters are operated by religious organizations. However, Section II.C ultimately argues that criminalization measures should be overturned not only because they infringe on homeless individuals’ civil liberties, but also because government interference in religious shelters is a constitutional violation in itself.

### A. *The Privatization of Services for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness*

Religious organizations have played a vital role in providing shelter and services since homelessness became an especially prominent problem in the 1980s.<sup>106</sup> These organizations stepped in where government “rolled back” social safety nets, believing it was the right thing to do.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, one of the amicus briefs filed to the Supreme Court in support of Boise claimed that religious organizations sponsor the majority of homeless shelters in Oregon and that therefore, under *Martin*, cities would inevitably violate the Establishment Clause given the Ninth Circuit’s decision.<sup>108</sup> According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, faith-based organizations provided at least thirty

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<sup>103</sup> U.S. CONST. amend. I.

<sup>104</sup> 902 F.3d at 1041; *see also supra* Section I.C.

<sup>105</sup> 902 F.3d at 1048–49.

<sup>106</sup> *See, e.g.*, Sara Rimer, *Religious Groups Plan More Shelters for Homeless*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 16, 1983, at 38, <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/10/16/nyregion/religious-groups-plan-more-shelters-for-homeless.html> (describing religious organizations’ provision of shelter and services in New York City).

<sup>107</sup> Jason Hackworth, *Faith, Welfare, and the City: The Mobilization of Religious Organizations for Neoliberal Ends*, 31 URB. GEOGRAPHY 750, 752–53 (2010) (observing how faith-based organizations deliver services that traditionally were provisioned directly by government, rather than private, actors).

<sup>108</sup> Brief for League of Oregon Cities as Amicus Curiae Supporting Petitioner at 4, *City of Boise v. Martin*, No. 19-247 (Sept. 25, 2019).

percent of emergency shelter beds nationwide in 2017.<sup>109</sup> The Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion found that in the same year, almost sixty percent of emergency shelter beds in eleven cities were provided by faith-based organizations.<sup>110</sup> Many religious shelters in the United States are known as gospel rescue missions, which integrate Christian teaching into the provision of shelter and services.<sup>111</sup> The Citygate Network, formerly known as the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions, has approximately three hundred members throughout North America that are “havens of hope for all who enter.”<sup>112</sup> Citygate reports that its member organizations provide more than twenty million nights of shelter and housing and sixty-six million meals each year.<sup>113</sup>

This Note does not posit that shelters operated by religious organizations should not exist, nor that they should necessarily water down the religious components of their shelter services. Public shelters leave gaps that can only be filled by religious shelters. Some individuals need and want spiritual support to reintroduce stability into their lives,<sup>114</sup> and desire a spiritual component to shelter services.<sup>115</sup> There is also a crucial role for religious shelters that specifically serve members of non-Christian faiths.<sup>116</sup> Beyond spiritual reasons, some individ-

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<sup>109</sup> NAT'L ALL. TO END HOMELESSNESS, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: FUNDAMENTAL PARTNERS IN ENDING HOMELESSNESS 1 (2017) [hereinafter FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS].

<sup>110</sup> BYRON JOHNSON, WILLIAM H. WUBBENHORST & ALFREDA ALVAREZ, BAYLOR INST. FOR STUDIES OF RELIGION, ASSESSING THE FAITH-BASED RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA: FINDINGS FROM ELEVEN CITIES 20 (2017).

<sup>111</sup> Hackworth, *supra* note 107, at 755–56; *see, e.g., About*, CITYGATE NETWORK, <https://www.citygatenetwork.org/agrm/About.asp> (last visited May 20, 2020).

<sup>112</sup> CITYGATE NETWORK, *supra* note 111.

<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> *See, e.g., Sarah L. DeWard & Angela M. Moe, “Like a Prison!”: Homeless Women’s Narratives of Surviving Shelter*, 37 J. SOC. & SOC. WELFARE 115, 126 (2010) (“Adhering strongly to faith gave spiritual adapters much needed hope and comfort, mitigating feelings of desperation, confusion and loneliness. By purposefully adapting their circumstances to a larger spiritual lesson and purpose, they were able to reframe their shelter experience.”).

<sup>115</sup> The Association of Gospel Rescue Missions (now the Citygate Network) found in its most recent survey of its member organizations that seventy-nine percent of individuals served “prefer spiritual emphasis in services.” ASS’N GOSPEL RESCUE MISSIONS, AGRM’S 2016 SNAPSHOT SURVEY HOMELESS STATISTICAL COMPARISON (2016), <http://www.agrm.org/images/agrm/Documents/Snapshot/2016/2016%20yearly%20comparison%20.pdf>. This figure has remained consistent since 2012. *Id.*; *see also* Hackworth, *supra* note 107, at 755–56 (describing gospel rescue missions as existing in every major city to provide meals and shelter for the homeless and as historically rejecting government funding).

<sup>116</sup> *See* FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, *supra* note 109, at 8 (noting the importance of a Muslim-based Housing First provider as one of only a handful of its kind). Since Christian organizations prominently run homeless shelters in the United States, this Note largely references Christian-affiliated shelters when discussing faith-based organizations. *See supra* notes 107–13 and accompanying text.

uals prefer the quality of care in private religious shelters over public shelters.<sup>117</sup> Some religious shelters also accept individuals who are denied admission into public shelters for past criminal convictions<sup>118</sup> or who have substance use disorders.<sup>119</sup> Religious organizations have even violated city codes<sup>120</sup> and have gone to court to exercise their religious duty to help the poor.<sup>121</sup>

But at the same time, the practices of the River of Life shelter in *Martin*—requiring attendance at chapel before meals and participation in religious programs to continue staying at the shelter—are hardly uncommon.<sup>122</sup> When shelters are not funded by any government entity, they are often exempt from government oversight.<sup>123</sup> At least one study shows that the most “openly sectarian” organizations are the least likely to request government funding.<sup>124</sup> For example, Chicago’s largest homeless shelter is exempt from government over-

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<sup>117</sup> One study found through interviews that “many of the homeless in New York City prefer rescue missions over government-run shelters because they are safer and quieter.” Hackworth, *supra* note 107, at 757.

<sup>118</sup> *Id.* at 758–59.

<sup>119</sup> More than half of the organizations surveyed in the National Alliance to End Homelessness’s study used a Housing First approach to remove barriers to shelters. FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, *supra* note 109, at 6. As discussed in Section III.B, *infra*, the Housing First model views housing as a treatment in itself and does not require sobriety before receiving services. *Housing First*, NAT’L ALL. TO END HOMELESSNESS (APR. 20, 2016), <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first> [hereinafter *Housing First*].

<sup>120</sup> See, e.g., Hayat Norimine & Obed Manuel, *Dallas’ Ban on Churches Sheltering Homeless Won’t Be Lifted in Time for Winter*, DALL. MORNING NEWS (Nov. 11, 2019, 1:15 PM), <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/2019/11/11/dallas-ban-on-churches-sheltering-homeless-wont-be-lifted-in-time-for-winter> (describing churches and religious organizations opening their doors to shelter people in violation of city zoning restrictions).

<sup>121</sup> See *infra* notes 158–62 and accompanying text; see also Susan L. Goldberg, *Gimme Shelter: Religious Provision of Shelter to the Homeless as a Protected Use Under Zoning Laws*, 30 WASH. U. J. URB. & CONTEMP. L. 75, 76 (1986) (arguing that providing shelter to those in need is a religious use of church property protected by the Free Exercise Clause).

<sup>122</sup> See *supra* note 114 and accompanying text.

<sup>123</sup> See Hackworth, *supra* note 107, at 756 (describing how some religious organizations “remain sceptical of the limitations that government [funding] places on their activities”); Diana B. Henriques, *As Exemptions Grow, Religion Outweighs Regulation*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 8, 2006), <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/08/business/08religious.html> (overviewing ways in which religious organizations, including homeless shelters, are exempt from government regulation); Anna Kim, *Chicago’s Largest Homeless Shelter Accused of Discriminating Against People with Disabilities, but Faces Little Oversight Because It’s a Church*, CHI. TRIBUNE (May 24, 2019), <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-met-pacific-garden-mission-oversight-20190520-story.html> (describing a Chicago shelter that does not receive public funds and is exempt from government oversight). When an organization directly receives HUD funding, it “may not engage in inherently religious activities” unless they are offered separately from the HUD-funded activities and participation in such activities is voluntary. *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Equal Treatment and the Faith-Based and Community Initiative*, HUD.GOV, [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/faith\\_based/faq](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/faith_based/faq) (last accessed Aug. 5, 2020).

<sup>124</sup> Hackworth, *supra* note 107, at 755.

sight and also from federal antidiscrimination laws as a religious organization.<sup>125</sup> This shelter requires attending religious services and states its mission is to “put prayer first.”<sup>126</sup>

It is difficult to discern impermissible religious coercion when so many shelters are run by religious groups, and when not all spiritual programming rises to the level of coercion in *Martin*. Organizations vary in how much religion is integrated into programming and whether participation in a religious activity is mandatory for receiving services.<sup>127</sup> The shelters at issue in *Martin* seem to fall on the more coercive end of the spectrum. They engaged in a variety of religious practices, such as having “Christian messaging on the shelter’s intake form and . . . Christian iconography on the shelter walls,” constituting an “overall religious atmosphere.”<sup>128</sup> But the shelters’ additional program requirements were what made the Establishment Clause violation seem clear. In order to stay at the shelters for more than seventeen days, the plaintiffs had to enroll in a Discipleship Program—an “‘intensive, Christ-based residential recovery program’ of which ‘[r]eligious study is the very essence.’”<sup>129</sup> Participants in this program were allegedly not allowed to attend another local Catholic program “because it’s . . . a different sect.”<sup>130</sup> There was also evidence that one plaintiff was required to attend chapel before eating dinner at the shelter.<sup>131</sup> So, even though plaintiffs were not denied access to shelter based on lack of space, they were practically denied based on their religious beliefs. This amounted to a genuine issue of material fact as to whether homeless individuals face a credible risk of prosecution when shelter is inaccessible for reasons other than capacity.<sup>132</sup> As discussed below, identifying religious coercion in shelters is a highly individualized inquiry, as it often is in other contexts.<sup>133</sup>

### *B. Identifying Religious Coercion in Shelters Post-Martin*

This Note does not dispute that many religiously affiliated shelters play a vital role in providing services and shelter to homeless indi-

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<sup>125</sup> See Kim, *supra* note 123.

<sup>126</sup> *Id.* (“[A]dvocates say people who don’t have access to basic necessities aren’t in much of a position to make choices, especially when city-funded shelters are frequently full.”).

<sup>127</sup> See Hackworth, *supra* note 107, at 758–59.

<sup>128</sup> *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F.3d 1031, 1041 (9th Cir. 2018), *amended by* 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019) (en banc).

<sup>129</sup> *Id.* at 1037 (alteration in original).

<sup>130</sup> *Id.* at 1041 (alteration in original).

<sup>131</sup> *Id.*

<sup>132</sup> *Id.* at 1041–42.

<sup>133</sup> See *infra* notes 148–49 and accompanying text.

viduals.<sup>134</sup> In fact, there is a history of churches and religious organizations successfully claiming that local government restrictions on providing services to homeless individuals impermissibly suppress their expression of faith.<sup>135</sup> Not only do faith groups provide necessary services and shelter to people experiencing homelessness, but they have a constitutional right to do so.<sup>136</sup>

But in light of the increasing criminalization of homelessness and the government's expansive reliance on religious shelters,<sup>137</sup> it is quite likely that homeless individuals will have to choose between being arrested or staying at a shelter where they feel coerced into religious activity. Under the Establishment Clause, the government cannot coerce individuals to participate in religious programs,<sup>138</sup> regardless of how effective those programs are at achieving their desired outcomes.<sup>139</sup>

In the context of the criminal justice system, courts have mainly explored Establishment Clause issues in drug and alcohol treatment programs offered in prisons as the only alternative to harsher criminal penalties.<sup>140</sup> Most of these programs are connected in some way to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Even though AA and NA are not formally religious programs,<sup>141</sup> courts have found Establishment Clause violations where the government

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<sup>134</sup> See *supra* notes 114–21 and accompanying text.

<sup>135</sup> See *infra* note 157 and accompanying text.

<sup>136</sup> See *infra* Section II.C.

<sup>137</sup> See FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, *supra* note 109, at 1 (noting that faith-based organizations provide about thirty percent of emergency shelter beds nationally); Hackworth, *supra* note 107, at 753–57 (stating that government funding of religious charities has become more acceptable over time and that such organizations have “filled the vacuum” created by cutbacks to the welfare state).

<sup>138</sup> See *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 592 (1992) (“A state-created orthodoxy puts at grave risk that freedom of belief and conscience which are the sole assurance that religious faith is real, not imposed.”); *W. Va. State Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943) (“If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in . . . religion . . . or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.”).

<sup>139</sup> See *Inouye v. Kemna*, 504 F.3d 705, 714 & n.10 (9th Cir. 2007) (finding compelled participation in religion-based drug programs to be unconstitutional, even where the programs seemed fairly effective).

<sup>140</sup> See, e.g., *Kerr v. Farrey*, 95 F.3d 472, 480 (7th Cir. 1996) (comparing the lack of other options for required rehabilitation in *Warner v. Orange Cty. Dep't of Probation*, 870 F. Supp. 69 (S.D.N.Y. 1994), *aff'd*, 173 F.3d 120 (2d Cir. 1999), to the variety of options available in addition to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in *O'Connor v. California*, 855 F. Supp. 303 (C.D. Cal. 1994)).

<sup>141</sup> In determining whether AA “should be considered ‘religion or its exercise,’” the *Warner* court noted that at first glance, AA may not seem like a religious program. 870 F. Supp. at 72. However, factual findings led the court to conclude “that the A.A. meetings plaintiff attended were the *functional equivalent* of religious exercise.” *Id.* (emphasis added).

compels participation in them due to their religious “components.”<sup>142</sup> These courts assumed that the “God” referenced in the twelve steps was a monotheistic deity that was “fundamentally based on a religious concept of a Higher Power.”<sup>143</sup> The AA and NA cases reveal that determining whether a program has substantial religious components is a highly factual inquiry. It seems that the Establishment Clause inquiry turns on the plaintiff’s particular experience with the AA/NA program. Courts have found a violation where the plaintiff’s participation in AA and/or NA is a condition of parole,<sup>144</sup> probation,<sup>145</sup> or expanded visitation rights.<sup>146</sup>

The *Martin* court was the first federal appellate court to discuss the Establishment Clause in the homeless shelter context.<sup>147</sup> The court clearly believed the requirement to enter the Discipleship Program to stay at the shelter amounted to religious coercion. But it is less clear whether the “overall religious atmosphere” of the shelter alone would rise to impermissible coercion.<sup>148</sup> In the NA context, the Ninth Circuit has found that the mere recitation of “the words ‘under God’ in the Pledge of Allegiance, or other incidental references,” usually do not amount to coercion.<sup>149</sup>

But even if a shelter does not require individuals to enter a specific program like the Discipleship Program, what should courts make of more “passive” acts such as sitting through a prayer or chapel service? In *Lee v. Weisman*, the Supreme Court found that requiring high school students to sit through prayers and religious ceremonies at a graduation violated the Establishment Clause, as it impermissibly

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<sup>142</sup> *Inouye*, 504 F.3d at 714 n.9.

<sup>143</sup> *Kerr*, 95 F.3d at 480; *see also Warner*, 870 F. Supp. at 72 (citing that plaintiff was told at AA meetings that he could not overcome his addiction without letting God into his life and that most meetings closed with a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer). The twelve steps of AA require participants to acknowledge that “a [greater] Power [can] restore [them] to sanity,” to “turn [their] will and . . . lives over to the care of God,” to admit wrongs to God, and to seek “through prayer and meditation to improve [their] conscious contact with God.” ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (2016), [https://www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/smf-121\\_en.pdf](https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/smf-121_en.pdf). The twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous are identical but replace “alcohol” with “addiction.” NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS, INSTITUTIONAL GROUP GUIDE 2 (1998), <https://www.na.org/admin/include/spaw2/uploads/pdf/handbooks/IGG.pdf>.

<sup>144</sup> *See Inouye*, 504 F.3d at 709–10.

<sup>145</sup> *See, e.g., Warner*, 870 F. Supp. at 70, 73 (finding an Establishment Clause violation where atheist plaintiff’s participation in AA was a probationary obligation).

<sup>146</sup> *Griffin v. Coughlin*, 673 N.E.2d 98, 99 (N.Y. 1996) (holding that participation in a program modeled after the religious components of AA cannot be a condition for an atheist or agnostic inmate to qualify for expanded family visitation rights).

<sup>147</sup> *See supra* notes 94–99 and accompanying text.

<sup>148</sup> *Id.*

<sup>149</sup> *Kerr v. Farrey*, 95 F.3d 472, 480 (7th Cir. 1996).



imposed peer pressure on vulnerable minors.<sup>150</sup> Though not every state-imposed religious message that causes offense is a violation,<sup>151</sup> it may be impermissible to put pressure on vulnerable people to conform to a religious message, even when that pressure is not a legal penalty.<sup>152</sup>

If the existence of coercion depends on the degree of choice and the nature of the pressure, then even a prayer during a meal at a homeless shelter may be coercion when the alternative is sleeping outside at risk of prosecution. That kind of pressure is much more severe than the pressure contemplated in the high school prayer cases. Therefore, even in cases where persons experiencing homelessness are not required to affirmatively participate in a religious training program or attend a church service, even passively sitting through a prayer might be considered coercion. Again, this becomes an individualized inquiry.<sup>153</sup> Whether a violation exists depends on the retaliation a homeless person might fear in the specific context. Does the person fear losing a meal and a bed as a result of not sitting through the prayer? The answer may more often than not be yes, especially if the person's alternative is to sleep outside at the risk of criminal prosecution.

### C. *The Need to Overturn Criminalization Measures to Protect the Free Exercise of Religion*

Some might argue that coercion in religious shelters should be addressed through greater government regulation. But this type of oversight triggers issues related to another First Amendment provision—the Free Exercise Clause.<sup>154</sup> Even in cases where the government seeks to *expand* the population served by the religious

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<sup>150</sup> 505 U.S. 577, 592–93 (1992).

<sup>151</sup> *Id.* at 597.

<sup>152</sup> *See id.* at 595 (stating that high school students did not reasonably have a choice to skip the religious ceremony intertwined in their high school graduation); *cf.* *Tanford v. Brand*, 104 F.3d 982, 985–86 (7th Cir. 1997) (finding no constitutional violation where college students can leave the prayer portion of a graduation ceremony without much embarrassment).

<sup>153</sup> *See* Rex Ahdar, *Regulating Religious Coercion*, 8 STAN. J. C.R. & C.L. 215, 240 (2012) (suggesting a more subjective, individualized assessment in religious coercion cases because they often involve members of religious minorities or dissenters).

<sup>154</sup> U.S. CONST. amend. I (“Congress shall make no law . . . prohibiting the free exercise [of religion] . . .”). The tension here between the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses of the First Amendment is a recurring theme. *See* *Cutter v. Wilkinson*, 544 U.S. 709, 719 (2005) (“[T]he two Clauses . . . often exert conflicting pressures.”); Derek H. Davis, *Resolving Not to Resolve the Tension Between the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses*, 38 J. CHURCH & ST. 245 (1996) (discussing the clash between the two Clauses).

organization, the organization can still argue that the government is impermissibly suppressing religious expression.

Privately funded shelters, such as religious shelters, have provided and will continue to provide crucial services to individuals experiencing homelessness. But these shelters cannot be the primary means of filling gaps in this nation's social safety net. Moreover, the government's reliance on religious shelters is problematic when it penalizes homeless people for sleeping outside instead of staying in one of these shelters. Even if a shelter does not receive any government funding, Establishment Clause issues arise when the government criminalizes the decision to sleep outside rather than entering a religious shelter.<sup>155</sup> Municipal governments should not force individuals to make this choice between criminal punishment and religious participation. Decriminalization would not only protect the constitutional rights of individuals experiencing homelessness, but would also protect private religious organizations from the imposition of requirements as a result of state entanglement.<sup>156</sup>

Therefore, it is also in the best interest of religious institutions for governments to end the criminalization of homelessness. If governments continue to use penal measures to address homelessness while still relying heavily on religious organizations to provide shelter beds, governments may try to impose regulations on these organizations in order to avoid an Establishment Clause violation. But by increasing oversight of religious shelters, governments may in turn violate the Free Exercise Clause.<sup>157</sup> Organizations may believe that integrating prayer or religious services into their provision of services is a religious mandate that would be unconstitutionally suppressed by greater government oversight.

Historically, the government has targeted religious organizations in order to indirectly regulate individuals experiencing homelessness.

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<sup>155</sup> See *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F.3d 1031, 1040–42 (9th Cir. 2018), *amended by* 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019) (en banc).

<sup>156</sup> See *infra* notes 157–62 and accompanying text.

<sup>157</sup> See *infra* notes 158–61 and accompanying text. Some organizations refused to accept food from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2016 after it published a rule prohibiting recipient organizations from mandating homeless persons' participation in religious activities. Christian Alexandersen, *No Prayer, No Meal: Shelters Turning Away Government Food Due to New Worship Rules*, PENN LIVE (Oct. 26, 2016), [https://www.pennlive.com/news/2016/10/no\\_prayer\\_no\\_food\\_shelters\\_tur.html](https://www.pennlive.com/news/2016/10/no_prayer_no_food_shelters_tur.html). Though the organizations did not formally challenge the government's attempt to regulate religious practices in these shelters, this is an example of separation of church and state concerns in the regulation of religious shelters. One of the organizations that refused USDA assistance in response to the rule did not even require individuals to pray or attend religious services; it simply refused assistance on the principle that the government should not regulate "matters of faith." *Id.* (quoting Bethesda Mission Executive Director Chuck Wingate).

Some of these organizations argued in court that the government was impermissibly regulating their religious expression under the Free Exercise Clause.<sup>158</sup> Some of these challenges involved regulations that churches alleged restricted their right to serve homeless individuals, such as permit schemes for serving food in parks,<sup>159</sup> building permits,<sup>160</sup> and zoning restrictions.<sup>161</sup> At least one church has also sued a city for confiscating the property of homeless individuals who were invited to sleep on the church property.<sup>162</sup>

Religious organizations should be able to freely exercise their religious tenets by serving and sheltering the poor,<sup>163</sup> but some of these organizations may also believe it is their right to integrate religious programming into the provision of services as the exercise of their religious mandate to evangelize. Section II.B demonstrated that while some shelters engage in objectively coercive practices, regardless of whether the Establishment Clause is invoked by the government's involvement, it is not easy to distinguish when a religious shelter becomes coercive.<sup>164</sup> So, when the government does get involved by forcing individuals to enter religious shelters under threat of arrest, the inquiry becomes even more complicated. The Establishment Clause issue highlighted in *Martin* underscores just one of many reasons that criminalization measures have questionable benefits and tremendous costs.<sup>165</sup> It also illustrates the importance of individualized inquiries into whether an individual experiencing homelessness had a meaningful choice when forced to choose between

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<sup>158</sup> See generally Goldberg, *supra* note 121, at 84–87 (summarizing the Judeo-Christian obligation to provide charity and shelter the homeless).

<sup>159</sup> *First Vagabonds Church of God v. City of Orlando*, 610 F.3d 1274, 1285–86 (11th Cir. 2010) (finding no Free Exercise Clause violation where an ordinance as applied to a church required it to obtain permits for serving meals to homeless individuals in city parks), *reinstated in part by* 638 F.3d 756 (11th Cir. 2011); see also *Big Hart Ministries Ass'n v. City of Dallas*, No. 3:07-CV-0216-P, 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 128443, at \*8–9 (N.D. Tex. Nov. 4, 2011) (involving a religious organization's violations of a food safety ordinance while serving homeless individuals).

<sup>160</sup> *Family Life Church v. City of Elgin*, 561 F. Supp. 2d 978, 986–88 (N.D. Ill. 2008).

<sup>161</sup> *Stuart Circle Par. v. Bd. of Zoning Appeals*, 946 F. Supp. 1225, 1236 (E.D. Va. 1996) (holding that zoning restrictions unconstitutionally prevented churches from exercising a “central tenet” of their religion by feeding the poor); Brief for Petitioner at 5, *Pac. Beach United Methodist Church v. City of San Diego*, 2008 WL 7257242 (S.D. Cal. Jan. 11, 2008) (No. 3:07-cv-02305-LAB-NLS) (asserting that a zoning ordinance prohibiting the operation of “homeless day centers” in residential areas impermissibly restrained plaintiff's religious exercise); Sarah Ritter, *Citing Freedom of Religion, JoCo Church Sues City for Not Letting It Shelter Homeless*, KAN. CITY STAR (Nov. 26, 2019, 2:36 PM), <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article237787869.html>.

<sup>162</sup> *Fifth Ave. Presbyterian Church v. City of New York*, 177 F. App'x 198 (2d Cir. 2006).

<sup>163</sup> See *supra* note 153 and accompanying text.

<sup>164</sup> See *supra* Section II.B.

<sup>165</sup> See *infra* Part IV.

staying in shelter and illegally sleeping outside. Part IV later argues that courts should make an individualized inquiry when assessing the constitutionality of criminalization ordinances in light of the many other functional barriers to shelter that are first discussed in Part III.

### III

#### THE LACK OF CHOICE FOR INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS—EVEN WHEN SHELTER IS “AVAILABLE”

Though *Martin* was a victory for advocates, it was only a small step in combatting the criminalization of homelessness. Even if there are available beds in local shelters that do not involve religious coercion, those shelters are not necessarily the viable alternative Judge Berzon described.<sup>166</sup> The next step in protecting the rights of homeless individuals is to ensure that courts and government officials understand when shelter is not *practically* available even when it is *technically* available, beyond the religious coercion context in *Martin*. To be sure, indoor emergency shelters should always be provided as an option, as they can provide shelter from harsh weather conditions,<sup>167</sup> connect individuals to services,<sup>168</sup> and shield vulnerable populations such as domestic violence victims and children.<sup>169</sup> This Note does not seek to diminish the many benefits that shelters can provide to people experiencing homelessness. But the mere availability of shelter beds does not make criminalization laws any less cruel.

*Martin* opened a door for courts to consider more than the mere technical availability of shelter beds, no matter what type of shelter these beds are in. But *Martin* only contemplates situations where there are no beds available in local shelters or where the only available beds are in a shelter that imposes coercive religious requirements. Since *Martin*, several lower courts have not found Eighth Amendment violations in cases brought by homeless advocates.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> See Rankin, *supra* note 8, at 124–25 (“[M]any cities lack sufficient shelter, not only due to an insufficient number of beds, but also due to the functional inaccessibility of existing shelter.”). For an overview of the ways in which shelter may be inaccessible to homeless persons, see generally SKINNER, *supra* note 1.

<sup>167</sup> Homeless individuals are “particularly vulnerable” to suffer from hypo or hyperthermia due to prolonged exposure to extreme weather conditions. Brodie Ramin & Tomislav Svoda, *Health of the Homeless and Climate Change*, 86 J. URB. HEALTH 654, 655–56 (2009).

<sup>168</sup> *Housing and Shelter*, SUBSTANCE ABUSE & MENTAL HEALTH SERVS. ADMIN., <https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/housing-shelter> (last visited May 21, 2020).

<sup>169</sup> *Safe Horizon Domestic Violence Shelters*, SAFE HORIZONS, <https://www.safehorizon.org/domestic-violence-shelters> (last visited May 21, 2020).

<sup>170</sup> See *infra* notes 224–29 and accompanying text.

Part of this may be due to the increasing frequency of homeless encampment sweeps after *Martin* and other measures that do not involve enacting a formal law.<sup>171</sup>

Beyond the specific Establishment Clause issue presented in *Martin*, this Part provides a broader overview of the reasons a person might not be able to stay in a shelter even if there are beds available. Because the presence of an Eighth Amendment violation turns on whether shelter is “practically available,”<sup>172</sup> this Part seeks to emphasize other factors courts should consider when making this determination. Some of these examples also implicate constitutional or statutory obligations similar to the Establishment Clause issue triggered in *Martin*.

### A. *Individuals with Disabilities and Medical Conditions*

Individuals may not have the choice to stay in a shelter if it does not accommodate their disabilities or would exacerbate their health problems.<sup>173</sup> Shelters are often inaccessible to individuals with disabilities,<sup>174</sup> but are still considered a viable alternative by police when they arrest individuals with disabilities for sleeping outside.<sup>175</sup> The

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<sup>171</sup> See HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 40–41 (spotlighting constructive alternative policies to homelessness, including those without formal legislation); NAT’L LAW CTR. ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY, TENT CITY, USA: THE GROWTH OF AMERICA’S HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS AND HOW COMMUNITIES ARE RESPONDING 21 (2017) [hereinafter TENT CITY] (citing a 1342% increase in the number of homeless encampments reported in the last decade); Rankin, *supra* note 32, at 30–34 (detailing the increased frequency of encampment sweeps post *Martin*); *infra* notes 226–29 and accompanying text.

<sup>172</sup> *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F.3d 1031, 1049 (9th Cir. 2018), *amended by* 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019) (en banc).

<sup>173</sup> For an overview of how criminalization measures exacerbate homeless individuals’ medical conditions, see HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 67–70.

<sup>174</sup> See, e.g., *Notice of Proposed Settlement of Class Action Concerning Access to Shelter for Individuals with Disabilities in the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) Shelter System*, N.Y.C. DEP’T OF HOMELESS SERVS. (June 27, 2017), <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/notice-of-butler-settlement-english.pdf> (showing that New York City’s Department of Homeless Services would make reasonable accommodations to increase availability in shelters for people with disabilities, but only after a class action was brought against the City); Kim, *supra* note 123 (describing “unclear” rules about whether only “ambulatory” individuals are permitted at the largest shelter in Chicago); Nikita Stewart, *As Shelter Population Surges, Housing for Disabled Comes Up Short*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 16, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/17/nyregion/as-residents-surge-in-new-york-shelters-housing-for-disabled-comes-up-short.html> (illustrating the inaccessibility of many shelters for disabled individuals experiencing homelessness in New York City).

<sup>175</sup> See *Glover v. City of Laguna Beach*, No. SACV 15-01332 AG (DFMx), 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 167501, at \*5 (C.D. Cal. June 23, 2017) (“Plaintiffs argue that disabled, homeless people are ‘left with the difficult choice of subjecting themselves to the intolerable conditions of the [emergency shelter], or intolerable treatment by [police]’ under Defendants’ homelessness policy.”).

criminalization of homeless people with disabilities may be easier to challenge under the Fair Housing Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act,<sup>176</sup> but cases where homeless individuals have health concerns that do not formally qualify as a disability may be more difficult.

Shelters can prompt health problems or worsen existing ones. To start, individuals experiencing homelessness tend to have compromised immune systems, which place them at a higher risk of contracting infectious diseases.<sup>177</sup> Infectious diseases such as tuberculosis are more likely to be transmitted in overcrowded shelters.<sup>178</sup> Considering that homeless individuals face many more health risks than the general population,<sup>179</sup> criminalization measures that force people to stay in a shelter may prevent them from a more life-sustaining alternative, which may be sleeping outdoors in the absence of permanent housing.

Another consideration for decisionmakers when enacting and enforcing criminalization ordinances is the need for homeless individuals to rest, both during the day and at night. Otherwise healthy individuals can develop a variety of health problems due to lack of sleep.<sup>180</sup> A study of homeless individuals with chronic pain in Toronto showed that poor sleeping conditions, stress of shelter life, lack of safe storage mechanisms for medications, and inability to rest during the

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<sup>176</sup> The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination nationwide on the basis of disability, including in shelters. See Daniel Weinberg, *The Housing Rights of Homeless Persons with Disabilities*, COOPER SQUARE COMMITTEE (Aug. 5, 2010), <https://coopersquare.org/resources/resources-for-tenants-with-disabilities/homeless>. The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in places of public accommodation, which would also include emergency shelters. *Id.*

<sup>177</sup> Ramin & Svoboda, *supra* note 167, at 657–58. Homeless persons' increased susceptibility to disease became even more evident during the COVID-19 outbreak. CULHANE ET AL., *supra* note 39, at 2–3; see also *supra* note 39 and accompanying text (summarizing the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the homeless population).

<sup>178</sup> Michelle Moffa, Ryan Cronk, Donald Fejfar, Sarah Dancausse, Leslie Acosta Padilla & Jamie Bartram, *A Systematic Scoping Review of Environmental Health Conditions and Hygiene Behaviors in Homeless Shelters*, 222 INT'L J. HYGIENE & ENVTL. HEALTH 335, 342 (2019).

<sup>179</sup> For example, the average estimated life expectancy of chronically homeless individuals is forty-two to fifty-two years. Rebecca S. Bernstein, Linda N. Meurer, Ellen J. Plumb & Jeffrey L. Jackson, *Diabetes and Hypertension Prevalence in Homeless Adults in the United States: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*, 105 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH e46, e46 (2015). Moreover, homeless adults are up to five times more likely to be admitted to the hospital than the general population. *Id.* at e47.

<sup>180</sup> See, e.g., *Sleep Deprivation Leads to Schizophrenia-Like Symptoms in Healthy Adults, Study*, U. HERALD (July 9, 2014, 6:34 AM), <https://www.universityherald.com/articles/10309/20140709/sleep-schizophrenia-symptoms-healthy-adults-bonn-germany.htm> (describing the study's findings on the links between sleep deprivation and psychosis, light sensitivity, and severe attention deficits).

day were the greatest barriers to pain management.<sup>181</sup> For individuals experiencing homelessness, especially those with preexisting medical conditions, getting adequate sleep is among the greatest challenges.

Many shelters are only open at nighttime and require people to leave early in the morning.<sup>182</sup> So even those who sleep in shelters at night may need to rest under the shade of a tent or in their car during the day, especially if they have trouble sleeping in crowded shelters or need to rest for medical reasons.<sup>183</sup> Both during the day and at night, individuals should not be criminalized for simply resting or sitting in public.

Several courts reviewing criminalization ordinances have emphasized the life-sustaining act of sleep when viewing homelessness as a status similar to a medical condition.<sup>184</sup> This Note focuses on the example of individuals with disabilities and health conditions to demonstrate a particularly urgent situation in which it is cruel and unusual to punish someone for resting outside. Decisionmakers should consider how individuals with disabilities and other health conditions may truly have no choice but to rest outdoors, even if local shelters technically have space.

### *B. Individuals with Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders*

Furthermore, overcrowded and noisy shelters may not be a feasible option for those with mental health conditions or substance use disorders.<sup>185</sup> HUD reports that in 2018, approximately twenty percent

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<sup>181</sup> Stephen W. Hwang, Emma Wilkins, Catharine Chambers, Eileen Estrabillo, Jon Berends & Anna MacDonald, *Chronic Pain Among Homeless Persons: Characteristics, Treatment, and Barriers to Management*, 12 BMC FAM. PRAC. 6 (2011).

<sup>182</sup> See Hanna Brooks Olsen, *Homelessness and the Impossibility of a Good Night's Sleep*, ATLANTIC (Aug. 14, 2014), <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/08/homelessness-and-the-impossibility-of-a-good-nights-sleep/375671>.

<sup>183</sup> *Id.*

<sup>184</sup> See *supra* notes 76–81 and accompanying text; see also *infra* note 195 and accompanying text. It is less clear how courts treat ordinances that criminalize camping, such as the act of setting up a tent or tarp, as opposed to sleeping. Kieschnick, *supra* note 10, at 1604–05 (noting that treating a homeless person's act of setting up a tent as conduct and sleeping as status "would mean a person experiencing homelessness during a hurricane or harsh winter could sleep outside on the bare ground but not under a tarp"). But Hannah Kieschnick notes how this distinction should not obviate an Eighth Amendment violation for any individual. *Id.* at 1605.

<sup>185</sup> This Section groups together the discussion of mental health and substance use because much of the existing literature and treatment models group these categories of challenges facing individuals experiencing homelessness. See NAT'L COAL. FOR THE HOMELESS, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND HOMELESSNESS 2 (2009) (describing the co-occurrence of substance abuse and mental illness among individuals experiencing homelessness). Though this Section discusses these conditions together, many homeless individuals may experience one condition without the other.

of the homeless population had a severe mental illness.<sup>186</sup> Individuals experiencing homelessness witness and experience violence at higher rates than the general population, which leads to further trauma.<sup>187</sup> Individuals prone to outbursts may be kicked out of shelters for being a disturbance to others.<sup>188</sup> Individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder are often unable to stay in shelters due to the nature of their condition.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, many mental health disorders also involve lower-quality sleep or other sleep disorders that are exacerbated by shelter conditions.<sup>190</sup> For individuals with mental illness, shelter may not be available because of requirements or complaints from other shelter residents. But sometimes, these individuals may choose to not go to shelter because they know they cannot get adequate rest there, or because staying in a shelter will exacerbate their mental health conditions.<sup>191</sup> Sleeping around strangers would make anyone anxious, especially those with preexisting mental illness.<sup>192</sup> Government actors should take this into consideration before criminalizing the act of sleeping or being outdoors while homeless.

Shelters may also have requirements barring those who use substances, even in extreme weather conditions.<sup>193</sup> But according to the 2018 HUD annual point in time count, approximately fifteen percent of homeless persons were reported to have chronic substance use dis-

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<sup>186</sup> U.S. DEP'T OF HOUS. & URBAN DEV., HUD 2018 CONTINUUM OF CARE HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS HOMELESS POPULATIONS AND SUBPOPULATIONS (2018) [hereinafter 2018 HUD PIT COUNT] (listing the results from HUD's annual point in time (PIT) count). Other studies report up to thirty to forty percent. Adam M. Lippert & Barrett A. Lee, *Stress, Coping, and Mental Health Differences Among Homeless People*, 85 SOC. INQUIRY 343, 344 (2015).

<sup>187</sup> See Molly Meibresse, Lauren Brinkley-Rubinstein, Amy Grassette, Joseph Benson, Carol Hall, Reginald Hamilton, Marianne Malott & Darlene Jenkins, *Exploring the Experiences of Violence Among Individuals Who Are Homeless Using a Consumer-Led Approach*, 29 VIOLENCE & VICTIMS 122, 125–26 (2014) (stating that sixty-two percent of homeless respondents reported witnessing an attack and forty-nine percent reported being the victim of an attack).

<sup>188</sup> See Susie Steimle, *Mother and Son Kicked Out of Homeless Shelter for Mental Health Outburst*, KPIX (Nov. 13, 2019, 11:21 PM), <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2019/11/13/mother-and-son-kicked-out-of-homeless-shelter-for-mental-health-outburst>.

<sup>189</sup> HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 34.

<sup>190</sup> See generally Andrew D. Krystal, *Psychiatric Disorders and Sleep*, 30 NEUROLOGIC CLINICS 1389 (2012) (describing the relationship between sleep deprivation and various psychiatric conditions).

<sup>191</sup> HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 70 (“[P]eople with schizophrenia experience paranoia particularly in large groups of people, and paranoia, anxiety, hallucinations, and hypervigilance related to post-traumatic stress disorder may make it difficult for people to cope with the noisy and crowded conditions in shelters.”).

<sup>192</sup> See *id.* (noting the stressful environment of shelters).

<sup>193</sup> See SKINNER, *supra* note 1, at 19–23 (noting that “homeless individuals with substance abuse problems are frequently barred from emergency shelters, as many require sobriety to access their services”).



orders.<sup>194</sup> As *Robinson* stated, “addiction is . . . apparently an illness which may be contracted innocently or involuntarily.”<sup>195</sup> Just as the *Robinson* Court prohibited criminalizing addiction, courts should not allow cities to criminalize individuals for sleeping outside if existing shelters in that city bar individuals with substance use disorders.

Despite how difficult it is for individuals to combat substance use disorders, and the need for stable shelter to do so, that disorder may be the very reason they are denied shelter—either because of formal shelter requirements barring substance use, or because shelter is not a conducive environment to those with substance use disorder. The significant hurdles individuals face in shelter when dealing with substance use disorder led to the development of the Housing First approach.<sup>196</sup> This model is an alternative to shelter and prioritizes permanent housing before addressing individuals’ substance use issues (among other obstacles) under the belief that housing itself is a treatment.<sup>197</sup> There is evidence that Housing First treatment is more effective than treatment offered in conjunction with temporary housing (i.e. shelter).<sup>198</sup> Part of this may be due to the structure and control of a shelter environment, in contrast to the independence and privacy that comes with permanent housing.<sup>199</sup> The success of the Housing First model points to the shortcomings of temporary shelter for individuals with substance use disorder. Unfortunately, the permanent supportive housing needed for a Housing First model is limited in availability and takes time and money initially to develop,<sup>200</sup> though

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<sup>194</sup> 2018 HUD PIT COUNT, *supra* note 186.

<sup>195</sup> *Robinson v. California*, 370 U.S. 660, 667 (1962).

<sup>196</sup> *Housing First*, *supra* note 119.

<sup>197</sup> *Id.*

<sup>198</sup> See NAT’L ACADS. OF SCIS., ENG’G & MED., PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING: EVALUATING THE EVIDENCE FOR IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES AMONG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS 48–50 (2018) (reviewing multiple studies to conclude that “supportive housing improves the housing status of individuals suffering from homelessness, mental illness, and substance abuse”); Deborah K. Padgett, Victoria Stanhope, Ben F. Henwood & Ana Stefancic, *Substance Use Outcomes Among Homeless Clients with Serious Mental Illness: Comparing Housing First with Treatment First Programs*, 47 COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH J. 227 (2011) (finding that individuals in Housing First programs had lower rates of substance use and dropped out of the program less frequently than individuals in more traditional treatment first programs).

<sup>199</sup> See Deborah K. Padgett, Leyla Gulcur & Sam Tsemberis, *Housing First Services for People Who Are Homeless with Co-occurring Serious Mental Illness and Substance*, 16 RES. ON SOC. WORK PRAC. 74, 75 (2006) (describing the tradeoffs and difficulties facing individuals who are in temporary shelter with treatment models).

<sup>200</sup> AHAR 2019, *supra* note 2, at ii.

there is ample evidence that permanent supportive housing is ultimately much cheaper for cities than temporary shelters.<sup>201</sup>

### C. LGBT Individuals

LGBT discrimination is an incredibly significant barrier that courts should consider in determining the constitutionality of criminalization measures. For example, one survey found that seventy percent of transgender respondents who stayed in a shelter reported being mistreated because of their transgender status.<sup>202</sup> LGBT individuals also disproportionately make up the homeless youth population and are often unaccompanied by adults, making them especially vulnerable to unsheltered homelessness and the juvenile justice system.<sup>203</sup>

The recent Trump Administration proposal to add a HUD rule to allow shelters to turn away transgender individuals highlighted discrimination against transgender individuals on a national level.<sup>204</sup> This policy would only exacerbate existing barriers for transgender people to obtain housing and shelter. A transgender person is nearly four times less likely to own a home than a member of the general population.<sup>205</sup> One survey found that seventy percent of transgender respondents reported some form of mistreatment in a shelter in the past year due to their gender identity.<sup>206</sup> This mistreatment came in various forms, from being forced to dress as the wrong gender to continue staying at the shelter, being kicked out of a shelter after their trans-

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<sup>201</sup> NAT'L ACADS. OF SCIS., ENG'G & MED., *supra* note 198, at 58–80 (analyzing in great detail other studies on the cost effectiveness of permanent supportive housing); HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 86–87. There is actually evidence that in New York City, properties in close proximity to supportive housing increase in value compared to other properties in the same neighborhood. FURMAN CTR. FOR REAL ESTATE & URBAN POLICY, THE IMPACT OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING ON SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS: EVIDENCE FROM NEW YORK CITY 6–7 (2008). Housing First programs are increasingly the preferred method of housing homeless individuals with substance use disorder rather than temporary shelters. HUD reports that 144,000 more permanent supportive housing (PSH) beds were added in 2019. AHAR 2019, *supra* note 2, at 4. PSH programs can also serve individuals or families with disabilities, which is a requirement for federal funding for those programs. *Id.* at 80; *see also* NAT'L ACADS. OF SCIS., ENG'G & MED., *supra* note 198, at 44–48 (describing the physical health benefits of permanent supportive housing).

<sup>202</sup> SANDY E. JAMES, JODY L. HERMAN, SUSAN RANKIN, MARA KEISLING, LISA MOTTET & MA'AYAN ANAFI, NAT'L CTR. FOR TRANSGENDER EQUAL., THE REPORT OF THE 2015 U.S. TRANSGENDER SURVEY 13 (2016), <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>.

<sup>203</sup> *See infra* notes 209–14 and accompanying text.

<sup>204</sup> *See* Revised Requirements Under Community Planning and Development Housing Programs, 24 C.F.R. § 5 (proposed Spring 2019), <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eAgendaViewRule?pubId=201904&RIN=2506-AC53>.

<sup>205</sup> *See* JAMES ET AL., *supra* note 202, at 176.

<sup>206</sup> *Id.*

gender status was discovered, or being verbally, physically, and sexually attacked for being transgender.<sup>207</sup> Another survey of shelters found that only thirty percent were willing to house transgender women with other women, and thirteen percent said they would house transgender women in isolation or with other men.<sup>208</sup> When individuals are penalized for not staying in shelter that is deemed “available,” they may lack the ability to stay in such a shelter either because of the discrimination they will face if they enter the shelter or because the shelter may turn them away in the first place.

Furthermore, homeless youth are disproportionately LGBT compared to the general population.<sup>209</sup> LGBT youth also tend to experience homelessness for a longer time than their non-LGBT peers.<sup>210</sup> Many of them are homeless because they were rejected or abused by their family.<sup>211</sup> Many will end up in the juvenile justice system, and among youth entering the juvenile justice system, LGBT youth are twice as likely to have experienced homelessness.<sup>212</sup> LGBT youth frequently avoid shelters out of fear of being turned into the police, their family, or child services.<sup>213</sup> This is not an unfounded fear, as some shelters require youth to report to police before being admitted.<sup>214</sup> Thus, LGBT individuals face functional and formal barriers to shelter that further highlight the involuntariness of sleeping outside.

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<sup>207</sup> *Id.*

<sup>208</sup> CAITLIN ROONEY, LAURA E. DURSO & SHARITA GRUBERG, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS, DISCRIMINATION AGAINST TRANSGENDER WOMEN SEEKING ACCESS TO HOMELESS SHELTERS 2 (2016), <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/06113001/HomelessTransgender.pdf>.

<sup>209</sup> See ANDREW CRAY, KATIE MILLER & LAURA E. DURSO, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS, SEEKING SHELTER: THE EXPERIENCES AND UNMET NEEDS OF LGBT HOMELESS YOUTH 4–5 (2013) (stating that surveys show between nine to forty-five percent of homeless youth are LGBT).

<sup>210</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>211</sup> According to the Williams Institute, 46% of surveyed LGBT homeless youth ran away from home because of family rejection of sexual orientation or gender identity, 43% were forced out by their parents because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and 32% experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at home. LAURA E. DURSO & GARY J. GATES, WILLIAMS INST., SERVING OUR YOUTH: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY OF SERVICE PROVIDERS WORKING WITH LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH WHO ARE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF BECOMING HOMELESS 4 (2012).

<sup>212</sup> Angela Irvine, “*We’ve Had Three of Them*”: Addressing the Invisibility of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Gender Non-Conforming Youths in the Juvenile Justice System, 19 COLUM. J. GENDER & L. 675, 689 (2010).

<sup>213</sup> MICHAEL PERGAMIT, MICHELLE ERNST, JENNIFER BENOIT-BRYAN & JOEL KESSEL, NAT’L RUNAWAY SWITCHBOARD, WHY THEY RUN: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT AMERICA’S RUNAWAY YOUTH 14 (2010), [https://www.1800runaway.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Why\\_They\\_Run\\_Report.pdf](https://www.1800runaway.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Why_They_Run_Report.pdf).

<sup>214</sup> *Id.* at 12.

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These examples highlight just a few instances in which individuals experiencing homelessness lack meaningful choice in whether to sleep or camp outside, even if there are technically beds available in local shelters. In other instances, a shelter may accept an individual, but shelter policies or requirements may lead an individual to choose not to enter. In addition to the religious requirements at issue in *Martin*, individuals often have to separate from family<sup>215</sup> and pets<sup>216</sup> in order to enter. This Note urges courts to consider some of the other ways in which shelter may not be “practically available” to a person experiencing homelessness when determining the constitutionality of criminalization measures.

#### IV

#### THE COST OF CRIMINALIZATION

Criminalizing homelessness has clear moral and constitutional implications, but it also is incredibly costly. The ideal solution would be for cities to stop criminalizing homelessness. But given that criminalization is an increasingly popular municipal government response to homelessness,<sup>217</sup> it is also important that judges consider the lack of choices available to homeless individuals when assessing the constitutionality of criminalization measures. Furthermore, cities may have a political preference to litigate and be forced to overturn criminalization laws than to initiate the repeal themselves. Thus, Section IV.A first calls on courts to protect the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness by considering the various ways in which an alternative to sleeping in public may not be available. Then, Section IV.B argues why legislatures and city officials ultimately should end criminalization of homelessness as a practical matter.

##### A. *The Judicial Role in Ending Criminalization*

It is clear that in the wake of *Martin* cities feared that courts would overturn their criminalization laws, especially because of the Establishment Clause implications of cities’ reliance on religious shel-

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<sup>215</sup> Couples and families may have to separate if they are designated for a specific gender. Greg C. Cheyne, *Facially Discriminatory Admissions Policies in Homeless Shelters and the Fair Housing Act*, 2009 U. CHI. LEGAL F. 459, 462–70 (describing the prevalence and effect of facially discriminatory policies in homeless shelters).

<sup>216</sup> RUBY ALIMENT, HOMELESS RIGHTS ADVOCACY PROJECT, NO PETS ALLOWED: DISCRIMINATION, HOMELESSNESS, AND PET OWNERSHIP (Sara Rankin & Kaya Lurie eds., 2016) (summarizing the challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness who own pets).

<sup>217</sup> See *supra* notes 11–13 and accompanying text.

ters.<sup>218</sup> The thorny constitutional issues that arise from criminalizing homelessness when the only available shelter beds are in religious shelters were discussed in Part II, which also argues that cities worried about complying with *Martin* should simply repeal criminalization measures to avoid constitutional infirmities and costly litigation. But as discussed in Part III, there are many factual circumstances in which a homeless person may not have practical access to a shelter beyond religious coercion. This means that as criminalization measures are litigated after *Martin*, courts should make very particular factual inquiries into whether a homeless plaintiff was truly deprived of choice when they were punished for sleeping or resting in public space. Not only does this inquiry require assessing the gap between the number of homeless individuals and the number of available shelter beds,<sup>219</sup> but it also requires analysis of why even seemingly available beds may not be practically available to a plaintiff given their factual circumstances.

It is understandable that courts may not feel equipped to make this individualized determination. But when a constitutional right is implicated as it was in *Martin*, courts have greater institutional competence to strike down criminalization ordinances. And while it is in the purview of legislatures and city councils to address homelessness by providing more affordable housing and services, the reality is that governments have turned more to criminalization measures than to providing housing and services.<sup>220</sup> Thus, courts need sufficient understanding about the choices available to particular individuals bringing cases against local governments. Courts throughout the country, including the Supreme Court should it ever grant certiorari on this issue,<sup>221</sup> should reimagine what choice means to an individual experiencing homelessness. Homeless people do not necessarily have a meaningful choice to sleep in a shelter simply because beds are available at a shelter in the jurisdiction.

Some might argue against such an individualized inquiry and such a heavy reliance on the factual circumstances in each case.<sup>222</sup> While this is understandable, the reality is that courts in these cases already

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<sup>218</sup> See Brief for League of Oregon Cities, *supra* note 108, at 4 (expressing concern that most shelters in the Ninth Circuit would be impermissibly religious in nature after *Martin*).

<sup>219</sup> See *supra* note 94.

<sup>220</sup> See *supra* notes 11–13 and accompanying text.

<sup>221</sup> See *supra* notes 32–33.

<sup>222</sup> See Kieschnick, *supra* note 10, at 1595–96 (cautioning “generally . . . against a more detailed factual inquiry into the voluntariness of a particular plaintiff’s conduct in place of this simple number-of-beds-versus-number-of-homeless inquiry” in light of the fact that the Supreme Court said the “substantive limit of the Eighth Amendment is ‘to be applied sparingly’” (quoting *Ingraham v. Wright*, 430 U.S. 651, 667 (1977))).

scrutinize the factual circumstances to assess whether plaintiffs meaningfully lacked choice.<sup>223</sup> Such scrutiny is not only a reality, but also a necessity to ensure that constitutional rights are not being violated. It was necessary to look at the particular facts in *Martin* to discover that plaintiffs were being punished for refusing to attend a religious service in exchange for shelter, which violates the Establishment Clause. Plaintiffs experiencing the barriers to shelter summarized in Part III might be more able to bring claims if courts conducted an individualized analysis.

Furthermore, there will always be new practices that criminalize homelessness more informally after laws are formally struck down in court. There is some evidence that *Martin* simply led local governments in the Ninth Circuit to find other ways to reduce the visibility of homelessness through more informal practices, such as encampment sweeps,<sup>224</sup> mass sheltering, and involuntary treatment for mental health.<sup>225</sup> Encampment sweeps, in particular, are trickier to attack constitutionally under *Martin* because even though such sweeps are supervised by law enforcement, courts do not consider this to be criminal enforcement under Eighth Amendment jurisprudence if there is no threat of arrest.<sup>226</sup> Courts also tend to uphold encampment sweeps when cities contend that they provided notice to homeless individuals and connected them to services during and after the sweep.<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, *Jones* and *Martin* involved municipal ordinances that pro-

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<sup>223</sup> See *Miralle v. City of Oakland*, No. 18-cv-06823-HSG, 2018 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 201778, at \*3 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 28, 2018) (stating that plaintiffs are able to find shelter outside the area of the encampment); *supra* note 94.

<sup>224</sup> See *supra* note 171 and accompanying text.

<sup>225</sup> Rankin, *supra* note 32, at 30–43.

<sup>226</sup> See *Miralle*, 2018 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 201778, at \*3 (noting plaintiffs' failure to show they could not obtain shelter outside the encampment at issue and stating that "Martin does not establish a constitutional right to occupy public property indefinitely at Plaintiffs' option") (citations omitted).

<sup>227</sup> See *id.* at \*5–6 (refusing to find Eighth Amendment violation where the city gave notice of encampment sweep and offered temporary shelter). However, it is not necessarily true that notice is given and services are offered when individuals are evicted from public encampments. In fact, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty found that only eleven percent of surveyed cities had formal notice requirements for clearing encampments. TENT CITY, *supra* note 171, at 28.

hibited sleeping in *all* public places,<sup>228</sup> whereas encampment sweeps usually target a specific public place within a city.<sup>229</sup>

Some may also argue that cities are left in a bind because it is costly and time intensive to build affordable housing and zoning laws restrict development.<sup>230</sup> Criminalization measures are portrayed as the immediate, even if temporary, solution to the nation's homelessness crisis.<sup>231</sup> So if we are to wait for cities to step away from criminalization and towards more constructive solutions, courts throughout the country need to be prepared to make individualized inquiries into whether individuals penalized for resting in public space had a meaningful and practical choice to sleep elsewhere, even if shelter beds were technically available.

### B. *The Legislative Role in Ending Criminalization*

However, the costliness of litigation,<sup>232</sup> the necessity of individualized inquiries, and the biases judges bring into individual decisions<sup>233</sup> ultimately point to the need for municipalities to seek solutions other than criminalization. Though courts should be quick to

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<sup>228</sup> See *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F.3d 1031, 1049 (9th Cir. 2018), *amended by* 920 F.3d 584 (9th Cir. 2019) (en banc) (involving two ordinances that prohibited sleeping in “any building, structure or place . . . without permission” and using “any of the streets, sidewalks, parks or public places as a camping place at any time”) (citations omitted); *Jones v. City of Los Angeles*, 444 F.3d 1118, 1138 (9th Cir. 2006) (“[S]o long as there is a greater number of homeless individuals in Los Angeles than the number of available beds, the City may not enforce section 41.18(d) at all times and places throughout the City against homeless individuals . . .”), *appeal dismissed and vacated as moot upon settlement*, 505 F.3d 1006 (9th Cir. 2007).

<sup>229</sup> See *Miralle*, 2018 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 201778, at \*3 (stating that plaintiffs are able to find shelter outside the area of the encampment).

<sup>230</sup> See Sarah Holder & Kriston Capps, *The Push for Denser Zoning Is Here to Stay*, CITYLAB (May 21, 2019), <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2019/05/residential-zoning-affordable-housing-upzoning-real-estate/588310> (describing the political controversy around upzoning as a solution to increase affordable housing and address homelessness).

<sup>231</sup> See Patt Morrison, *Column: The Supreme Court Could Soon Decide How the American West Deals with Homelessness*, L.A. TIMES (July 31, 2019, 3:00 AM), <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-07-30/patt-morrison-theane-evangelis-boise-homeless-los-angeles> (“It really ties the hands of states and cities and counties as they’re trying to address these issues by taking ordinances that every city has in some form or another historically off the table and creating a constitutional bar to enforcement of those ordinances.”) (quoting Theane Evangelis, one of the lead counsel that represented Boise on its appeal to the Supreme Court in *Martin*).

<sup>232</sup> For example, the city of Boise paid its lawyers \$75,000 to write the brief requesting certiorari from the Supreme Court and would have paid an additional \$225,000 had the Court taken the case. Hayley Harding, *Boise Begins to Ask U.S. Supreme Court to Hear Its Appeal in Homeless Camping Case*, IDAHO STATESMAN (June 3, 2019, 3:21 PM), <https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/local/community/boise/article231131103.html>.

<sup>233</sup> See *supra* Section I.A.

strike down these laws as unconstitutional, the laws should not be enacted and enforced in the first place.

Criminalization measures ultimately exacerbate homelessness by forcing individuals into the criminal justice system. Homeless people are eleven times more likely to be arrested than the general population.<sup>234</sup> Some law enforcement officers have even expressed that policing the homeless is not a viable solution to homelessness.<sup>235</sup> Even a civil infraction can “mutate” into a criminal consequence such as a misdemeanor or bench warrant, which often leads to greater financial burdens and ineligibility to access shelter, food, and other services.<sup>236</sup>

Therefore, criminalizing homelessness is counterproductive because it makes targeted individuals more likely to remain homeless. The revolving door between homelessness and prison makes it less likely for an individual to access temporary shelter, permanent housing, employment, and government benefits if they have any history with law enforcement.<sup>237</sup> Even aside from direct discrimination, the housing application process and shelter entry disparately impact formerly incarcerated individuals because of how disconnected they have been from the community, with no government identification or past utility bills to give to potential landlords.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 50, 71.

<sup>235</sup> See Anita Chabria, *Trump Wants California Cops to Evict Homeless People. They Don't Want That 'Dirty' Job*, L.A. TIMES (Feb. 6, 2020, 5:00 AM), <https://www.latimes.com/homeless-housing/story/2020-02-06/homeless-police-trump-santa-rosa-clear-encampment> (citing officers' concerns that they lack the social work training to be on the “front lines” of addressing homelessness); Jake Lilly, *Op-Ed: As a Prosecutor, I Believe Denver Should Stop Criminalizing Homelessness*, WESTWORD (May 5, 2019, 6:55 AM), <https://www.westword.com/news/prosecutor-jake-lilly-argues-in-favor-of-denvers-initiative-300-11332945> (“It is tempting to call the police about homeless people occupying parks or sidewalks, because if police take them away, the caller will not see the consequences and it keeps us from having to address the underlying problems inherent with poverty.”).

<sup>236</sup> Rankin, *supra* note 8, at 107–08.

<sup>237</sup> See HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 64 (describing the collateral consequences of criminalizing homelessness); Stephen Metraux, Caterina G. Roman & Richard S. Cho, *Incarceration and Homelessness*, in TOWARD UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS: THE 2007 NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH 9–6–9–11 (Deborah Dennis, Gretchen Locke & Jill Khadduri eds., 2007) (illustrating the barriers to housing and employment faced by formerly incarcerated individuals); Margot B. Kushel, Judith A. Hahn, Jennifer L. Evans, David R. Bangsberg & Andrew R. Moss, *Revolving Doors: Imprisonment Among the Homeless and Marginally Housed Population*, 95 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 1747, 1747 (2005) (stating the overrepresentation of both formerly incarcerated individuals among the homeless population, and of individuals who were homeless at the time of arrest in the prison population); Rankin, *supra* note 8, at 101–02 (detailing statistics that demonstrate homeless people’s frequent interaction with the penal system).

<sup>238</sup> NAT’L LAW CTR. ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY, PHOTO IDENTIFICATION BARRIERS FACED BY HOMELESS PERSONS: THE IMPACT OF SEPTEMBER 11, at 14 (2004) (finding that fifty-four percent of the clients of surveyed service providers were denied



In addition to being ineffective and inhumane, criminalization measures are exorbitantly expensive.<sup>239</sup> For example, San Francisco spent \$20.6 million sanctioning homeless people under anti-homeless laws, including the arrest of 125 individuals, in 2015.<sup>240</sup> A study estimated that six Colorado cities spent more than five million dollars enforcing fourteen anti-homeless ordinances between 2010 and 2014.<sup>241</sup> Another study estimated that Seattle and Spokane, Washington spent at least \$3.7 million on enforcing their criminalization ordinances over a five year period.<sup>242</sup> And if these criminalization measures lead to the incarceration of homeless individuals, it costs the cities even more money.<sup>243</sup>

So how should cities address homelessness? The greatest need is for more affordable housing, including access to more affordable housing subsidies.<sup>244</sup> There should be protections for tenants at risk of becoming homeless,<sup>245</sup> and also permanent supportive housing for individuals with mental illness, disabilities, or substance use disorders who have already experienced homelessness and need wraparound services in addition to housing.<sup>246</sup> The recent movement to defund the

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housing or shelter services due to lack of identification); Stephen Metraux & Dennis P. Culhane, *Homeless Shelter Use and Reincarceration Following Prison Release*, 3 CRIMINOLOGY & PUB. POL'Y 139, 154 (2004) (describing difficulties in obtaining government identification for formerly incarcerated individuals); Teresa Wiltz, *Without ID, Homeless Trapped in Vicious Cycle*, PEW: STATELINE (May 15, 2017), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2017/05/15/without-id-homeless-trapped-in-vicious-cycle> (summarizing the various barriers homeless individuals face in obtaining identification and receiving services without identification).

<sup>239</sup> See, e.g., HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 71–74 (describing the taxpayer costs of chronic homelessness); Rankin, *supra* note 8, at 109 n.52 (detailing the expensive cost of criminalization practices).

<sup>240</sup> S.F. BUDGET & LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE, POLICY ANALYSIS REPORT: HOMELESSNESS AND THE COST OF QUALITY OF LIFE LAWS 1–2 (2016), <https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/FileCenter/Documents/56045-Budget%20and%20Legislative%20Analyst%20Report.Homelessness%20and%20Cost%20of%20Quality%20of%20Life%20Laws.Final.pdf>.

<sup>241</sup> RACHEL A. ADCKOCK ET AL., HOMELESS ADVOCACY POLICY PROJECT, TOO HIGH A PRICE: WHAT CRIMINALIZING HOMELESSNESS COSTS COLORADO 25, 37 (Rebecca Butler-Dines et al. eds., 2016).

<sup>242</sup> JOSHUA HOWARD & DAVID TRAN, HOMELESS RIGHTS ADVOCACY PROJECT, AT WHAT COST: THE MINIMUM COST OF CRIMINALIZING HOMELESSNESS IN SEATTLE AND SPOKANE 5 (Sara K. Rankin ed., 2015).

<sup>243</sup> For the high costs of local incarceration, see generally CHRISTIAN HENRICHSON, JOSHUA RINALDI & RUTH DELANEY, VERA INST. OF JUSTICE, THE PRICE OF JAILS: MEASURING THE TAXPAYER COST OF LOCAL INCARCERATION (2015).

<sup>244</sup> HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 87–89.

<sup>245</sup> See generally TRISTIA BAUMAN & MICHAEL SANTOS, NAT'L LAW CTR. ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY, PROTECT TENANTS, PREVENT HOMELESSNESS (2018) (reporting various policies that protect renters and thereby prevent homelessness).

<sup>246</sup> See HOUSING NOT HANDCUFFS, *supra* note 11, at 65, 86 (citing research showing that supportive housing, which is permanent housing for formerly homeless individuals in

police has already led some cities to decriminalize their response to homelessness and give more responsibility to social workers.<sup>247</sup> Shifting laws and funds away from the police and to other government agencies that would more productively address homelessness would ultimately save government funds and disentangle homeless individuals from the criminal justice system.<sup>248</sup>

Although this Note advocates for judges to deeply assess the lack of choices available to individuals experiencing homelessness, policy-makers must also move away from the narrative that homeless people choose to be homeless instead of in a stable home, to sleep in public over healthier and safer alternatives. Criminalization laws are blatantly counterproductive. But as cities seek alternatives to addressing homelessness, they must keep in mind this lack of choice in order to avoid policies and informal practices that on their face seem to serve the homeless, but in practice rob them of their dignity.<sup>249</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The *Martin* court's discussion of what constitutes choice for a person experiencing homelessness when it comes to coerced religious expression is a step in the right direction for the conversation surrounding the constitutionality of anti-homeless ordinances. But it is only a step. The reality is that individuals experiencing homelessness face many barriers to shelter other than coerced religious expres-

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conjunction with other services, reduces recidivism rates); Adam Shrier, Erica Jackson, Mary Wilson & Nomin Ujjiyediin, *Many Inmates Move from Prison to Shelters, Despite Efforts to Get Them Homes*, CITYLIMITS (Jan. 17, 2017), <https://citylimits.org/2017/01/17/many-inmates-move-from-prison-to-shelters-despite-efforts-to-get-them-homes> (summarizing arguments for supportive housing as a solution to the revolving door between prison and homelessness in New York City).

<sup>247</sup> See Marisa Kendall, *How 'Defunding' the Police Could Reframe the Bay Area's Homelessness Crisis*, MERCURY NEWS (July 20, 2020, 1:32 PM), <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/07/20/how-defunding-the-police-could-reframe-the-bay-areas-homelessness-crisis> (listing proposals by Oakland, San Francisco, Berkeley, and San Jose to shift funds and responsibility away from police and to other community programs regarding homelessness); Tinoco, *supra* note 17 (describing a petition that calls on the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority to cease partnering with the City's Police Department and the County Sheriff's Department); Vasilogambros, *supra* note 14 (noting that Denver, Albuquerque, and Austin recently involved more mental health and social workers in responding to homelessness rather than primarily relying on police).

<sup>248</sup> See *supra* notes 239–43 and accompanying text (describing the financial ramifications of criminalizing homelessness).

<sup>249</sup> See, e.g., *supra* note 44 and accompanying text (discussing how the mayor of Sacramento advocates for a right to shelter but also an "obligation to use it"); *supra* note 51 and accompanying text (citing New York governor's plan to reduce the visibility of homeless people on subways by connecting them to services while also using police to address quality of life issues).

sion.<sup>250</sup> The Establishment Clause issue presented in *Martin* is just one example of when shelter is not practically available to individuals experiencing homelessness, even when beds are technically available. A person's gender identity, disability, or experience with substance use are additional examples of factors that may make shelter practically inaccessible. To simply say that it is no longer an Eighth Amendment violation to prosecute someone for sleeping outside because there were beds available in a shelter undermines constitutional conceptions of autonomy and dignity.

Not only do courts need to reconsider the meaning of choice to an individual experiencing homelessness when considering the legality of criminalization ordinances, but cities also must stop creating these laws and repeal existing ones. Enforcing these laws is counterproductive, as it brings more homeless individuals into the criminal justice system and thereby drives people further into homelessness.<sup>251</sup> Courts should acknowledge the involuntariness of sleeping outside for an individual experiencing homelessness, even if shelters appear to be available in that jurisdiction. Ultimately, homelessness must be addressed not through criminalization, but through solutions that are focused on more than merely reducing the visibility of homelessness.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> See *supra* Part III.

<sup>251</sup> See *supra* notes 15, 234–38 and accompanying text.

<sup>252</sup> See *supra* notes 8–16 and accompanying text (describing the increased visibility of homeless people in cities and summarizing how cities use criminal statutes to attempt to reduce their visibility).

This is Exhibit "10" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

The logo for the City of Edmonton, featuring the word "Edmonton" in white text on a dark blue rectangular background.

# City of Edmonton Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards

Last Updated: July 30, 2021  
Affordable Housing & Homelessness  
Social Development, Citizen Services

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## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional land on which Edmonton sits, the Territory of the Treaty 6 First Nations and the homelands of the Métis people. We would like to acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries such as: Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Blackfoot, as well as the Métis and the Inuit.

## Stakeholder Engagement

The City of Edmonton lends its thanks to individuals from the following organizations and groups who participated in the engagement to develop the City of Edmonton's first Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards:

- Ministry of Community and Social Services (CSS);
- Alberta Health Services;
- Individuals with lived experience in the shelter system;
- Homeward Trust Edmonton;
- Emergency shelter providers including Hope Mission, the Women's Emergency Shelter Centre (WEAC) and Mustard Seed;
- Edmonton Police Service (EPS);
- Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations;
- Indigenous service providers including Bent Arrow, Niginan Housing and Métis Urban / Capital Housing Corporation;
- Youth Emergency Shelter Services (YESS);
- Day service providers including Boyle Street Community Services and Bissell Centre;
- George Spady Centre;
- Community Leagues;
- Business Improvement Areas (BIAs);
- Representatives from the City of Edmonton's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee;
- Representatives from the Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton Committee; and
- Representatives from the City of Edmonton's Accessibility Advisory Committee

## Executive Summary

The City of Edmonton Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards are designed to help end homelessness in our community by demonstrating how emergency shelters can be accessible and housing-focused. By establishing minimum operating, service-delivery, and infrastructure standards based on research and best practices from the Canadian Shelter Transformation Network and other jurisdictions across Canada, this document is a guide-post for emergency shelters to evaluate their individual and collective success in helping individuals resolve their homelessness in order to live safer, healthier lives. It is also a document that can be used by funders and other key stakeholders in Edmonton's homeless-serving system of care to inform future discussions about the role of emergency shelters in ending homelessness in Edmonton.

The City of Edmonton Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards ("the Standard") outlines best practices for walk-up, overnight emergency shelter services for people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton. These shelters are distinct from shelters serving people fleeing domestic violence, youth shelters, and short-term/transitional housing options, which may require distinct service delivery models, referral based intake, and/or rent.

The Standard is informed by a set of guiding principles that directly tie into operational, service-delivery, and infrastructure best practices for emergency shelter operators to learn from and adopt. The Standard is designed to ensure that both essential services and connections to appropriate social support systems are client-centered, trauma informed, and that these services are delivered in a way that reduces harm for both individuals experiencing homelessness and the surrounding community.

A complete list of terms and definitions can be found on page 17. It is recommended that the Standard be reviewed and updated every three years in order to reflect up to date research and changes within Edmonton's emergency shelter system.



## System Dependencies

Emergency shelter services are a gateway to housing, health, and other programs necessary for Edmontonians to resolve their homelessness. While emergency shelters in Edmonton can orient their systems of care inside shelter to be housing-focused, trauma informed, and accessible, it is important to acknowledge that alignment with other systems, such as healthcare, justice, and housing, is critical for guests to successfully flow out of shelter into stable and appropriate housing solutions.

Throughout the engagement process, stakeholders emphasized the importance of increasing the supply of supportive housing for individuals with complex needs who are experiencing chronic homelessness as a necessary intervention to increase housing outcomes out of shelter. All shelter operators also articulated the need for integrated medical support services in emergency shelters in order to appropriately care for guests. These system dependencies, and others, require continued collaborative efforts between relevant health and social agencies to ensure appropriate care pathways for those in our community who present with multiple physical, mental, and addictions health needs.

## Guiding Principles

*Guiding principles ensure the policy and operational decisions of emergency shelter operators are aligned in connecting guests to sustainable housing options and support services*

1. Promote inclusion and welcome all who need services regardless of gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, cognitive or physical abilities
2. Maintain a housing-focused approach to shelter service delivery, recognizing that stable housing is the primary need shared by all people experiencing homelessness, and that other health and social challenges can be better addressed once housing is secured.
3. Provide service delivery grounded in an anti-racist and trauma-informed approach that prioritizes the client's safety, choice, and control, including consideration of specific Indigenous historical trauma.
4. In recognition of the over-representation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness, recognize and respond to the needs Indigenous guests with culturally appropriate and Indigenous specific operations and supports.
5. Respect clients' cultural and spiritual identities and, if requested, connect them with pathways to access appropriate services in line with their identities.
6. Provide access and referrals to a full spectrum of addictions and recovery services, from harm reduction to abstinence based programming, and respect and support a client's choice to access these services.
7. Collaborate with other service providers and stakeholders across the homeless-serving, health, and justice sectors, including but not limited to income and employment support programs, mental health, addictions, and recovery services, and Edmonton Police Service, to make appropriate referrals and develop case management plans for clients that lead to the best outcome.
8. Communicate information about the facility and operations in a way that is accessible, transparent, and clear about behavioural responsibilities and banning processes for guests and staff alike.
9. Develop relationships with the community where the facility is situated and establish open and transparent communications channels with neighbours.

## Operational Standards

This section will establish minimum operational standards for day-to-day operations of emergency shelters in Edmonton. These standards are designed to increase accessibility for guests who may otherwise avoid shelter due to operational barriers.

### OUTCOME STATEMENT

The successful implementation of the operational standards described in this section are expected to achieve the following outcomes:

- Increase the number of shelter spaces in Edmonton that are considered to be low-barrier
- Reduce the number of individuals choosing to sleep rough when there is available shelter space
- Minimize, or reduce, the number of critical incidents occurring at shelters

### Hours of Operation

Emergency shelters operators should provide true 24/7 support to guests and not require them to leave the property for operational purposes (such as converting a space from sleeping services to meal services). In a 24/7 model, admission can occur at any time of day as capacity allows. In order to achieve this, there must be a clear separation of day-services space (including communal eating spaces, offices, and activity areas) from overnight sleeping space to allow guests to move from one space to another throughout the day.

### Sleeping Accommodations

Dignified sleeping quarters should be provided in order to ensure guests can maintain healthy sleep hygiene for the duration of their stay in shelter. Sleep hygiene is a critical component of an individual's overall physical and mental health. Dignified sleeping accommodation includes:

- Private or semi-private sleeping spaces where possible;
- A bed off the ground, with bed rails or lower heights for low-mobility guests or those impaired by substance use;
- Separation from communal eating or activity areas;
- Couples spaces, if needed;
- Day-sleep spaces;

- 2 meters between beds, if in a congregate setting (although this is not a preferred setting).

Operators will make reasonable efforts to accommodate client preference on sleeping location, utilizing a GBA+ lens.

### **Storage for Guests**

Emergency shelters should ensure guests have safe and secure storage options for their belongings, and should not confiscate or ban items from being stored unless they pose a life-safety risk to staff and other guests. Rules around accessing storage, like what can and cannot be stored, how often a person can access their items if stored in a locked storage room, and how long an item will be stored before it is discarded - should be posted publicly, with storage records kept by operators.

Some examples of storage solutions include:

- Lockers or trunks: A 24/7 storage solution that allows an individual to safely lock up and access their own clothing, shoes, hygiene products, and other small personal items;
- Amnesty Totes or Safe Keeping Boxes: A storage system that allows guests to store items prohibited from shelter that might otherwise prevent them from being able to access services. These items can be stored in opaque bags for the guest to check-out upon leaving the shelter;
- Locked storage room: A larger storage space with a “check in - check out” system for individuals who have large amounts of personal items that cannot be accommodated in a locker or trunk ;
- Secure Bike Facility: Bicycles are a common mode of transport for individuals experiencing homelessness; a locked bike facility should be well designed to prevent theft.

### **Hygiene Services**

Operators will provide a minimum of one shower stall for every twenty persons (per industry standards), and 1 toilet/sink for every 10 persons staying overnight (per National Building Code, Alberta Edition). A minimum of one washroom that is barrier-free, fully accessible and marked as gender

neutral must be provided. Access to showers by clients should be available on demand.

Basic hygiene and toiletry products should be provided to clients who cannot provide their own, including towels, soap, shampoo, a toothbrush, toothpaste, shaving products, menstrual hygiene products, and incontinence products as appropriate.

### **Bedding & Laundry Services**

Operators should provide bedding, towels, and laundry services for clients (both commercial and self-serviced). A policy to regulate self-service machines - operating hours, sign up sheets, time for servicing and cleaning - should be posted where guests can read and understand it.

### **Nutrition**

Nutritional needs are dependent upon the individual needs of each client, and food provision is an essential health service that should be included in shelter. Food service delivery that requires line-ups does not promote dignity for those accessing food services, and are known to cause unrest and frustration. Instead, food services that offer guests meal options at all times of the day are preferred, as both a health intervention, for guests who have underlying health conditions like diabetes, and as a way to increase accessibility for guests who may try to access shelter outside of pre-set meal times.

### **Pets**

Emergency shelters should establish a pet policy that ensures that there is a plan in place to support people with pets who need to stay at the facility. If pets cannot be accommodated, emergency shelters should refer guests to a shelter that meets their needs and arrange for transport.

### **Applicable Laws**

These Standards are meant to supplement, not to displace, any applicable laws, statutes, regulations, bylaws, policies and equivalents thereto. Operators shall adhere to all applicable laws, statutes, regulations, bylaws, policies, and equivalents thereto, including (without limitation) those outlined in the Government of Alberta's Homeless Shelter Accommodation Expectations.

### **Neighbourhood Impacts**

All shelters should develop a Good Neighbour Commitment that lays out specific measures and actions that will be implemented by the operator to mitigate and minimize the impacts of the shelter operation on neighbouring properties, businesses, and residents. In order for a Good Neighbour Commitment to be acceptable in form and content to the City, it should include service standards, a 24/7 on-site contact, and an issue resolution process that is clearly communicated with nearby residents and businesses. Public sidewalks and building frontages should not be relied upon for queueing or smoking areas.

## Service Delivery Standards

This section will establish minimum expectations for service delivery and programming for emergency shelter operations in Edmonton.

### OUTCOME STATEMENT

The successful delivery of the programs and services described in this section are expected to achieve the following outcomes:

- Increase the number of individuals securing permanent housing from shelter
- Increase the number of individuals being diverted to temporary housing options that are more suitable for their circumstances
- Reduce the average length of stay for regular shelter clients

### Expectations of Shelter Guests

Operators should develop an Admissions Policy that includes behavioural expectations of guests accessing overnight sleep space, day sleep space, and day space. The expectations must be posted transparently throughout the emergency shelter and communicated verbally to guests during admission to emergency shelter.

These expectations should include (but are not limited to):

- behavioural expectations, including a commitment to be respectful of staff and other shelter guests;
- items that are prohibited from entering shelter and options for storage of personal items (see: 'Storage for Guests');
- required participation in housing programs, and a commitment from guests to work on a housing plan.

Admission decisions will not be made based on a guest's substance use; guests should be welcome to use emergency shelter services as long as they are safely mobile and are able to adhere to the behavioural expectations in place.

### Service Restrictions

Decisions on restriction to access, (sometimes called banning or barring), will be made based on a clearly defined policy and consistent set of procedures that is publicly posted for guests and staff. Banning or barring should be minimized unless individual's pose a safety threat to staff or other participants. A clear process for pursuing the removal or reconsideration of bans will also be articulated.

### Admission & Diversion

During the admissions process, emergency shelter operators should:

- Determine whether or not the guest is suited for the programs and services offered at the shelter they are seeking to access;
- Provide a referral and arrange for transport for guests who are best suited to a different shelter or, if possible, divert to housing, based on their needs;
- Share with the guest clear expectations about the conditions for shelter use, orient guests to the space, and assign a bed.

The admissions process must demonstrate a clear pathway to intake for shelter guests, requiring that all guests participate in housing programs and can voluntarily participate in other specialized programs that support their pursuit of housing.

Diversion is the practice of referring people from shelter to safe and appropriate alternatives wherever possible. When new guests arrive, emergency shelters should have a diversion policy and process in place that works with the new guest to determine whether or not the shelter is an appropriate place for them to stay that night and, if it's not, work towards a better solution.

### Intake

Once guests have been admitted to shelter, a more comprehensive intake should be completed within one to three days. While guests may not be able to do a full intake on the same day as seeking admission (often reasonably seeking to have their basic needs met first), a more comprehensive intake



should be completed with guests in order to quickly connect them to a program that will facilitate their rapid exit from shelter into housing. Shelters should avoid the use of lengthy line ups or queues for beds.

### **Specialized Program Requirements**

There are four specialized program areas that Edmonton shelter operators should develop, with corresponding policies and referral pathways, in order for an emergency shelter to meet Edmonton's Minimum Shelter Standards.

Consistent with a housing focused approach, there should be an embedded housing program in every single emergency shelter and service delivery should be tied to developing a housing plan and making housing referrals as frequently as possible. In order to achieve this, emergency shelter operators must ensure that all staff have a familiarity of the housing system. To maximize access to housing programs in shelter, shelter should be low-barrier and inclusive of the unique needs reflected in Edmonton's homeless population. In addition to a housing program, three additional program standards have been identified to increase accessibility to shelter and, by extension, housing programs.

#### **1. Diversion and Housing First Programs**

Emergency shelters must have integrated diversion and housing programs for shelter guests that are linked to Coordinated Access Housing Services, the primary pathway for housing support in Edmonton. It should be the goal of these programs, and all programs, to help move individuals out of shelter and into safe housing quickly. Emergency shelters can track their success in this area by measuring housing outcomes (increased) and guests' length of stay in shelter (decreased), and frequently reviewing intake information to identify individuals who are chronically in shelter. Chronic shelter users should be targeted for more enhanced housing support.

An embedded housing program should mandate that:

- Guests have engaged with a housing worker within 48 hours of entering an emergency shelter;
- Guests develop a housing plan within one week of entering shelter;
- If the housing program in shelter is not an appropriate fit, guests are referred to appropriate housing programs as quickly as possible.

## 2. Mental Health and Addictions Program

Operators will assist clients in obtaining appropriate mental health and addictions support services, which includes respecting client choice to access services from the full range of the addiction recovery spectrum. Where possible, programs should be offered on-site; in the event that is not possible, clear referral pathways and connections with the healthcare system should be established and tracked. This program should include:

- Clear protocols for guests prior to entry that explain what substances are prohibited from being used on site and corresponding storage options;
- Provision of medical and disposable sharps containers;
- Direction to resources that reduce the spread of communicable diseases as it relates to substance use, including the provision of clean and safe injection equipment or information on where to obtain it;
- Information for guests about where Supervised Consumption Services and other harm reduction programming can be accessed, if not on site;
- Staff training in overdose prevention and a clear protocol on how to respond to an overdose with provision of the appropriate tools;
- Referral pathways with warm hand-offs to appropriate support services when services in the facility are inadequate or unavailable.

## 3. Indigenous Support Program

The City of Edmonton recognizes that the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in vulnerable populations due to effects of historical trauma requires Indigenous people to lead program delivery and support services wherever possible. Operators are expected to work or partner directly with Indigenous organizations and individuals to ensure that program delivery and engagement is culturally competent. Examples of this may include:

- Conducting spiritual ceremonies, including smudging, sacred fire, and other teachings and protocols that can restore and support cultural healing from the effects of historical trauma;
- Involving Elders in the planning and implementation of support services ie. Elders counselling/guidance;
- Access to translation services to support personalized service delivery.

- Diversion efforts that seek to connect people to their families and home communities, wherever they may be.

#### **4. LGBTQ2S+ and Youth Support Program**

Operators will establish clear policies that reflect inclusiveness of LGBTQ2S+ individuals to ensure safer spaces for non-binary gendered people in Emergency Shelters, as recommended in the [LGBTQ2S Youth and Housing Shelter Guidelines](#). Operators are required to respect and accept the self-defined sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression of an individual, including their pronoun. Operators will make appropriate referrals to youth programs and services for those who are not appropriately supported in adult-focused emergency shelters.

## Infrastructure Standards

This section will outline infrastructure standards for shelter operators pursuing modifications of an existing building or building a new facility.

### OUTCOME STATEMENT

That emergency shelters in Edmonton adopt best practices as outlined below when redesigning an existing shelter space or building a new shelter to improve service delivery, decrease negative community impacts, and increase accessibility for guests, in line with the Guiding Principles.

### Built Form Considerations

Emergency shelters should have:

- private or semi-private sleeping spaces
- day space, separate from sleeping quarters, that provides areas for: communal meals, housing work, and staff offices
- barrier free and gender neutral washrooms
- a predictable lay-out, with minimal sharp corners and rounded walls to prevent individuals from bumping into one another
- enhanced materials used throughout to prevent noise transfer between spaces,
- A private and thoughtfully placed smoking area
- Safe parking and storage for bikes and shopping carts
- Increased ventilation and sanitation to support public health.

## Terms and Definitions

**Anti-Racism:** Anti-racism is usually structured around conscious efforts and deliberate actions to provide equitable opportunities for all people on an individual and systemic level. It can be engaged by acknowledging personal privileges, confronting acts and systems of racial discrimination, and/or working to change personal racial biases. (Safer For All Report, March 30, 2021)

**Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+):** An analytical tool often used with the intention of advancing gender equality. The “plus” in the name highlights that Gender-based Analysis goes beyond gender, and includes the examination of a range of factors such as age, education, race, language, geography, culture, and income. GBA+ is used to assess the potential impacts of policies, programs or initiatives on diverse groups of citizens, taking into account gender and other factors. (Gender-Based Analysis Plus Report, City of Edmonton, 2017)

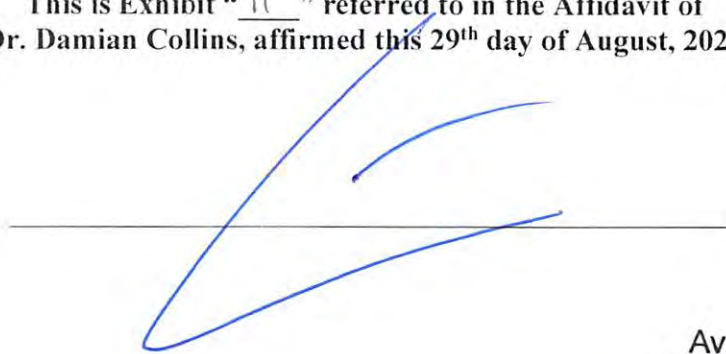
**Harm Reduction:** A client-centered approach that seeks to reduce the health and social harms associated with addiction and substance use (Harm Reduction, Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario, 2021)

**Housing Focused Shelter:** A housing-focused shelter is unrelenting in its pursuit to make homelessness as brief as possible while returning people to permanent accommodation. From the moment an individual or family pursues shelter, there are efforts to ensure a safe and appropriate exit from shelter. Housing focused shelter does not operate other programming that can interfere with ensuring stays are short-term with a return to housing rapidly. (Housing Focused Shelter, OrgCode Consulting Inc. in partnership with the Canadian Shelter Transformation Network and Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, March 2019)

**Low-Barrier Shelter:** Low barrier shelters ensure that every reasonable barrier to shelter access (and by extension housing access) has been removed. (Housing Focused Shelter, OrgCode Consulting Inc. in partnership with the Canadian Shelter Transformation Network and Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, March 2019)

**Trauma-Informed Care:** Services are provided in ways that recognize the need for physical and emotional safety, as well as choice and control in decisions affecting one’s treatment. Trauma-informed service delivery creates an environment where service users do not experience further traumatization or re-traumatization. (Trauma-Informed Care - Overview, Community Mental Health Action Plan, 2021)

This is Exhibit "11" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal black line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

## CHAPTER 15

# SUBSIDIZED RENTAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS UNDER THE UCP

*Nick Falvo*<sup>1</sup>

“Homelessness is not a choice. It is a lack of other choices.”

— Louise Gallagher

THROUGHOUT CANADA, government supports housing affordability by seeing to it that rent levels in some housing units are kept at or below a certain threshold (often at or below 30 per cent of a household’s income, with precise rent scales varying by program and jurisdiction). This role — while certainly not the only one played by government in housing — is crucial, largely because the private market alone does an inadequate job of creating and sustaining housing that is affordable for low-income households. This is the case both for households with limited labour market attachment and those receiving means-tested income assistance.

In Canada, all orders of government play important roles in housing, with the Government of Canada (GoC) often leading, and provincial and territorial governments responding to invitations to cost-share new initiatives by contributing funding. In some instances, staff support services are required by tenants and funded by federal, provincial and territorial governments. Municipalities play important roles pertaining to regulation and modest funding.

The Government of Alberta (GoA) has a regulatory, funding and leadership role in the provision of affordable housing. Alberta enters into funding agreements with the GoC and partners with municipalities and housing providers to deliver housing supports to Albertans. The GoA also plays an important role with respect to homelessness and harm reduction.

This chapter begins with an overview of the GoA’s precise role with affordable housing and homelessness. It then discusses the United Conservative Party (UCP) government’s various spending announcements and examines the following themes: GoA co-operation with federal housing initiatives; Alberta’s Affordable Housing Review Panel; Stronger Foundations (Alberta’s 10-year housing strategy unveiled in 2021); and homelessness policy under the UCP. The chapter closes with a discussion and conclusion.

This chapter is based largely on the author's own tracking of housing and homelessness developments in Alberta since the UCP formed government, including the author's ongoing budget analysis and review of publicly available documents. It also relies on results of 16 semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom in February and March 2022 (see Appendix for the interview guide). Interviews were conducted with persons who have strong knowledge of Alberta's housing and homelessness sectors, and their identity is being protected. An early draft of this chapter was circulated to all interview subjects, one well-placed GoA staff person and various other subject matter experts in June 2022. Each person was given one month to provide the author with comments.

### **Subsidized Housing and Homelessness Policy in Alberta**

Under former premier Jason Kenney, Alberta's Ministry of Seniors and Housing was the province's lead ministry for the design, administration and funding of affordable housing policy and programs (but in October 2022, housing became subsumed under the newly designed Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services). Its specific roles included: negotiating bilateral housing agreements with the GoC; providing program oversight of existing units under affordable housing agreements with private non-profits; and funding new units and repairs to existing units of public housing for low-income households. The Alberta Social Housing Corporation owns approximately 48 per cent of the province's affordable housing portfolio. Service Alberta is responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act and the landlord/tenant dispute board.

Some affordable housing in Alberta is administered by non-profit entities, some by public entities, and some by for-profit landlords. When it comes to housing on reserve, the Alberta provincial government typically plays no role at all — though it could if it so chose. Off reserve (and under Kenney), Alberta Seniors and Housing administered the Indigenous Housing Capital Program that provides capital funding to increase the supply of off-reserve, non-market, affordable rental units for Indigenous people in need.

The Alberta Housing Act is the regulatory framework for most subsidized housing in Alberta. It stipulates how rents are calculated and what kind of reporting must be done by operators. Alberta's Housing Management Bodies (HMB) — which manage most subsidized housing units in the province — are regulated by the act. As of April 1, 2022, there were 88 HMB in Alberta. Most HMB have boards that are partly or wholly appointed by municipalities. In most cases, the members appointed by municipalities are municipal elected officials. Outside of Calgary and Edmonton, HMB boards consist entirely of elected officials.

Most of Alberta's subsidized housing units are Rent Geared to Income (RGI) units,



meaning rents are very low in those units. However, on a per capita basis, Alberta has far fewer subsidized housing units than the rest of Canada. Alberta's rate of social housing is just 2.9 per cent; for Canada as a whole, the figure is 4.2 per cent. This discrepancy is believed to exist for two main reasons: incomes have historically been higher in Alberta than the rest of Canada, resulting in less need for social housing; and Alberta's political climate is more conservative than the rest of Canada, meaning there has been less public appetite for social housing.

The percentage of Alberta households in core housing need has been rising steadily over the past three census periods, from 10.1 per cent in 2006 to 10.7 per cent in 2011 and 11.4 per cent in 2016. This refers to households either paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, are living in housing requiring major repairs, or are living in housing that has too few bedrooms for the household in question. In 2016, more than 164,000 Alberta households were in core housing need.

When Alberta's provincial government does fund new subsidized units, the process lacks transparency. This has been the case for decades (including under the previous NDP government). Provincial housing funding for capital is not allocated via a formal grant program through which non-profits (e.g. community housing/non-market housing providers) can apply for funding. Such a process has not been in place in Alberta since 2012. According to one key informant interviewed for the present chapter:

They need to have open calls for funding initiatives. There's no program to apply for. People just lobby government. When provincial funding is provided for housing, we don't even know where the money comes from. We don't see funding in the budget for new builds, yet there will be announcements for new programs.

Another key informant made a similar comment with respect to permanent supportive housing:

With the GoA, there's no clear application process for permanent supportive housing. They can meet with the minister and sometimes get approved. But there's not a transparent application process. Where's the portal? Where's the application process spelled out? It was similar under [former Alberta premier Rachel] Notley.

The GoA also lacks a clear, public reporting structure for subsidized housing. For example, most Albertans — including well-placed sources in the affordable housing sector — do not know: which projects have received funding; which types of households (e.g. singles, seniors, etc.) have been targeted; or in which municipalities

the units are located. This lack of transparency makes it challenging for key actors in the non-profit housing and homeless-serving sectors to plan; it has also made it challenging for stakeholders to have a democratic dialogue about the appropriate allocation of public funding.<sup>2</sup>

*Housing for seniors.* Alberta has two seniors housing programs: the Seniors Lodge program and the Seniors Self-contained Housing program. The Seniors Lodge program is for semi-independent seniors and includes room and board. Unique to Alberta, the program was created in 1958 to free up spaces in auxiliary hospitals that were housing seniors who did not require such high levels of care. Municipalities have been a partner in this initiative from the beginning (GoA, 2015). Facilities that are part of the lodge program typically have large dining rooms and onsite recreational programs. Light housekeeping and home care are typically provided. Approximately 80 per cent of lodge units are located outside Calgary and Edmonton. The Seniors Self-contained Housing program provides apartment-style housing to seniors who are able to live independently, with or without the assistance of community-based services.

*Rent supplements.* In 2021, under the UCP, the GoA released a newly designed financial assistance framework for renters. The Rental Assistance Benefit (RAB) is similar to a program previously operated; it is a long-term subsidy intended for those in highest need (identified through social housing waitlists). The Temporary Rental Assistance Benefit (TRAB) is a shallower, time-limited subsidy (up to two years) intended for people with stronger labour market attachment. To be eligible for TRAB, households must either be currently employed or have been employed in the previous 24 months and cannot currently be receiving social assistance. The TRAB benefit is provided on a first-come, first-served basis. It was initially available only in Alberta's seven largest municipalities (Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Fort McMurray, Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie). However, on Aug. 5, 2022, the GoA announced TRAB's expansion to include a total of more than 80 communities (GoA, 2022a). In Calgary, both RAB and TRAB are administered by the Calgary Housing Company, the city's largest provider of affordable housing. In Edmonton, both programs are administered by Civida, a non-profit housing provider (Falvo, 2021).

*Homelessness.* In 2007, then-premier Ed Stelmach and Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Yvonne Fritz announced the GoA would embark on a 10-year initiative to address homelessness throughout Alberta. In January 2008, the GoA announced the creation of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, which was given a mandate to develop a 10-year provincial strategic plan to co-ordinate and end homelessness. The secretariat was established as an agency of the GoA,

intended to not only develop but also to lead implementation of the provincial plan. To this end, the Secretariat was instructed to develop and coordinate new initiatives to address homelessness, such as prevention strategies, research programs, and the creation of a homeless information management system. The Secretariat was instructed to work with municipalities and communities throughout the province, and to support the development of community plans for action on homelessness (Alberta Secretariat, 2008, p. 3).

As such, in October 2008, the secretariat released *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*. The plan placed great emphasis on Housing First, which means persons experiencing homelessness should be provided with permanent housing and all appropriate social work support, irrespective of whether or not they are deemed “ready” to maintain such housing.

However, according to one well-placed key informant, the GoA “slowly started losing interest” with changes in provincial leadership. The same key informant noted:

The change in leadership with the Tories was as much a factor as elections. In a very short period we had Stelmach – Redford – Hancock – Prentice along with several cabinet changes. The funding kept coming but the leadership was lost after Stelmach and we entered a phase of benign neglect. When the NDP took over I think they dropped it altogether but didn’t replace it. The money kept coming for the CBOs [e.g., Homeward Trust Edmonton, Calgary Homeless Foundation, etc.] but again there wasn’t leadership.

The Secretariat was quietly disbanded well before the 10-year mark.

Today, when it comes to absolute homelessness (e.g. persons living in emergency shelters or sleeping rough) Alberta’s seven largest cities have homeless-serving systems of care, each of which benefits from both federal Reaching Home funding and provincial Outreach and Support Services Initiative (OSSI) funding. Reaching Home is the Government of Canada’s main funding vehicle for homelessness, while OSSI is a provincial program run through Alberta Human Services (OSSI funding is generally used for operating costs associated with Housing First).

In Calgary, Edmonton and Medicine Hat, both Reaching Home and OSSI funds are disbursed to large non-profit entities (namely, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, Homeward Trust Edmonton and the Medicine Hat Community Housing Society), which in turn disburse them to smaller non-profits providing direct service to persons experiencing homelessness. The province disburses the funds in the other four large cities to their local municipal governments, which in turn disburse them to small service providers.

Across Alberta there is a lack of publicly available reporting with respect to how either Reaching Home or OSSI funds are used. This makes it challenging to undertake critical analysis. It would be helpful, for example, to know the following for each funding source, for each city and for the most recent fiscal year:

- Which programs and organizations benefit from funding?
- What types of programs receive how much funding (e.g. prevention versus outreach versus wraparound supports)?
- Which age groups are targeted/prioritized?
- How does each system-planning organization (e.g. Homeward Trust Edmonton, City of Grande Prairie, etc.) allocate their administrative share of each fund — e.g. for their own internal use?

Throughout Alberta, provincial funding is also provided by the GoA directly to emergency shelters. However, this funding is inadequate. Provincial funding is not indexed to inflation and some emergency shelters have not received funding adjustments since 2008. This results in low wages for staff and high turnover.

There is very little publicly available, province-wide reporting on emergency shelters. It would be helpful, for example, to know the following about each of Alberta's emergency shelters:

- What percentage of each shelter's beds are occupied each night?
- What is the average length of stay in each shelter?
- What are each shelter's desired outcomes, as articulated in that shelter's core service agreements with the GoA (for example, are shelter officials encouraged and expected to help place residents into permanent housing)?
- How many new intakes and placements into permanent housing take place on a monthly basis? Of the housing placements, how many are assisted with rent supplements or housing allowances, and how many offer staff support once the person is housed?
- What efforts are made by shelter officials to provide follow-up services or to monitor recidivism once clients are placed into housing?
- How many FTE staffing positions does each shelter have?
- How many days of training does each new staff person receive, and what does that training consist of?
- What is each shelter's staff turnover rate?

Without such information, it is challenging for stakeholders of all types — including researchers and program evaluators — to engage in critical debate about how to improve programming and planning for persons experiencing homelessness.

Finally, during the last few years, the GoA has provided winter emergency funding to several emergency shelter sites in rural areas. In 2021-22, this included the eight rural communities of Cold Lake, Drayton Valley, Edson, Lac La Biche, Leduc, Peace River, Slave Lake and Wetaskiwin.

### **The Rachel Notley Years**

In its 2016 budget, the Notley government announced its intent to nearly double annual provincial spending on housing (albeit on a time-limited basis). This represented a total of \$892 million in new funding, initially spanning a five-year period;<sup>3</sup> approximately \$13 million of this was earmarked for new units for vulnerable subpopulations, including for persons experiencing absolute homelessness.

In July 2017, Alberta's provincial government released their provincial affordable housing strategy, titled *Making Life Better*. Most of the new funding committed in this strategy was allocated to public bodies rather than to non-profits that operate at arm's length from government. Further, the funding was not allocated via a formal grant program through which non-profits (e.g. community housing/non-market housing providers) could apply for funding. As discussed, such a process has not been in place in Alberta since 2012. The provincial government initially claimed this would result in the creation of 4,100 new units of housing over five years through a combination of new builds and repairs. However, a lack of public reporting has made it challenging to critically assess these claims.

### **The UCP Years**

During successive budgets, the UCP made several housing-related announcements, while generally taking a status quo approach with respect to homelessness funding. Meanwhile, UCP co-operation with federal housing initiatives was generally decent. The UCP struck an Affordable Housing Review Panel in July 2020, and that group's work was followed by the launch of a 10-year housing plan in November 2021. That same month, a provincial homelessness task force was announced. What follows is a discussion of the UCP's various housing-related initiatives.

**Provincial budgets.** The first three budgets introduced by the UCP included housing-related cuts, with some budgets containing modest increases. No major changes to funding for homelessness programming were announced in any UCP budget. Each UCP budget will now be discussed in turn.

The 2019-20 UCP budget announced that operating budgets for HMBs would be reduced by an average of 3.5 per cent. The budget also announced a 24 per cent reduction to the Rental Assistance Program that provides financial assistance for low- to moderate-income households to help with monthly rent payments for up to one year. This 24 per cent reduction was to begin in 2020 and take full effect within three years (see below for further discussion of the Rental Assistance Program). The budget also announced the following income assistance programs for low-income households would no longer be indexed to inflation: the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped; the Alberta Seniors Benefit; Income Support; Special Needs Assistance for Seniors; the Supplementary Accommodations Benefit; and the Seniors Lodge Assistance program.

The 2020-21 budget included a 32 per cent cut to housing maintenance over three years. However, in the fall of 2021 (after the budget), some provincial stimulus funding was earmarked for affordable housing via the Municipal Stimulus Program (MSP). The MSP had a \$500-million budget for roads, bridges, water and wastewater systems, public transit and recreation. Some of it was used for housing. For example, the City of Edmonton used \$15.8 million from the MSP to support a Rapid Housing Initiative project<sup>4</sup> (specifically, the Westmount supportive housing site) and to assist several non-profit housing providers to undertake rehabilitation of existing housing units (Kjenner, 2022). The City of Calgary used \$15 million from the MSP to renovate and repair affordable housing (Toy, 2020).

Budget 2021-2022 included a five per cent nominal increase in operating funding for provincially owned social housing units (though no new funding for the Seniors Lodge program). It also provided a \$16-million annual increase in financial assistance to low-income households that rent primarily from for-profit landlords — a reversal of the 25 per cent cut to the Rental Assistance Program, announced by this government in its first budget (this funding is believed to have been claimed by the GoA as its provincial contribution to the Canada Housing Benefit initiative, discussed below). This budget also announced a six per cent nominal cut to capital maintenance for subsidized housing over the following fiscal year.

The 2022-23 budget announced \$118 million in capital funding over three years for affordable housing in general. According to the budget document, this is intended “to begin implementation of Stronger Foundations: Alberta’s ten-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing.” But three caveats are in order. First, this was financed in part by \$90 million from the sale of provincially owned assets. Second, most of this funding was back-ended: \$20 million for 2022-23, \$39.9 million for 2023-24, and \$58.1 million in 2024-25. And third, the Capital Investment budget for the Alberta Social Housing Corporation (e.g. provincially owned housing) for 2022-23 saw a 50 per cent reduction compared to the previous year. The new capital funding for housing was to

include a modest increase, specifically for Indigenous people — namely, \$20.7 million over three years for the Indigenous Housing Capital Program. A modest increase — \$25 million over three years — was also announced for the operation of existing housing. This was to be back-ended as follows: \$1.8 million for 2022-23; \$4.2 million for 2023-24; and \$19.3 million for 2024-25. Much of this was to go toward rent subsidies for low-income households.

***Co-operation with federal initiatives.*** As discussed in this chapter's introduction, the GoC typically leads on affordable housing policy, with provincial and territorial governments cost-matching many of the federal initiatives.

Federal leadership on housing and homelessness in Canada saw a rebirth of sorts in 2017, when the GoC announced the National Housing Strategy (NHS). Alberta signed its bilateral agreement with the Government of Canada in March 2019, securing the maximum federal amounts available.

Several initiatives from the strategy required cost-sharing from provincial and territorial governments. What follows is a discussion of those initiatives in the Alberta context.

The Canada Community Housing Initiative (CCHI), unveiled as part of the NHS, focuses on preserving existing units of social housing across Canada until 2028. This entails \$4.3 billion of federal funding over a decade and requires 50:50 cost-matching from provinces and territories. This is precisely the amount of federal funding that was set to expire over the course of the decade on existing social housing units, meaning this is about expiring operating agreements. Canada's approximately 500,000 social housing units that are administered by either provincial or territorial authorities and have rent-gear-to-income subsidies are eligible for this. This funding assists with repairs, helps keep rents affordable, and provides mortgage assistance for the operators.

As part of the NHS, the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH) program was rebranded across Canada; in Alberta, it became known as the Alberta Priorities Housing Initiative and began on April 1, 2019 (after IAH ended). This bilateral program, requiring 50:50 cost-sharing with provincial and territorial governments, continues until 2028.

The Canada Housing Benefit (CHB) is a new federal initiative unveiled as part of the NHS consisting of financial assistance to help low-income households afford rent. It requires 50:50 cost-sharing with provincial and territorial governments. When it was announced in 2017, the GoC stated it expected the average beneficiary would receive \$2,500 in support per year. As mentioned above, the 2019-20 provincial budget announced a 24 per cent reduction to the Rental Assistance program. This 24 per cent reduction was to begin in 2020 and take full effect within three years. According to a December 2019 *Canadian Press* article, "In negotiations over the funding arrangement, Alberta officials have sought to have their existing spending count towards the cost-

matching approach instead of increasing funding as other provinces have said they would” (Press, 2019). Then, in July 2021, the GoA announced it had signed the Canada-Alberta Housing Benefit agreement, paving the way for the CHB to flow in Alberta. According to one well-placed key informant interviewed for this chapter:

It’s likely that the provincial cut announced in the 2019-20 provincial budget was later redirected toward the Canada Alberta Housing Benefit, and that there was no net increase in provincial funding for rent supplements [as expected under the federal initiative]. The GoA likely used that as their matching provincial contribution.

The Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) is a federal initiative providing funding for newly built modular housing, the acquisition of land, the conversion of existing buildings into affordable housing, and the reclamation of closed or derelict properties. (Table 15.1, below).

**Table 15.1: RHI funding announcements: Alberta**

Date	Municipality	Stream	RHI funding	Units	Operator(s)
15 Dec 2020	Edmonton	Major Cities	\$17.3M	80	Homeward Trust
17 Dec 2020	Calgary	Major Cities	\$24.6M	178	HomeSpace, Horizon, Silvera
17 Mar 2021	Edmonton	Projects	\$24.8M	130	Homeward Trust, GEF
6 Jul 2021	Edmonton	Major Cities	\$14.9M	68	?
28 July 2021	Calgary	Projects	\$16.6M	82	?
12 Jan 2022	Edmonton	Major Cities	\$14.8M	125	Mustard Seed, Niginan
25 Jan 2022	Hinton	Projects	\$2.3M	8	Town of Hinton, Evergreens Foundation
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$115.3M</b>	<b>671</b>	

*Notes.* Date refers to date of official CMHC announcement. The first five announcements in this table were made during Round 1, while the Jan. 12, 2022 Edmonton announcement was made as part of Round 2. Total figures in the bottom row are based on known CMHC announcements.

*Source.* Most of the data in this table was provided to the author by the Alberta Seniors & Community Housing Association on June 6, 2022.



Approximately \$24.6 million in RHI funding was approved for Calgary through the RHI's Major Cities Stream. Edmonton received \$17.3 million via the Major Cities Stream and \$24.8 million via the Project Stream. In total, 210 units of modular housing will be delivered across five buildings in Edmonton. The GoA is providing a capital contribution of \$16.3 million to the Edmonton projects via the Municipal Stimulus Program. In sum, RHI funding has been secured for projects — mostly for Calgary and Edmonton — but none have received provincial operating funding. This is problematic insofar as such operating funding must be in place for these units to support vulnerable tenants over the long term. Having said that, consultations by CMHC with provincial and territorial governments on the RHI before its roll out was extremely limited.

***Affordable Housing Review Panel.*** In July 2020, Kenney struck the Affordable Housing Review Panel. As part of this process, Seniors and Housing Minister Josephine Pon appointed 10 experts to conduct a review with the view of providing “recommendations to transform affordable housing” (Alberta, 9 July 2020). The panel's final report, released in December 2020, included the following findings:

- The GoA owns almost half of Alberta's subsidized housing stock, with 60 per cent of units operating under a strict regulatory structure constraining the ability of providers to redevelop or partner with other entities (both non-profit and for-profit).
- Much of this stock is rather old — e.g., major repairs are needed in the near future.
- According to the report: “Because the government owns the assets, operators cannot leverage the properties that they operate to finance new development or reinvest in existing units” (p. 13).
- Many of Alberta's HMBs are small. “For example, 52 per cent operate fewer than 100 units and 34 per cent only manage one building. This means many operators lack operational and development expertise, have limited capacity to develop their portfolio and are not able to achieve economies of scale” (p. 13). This makes amalgamations appealing in principle.
- An important recommendation from the panel's final report was to ensure all proceeds from any transfer of assets be maintained within Alberta's affordable housing system. Specifically, the panel recommended “that the proceeds derived from the transfer of assets be held in a dedicated investment fund, with the income derived to be reinvested into affordable housing initiatives” (p. 15).
- The panel also recommended that the GoA's role change to “be as a regulator,

policy maker, planner, funder and enabler of the sector rather than as an owner of affordable housing assets” (p. 14).

The panel’s recommendations helped inform *Stronger Foundations: Alberta’s 10-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing*, a 28-page document unveiled in November 2021. The strategy also sought to directly address the panel’s first recommendation, namely for the GoA to develop a clear long-term housing plan. *Stronger Foundations*. Stronger Foundations announced the intention of the GoA to undertake the following initiatives over a 10-year timeframe:

- *Reduce the GoA’s role in property ownership*. According to the strategy, all proceeds from any real estate asset sales would be reinvested into the broader affordable housing system (keeping in mind that the Alberta Social Housing Corporation owns a considerable amount of aging stock). Having said that, real estate assets sold in one community will not necessarily be returned to that same community, especially if there is greater demand in a different community. The GoA was expected to start by transferring land (more so than buildings) for nominal sums. In cases where units are transferred, it is the province’s preference to transfer them to their current operators.
- *Increase housing developments with mixed-income options*. According to the strategy: “Initiatives are planned to enable mixed-income developments through operating agreements with HMBs and new partnerships with the non-profit and private sectors” (p. 20).
- *Create 13,000 new units of affordable housing*. The strategy proposed to “bring Alberta closer to the national average of affordable housing supply without putting the entire burden on taxpayers” (p. 5).
- *Provide demand-side assistance to an additional 12,000 households*. The strategy proposed to “double the number of households receiving rent supplement (an increase of 12,000)” (p. 22). It is expected that such rent supplements might be channeled to communities with higher rental vacancy rates.

The strategy also committed to: shifting to competency based HMB boards; streamlining the income verification process for assisted households; increasing seniors’ housing in line with population growth; enhancing the Seniors Lodge program (e.g. increasing the practice of co-locating continuing care beds in lodges so seniors do not have to move when they begin requiring care); investing in the Find Housing online tool; and establishing three-year targets for programs and new housing developments based on current and projected community needs. Bill 78, the strategy’s enabling legislation, received royal assent on Dec. 8, 2021.

***Homelessness policy under the UCP.*** Early in its mandate, the UCP funded the Herb Jamieson Shelter operated by Hope Mission in Edmonton. The first new emergency shelter funded in Edmonton in over a decade, it is a large shelter the UCP committed to funding in its election platform. According to one key informant: “Hope Mission is tight with the local faith community. When the UCP funded this, they appeared to be playing to the base of UCP supporters.”

Similarly, the UCP intends to provide operating funding for a new emergency shelter in Edmonton operated by The Mustard Seed (another faith-based organization). This may provide between 40-50 new spaces.

In addition to the above, the government has made several pandemic-related funding enhancements related to homelessness; in most cases, the funding flowed directly to emergency shelters.

- In March 2020, \$25 million in provincial pandemic-related funding was announced for homelessness. This was intended for “overflow homeless shelters and spots for people who need to self-isolate” (Bennett, 2020).
- On Aug. 5, 2020, the GoA announced an extension of this in the form of another \$48 million for shelters and community organizations. According to a CBC News article, when this was announced, the Minister of Community and Social Services Rajan Sawhney indicated “there [were] no plans to reactivate emergency satellite shelters at convention centres in Calgary and Edmonton that wound down earlier [in the] summer. They were too expensive and the government wants a more affordable solution...” (French, 2020).
- In November 2021, the GoA announced it would provide \$21.5 million for additional beds and isolation sites at emergency homeless shelters and emergency women’s shelters until March 2022. About \$13 million of the money would aid 14 shelters to expand space and provide meals, showers, laundry services and access to addictions and mental health services. Another \$6.5 million is to be used to open about 285 isolation spaces in 10 communities, and \$2 million would support emergency women’s shelters (Mertz, 2021).

During the pandemic, there were some improvements in physical distancing at emergency facilities compared to the pre-pandemic period; however, this was inhibited by a lack of resources. There was a public health requirement of just one metre between persons in emergency shelters throughout the province — an exception to the province-wide two-metre requirement for the rest of the population. A two-metre requirement was in place at specific emergency shelters only during COVID-19 outbreaks — e.g. when there was one active case or more at the shelter in question (Falvo, 2020).

**Harm reduction.** Harm reduction focuses on reducing harm caused by drug use without requiring total abstinence. Harm reduction approaches include the distribution of condoms, clean syringes, safe inhalation kits and supervised consumption services. There is evidence that harm reduction approaches: reduce risk-taking behaviour; reduce the risk of transmission of blood-borne diseases; prevent overdoses; reduce crime; and increase contact with other supports, including health-care supports (Pauly et al., 2013). Recent research on supervised consumption services in Calgary has further found that: overdoses decrease steadily over time with such programming; and each overdose that is managed results in approximately \$1,600 in cost savings resulting primarily from reduction in the use of emergency departments and pre-hospital ambulance services (Khair et al., 2022). Most harm reduction programs across Canada tend to target persons experiencing homelessness.

According to one key informant interviewed for this chapter, Alberta had rather robust harm reduction programming beginning in the 1980s, despite successive social conservative governments: “Activists worked quietly and effectively.” For example, 1.4 million clean needles were being distributed in Edmonton annually even before the NDP formed a government in 2015. Alberta was also one of the first provinces in Canada to distribute naloxone kits (beginning in 2005), and one of the first provinces to distribute safer inhalation supplies (beginning around 2008).

The same key informant noted the UCP has since made harm reduction a wedge issue with voters. For example:

- Alberta Health Services (AHS) had a comprehensive organizational policy on harm reduction brought in under the NDP. It stipulated that people could not be excluded from health care due to substance use, and it covered all clinical programs covered by AHS and all AHS staff. The UCP changed this, limiting its scope and making it optional.
- Identification is now required to access supervised consumption services in Alberta. Patients must provide their personal health number. According to one key informant: “I’m not aware of anywhere else in the world that mandates this.”
- Lethbridge had the largest supervised consumption service in North America, but it was closed by the UCP in 2020, and replaced with a two-booth mobile site. The previous initiative used to serve 20 people at a time; the two-booth mobile site today serves just two people at once.
- Edmonton lost Boyle Street, the city’s largest supervised consumption site. The UCP had made an election promise about not having three sites in downtown Edmonton.
- The UCP closed injectable opioid agonist treatment (iOAT). AHS had operated

one in Calgary and one in Edmonton. This was long-term treatment for people with severe opioid challenges (e.g. persons who had tried other approaches without success). Patients were given one year to transition to oral medication — though most had not done well on it previously.

- The UCP plans to close Calgary’s supervised consumption services (injection only) at the Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre and intends to replace it with two shelter-based sites (*Canadian Press*, 2022).
- Medicine Hat was on the brink of getting supervised consumption. A building had been purchased, and then the UCP cancelled its funding.

According to one key informant who has strong familiarity with harm reduction in Alberta: “There was in effect quiet diplomacy for many years, but that’s changed under the UCP, and people in the sector are now demoralized.”

Admittedly, the UCP has made some abstinence-based treatment options more accessible to persons experiencing homelessness. Specifically, the UCP has reduced the need for fees for residential treatment programs. According to one key informant: “No one is supposed to pay out of pocket now to attend residential treatment.” These programs are typically 30 days long, with some lasting up to one year. Some participants go from residential treatment to after care where they are still supported (but it is more like transitional housing). The UCP has also announced they will build five “recovery communities” for long-term residential treatment, some of which may now already be built.

The lack of harm reduction options has the potential to exacerbate homelessness, including amongst older persons. According to one key informant: “There’s no seniors’ housing for an alcoholic. Lodges don’t take alcoholics. So those persons end up in a homeless shelter. They also don’t fit well into long-term care.”

In June 2022, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta’s Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply released its final report. All NDP members of the committee had resigned four months earlier, calling it a “political stunt” (Smith, 2022). The report “was released online, without a government announcement or media conference” (Amato, 2022). To no one’s surprise, the committee’s final report did not recommend Alberta emulate British Columbia’s exploration of safe supply. Rather, it recommended Alberta continue to focus on abstinence-based approaches (Select Special Committee, 2022).

***Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force.*** Under the UCP, efforts were made to modify the funding model for emergency shelters. According to one key informant, the GoA (specifically, Community and Social Services) was developing

a logic model for shelters. It [was rolled out] as of April 1, 2022 with the new funding cycle for shelters. Shelters will all be expected to have a logic model in place. Government is developing it and I think shelters will have some opportunity to give feedback on a draft.

Another key informant noted:

Funding for our emergency shelter used to be based on shelter bed nights. Heads on mats and numbers of meals. I pointed out that this was not the right way to incentivize; so now [under the UCP] we have housing outcomes in part of our core service agreements. I was given the liberty of writing those into mine.

Possibly with the goal of building on such efforts, in November 2021, the UCP government announced the creation of a new homelessness task force. According to a government news release:

The task force will look at how communities are affected by homelessness. It will also look at developing a model for responding to people with complex needs. Additionally, it will make recommendations that will help create an action plan on homelessness for the province (GoA, 2021b).

According to the GoA's website: "The Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force was established to find innovative ways to end recurring homelessness in our province and find long-term solutions to help those in need" (GoA, 2021a). The website reports the task force was also to:

look at how communities are impacted by homelessness; conduct a thorough review of access to services, including shelter, food, financial assistance, health and recovery supports; and develop a coordinated and community-based model that responds to the individual and complex needs of vulnerable Albertans (GoA, 2021a).

Task force recommendations were to "inform an action plan for province-wide implementation and an evaluation framework" (GoA, 2021a). This work resulted in a Sept. 30 2022 report titled *Recovery oriented housing model: Report of the Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force*. The report itself consisted of little more than vague platitudes (it did not cite a single body of academic research). However, on Oct. 1 2022, the UCP government announced \$63 million over two years

**Table 15.2: Breakdown of \$63 Million in Homelessness Funding**

Action plan item	Funding 2022-23	Funding 2023-24
Additional funding for Edmonton community-based organization	\$12 million	\$12 million
Winter shelter demand	\$9 million	\$9 million
Expanding shelters to 24-7 service	\$4.5 million	\$9 million
Piloting the service hub model	\$2.5 million	\$5 million
		<b>TOTAL: \$63 million</b>

Source. GoA, 2022c.

in new funding for homelessness, ostensibly in response to the task force report (GoA, 2022c). This new funding, which the UCP referred to as its Action Plan on Homelessness, consisted of the following:

- Equalizing funding between community-based organizations in Edmonton and Calgary (Calgary had previously been receiving more homelessness funding on a per-capita basis).
- The expansion of the number of emergency shelter spaces for the winter months.
- The conversion of all provincially funded emergency shelters to “24-7 access” (many had previously required that residents leave during the day).
- The piloting a new “service hub model” at emergency shelters in Edmonton and Calgary “to connect clients directly with supports and services such as recovery, housing and emergency financial support.”

This new funding is summarized in Table 15.2 (above).

Also on Oct. 1, 2022, alongside the above announcements pertaining to homelessness, the UCP announced \$124 million in new funding over two years for addiction services (\$70 million in capital funding and \$54 million in operating funding). The breakdown of this new funding is as follows shown in Table 15.3 (next page).

## Discussion

While this chapter’s focus is twofold (housing and homelessness), it effectively covers three areas: subsidized housing; homelessness; and harm reduction (largely due to how enmeshed harm reduction is with homelessness). The UCP government handled each of these areas differently, and as such deserve a different assessment.

**Table 15.3: Breakdown of \$124 million in addictions funding**

Announced on October 1, 2022

Item	Funding level
Recovery Communities*	\$65 million
Hybrid health and police hubs	\$28 million
Therapeutic Living Units in provincial correctional facilities	\$12 million
Medical detox	\$11 million
Harm reduction and recovery outreach teams	\$8 million

*Notes.* All budget items include both capital and operating funding, with the exception of “Harm reduction and recovery outreach teams,” which consists only of operating funding. All funding is over two years.

\* There are four recovery communities currently under development in Alberta, one in each of the following communities: Red Deer, Lethbridge, Gunn, and on the Blood Tribe First Nation.

*Source.* GoA, 2022b.

### ***Subsidized rental housing: Insufficient funding, but a move toward better policy***

From a budgetary standpoint, there were ups and downs with subsidized rental housing. The first three UCP budgets announced cuts to specific programs, although some programs saw modest increases.

The de-indexation of various income assistance programs (announced as part of the 2019-20 budget) has had a significant impact on housing affordability across Alberta, especially in light of high inflation.

The use (e.g. reprofiling) of previously allocated provincial rent supplement funding to count as the GoA’s “matching contribution” toward the CHB initiative was disappointing for many affordable housing advocates. Federal initiatives such as these are intended to induce provincial and territorial governments to spend more, not to repackage existing funding.

A lack of provincial operating funding puts all RHI units in jeopardy across Alberta. All RHI projects will have great difficulty serving marginalized tenants without new operating funding from the GoA.

Both the Affordable Housing Review Panel and the Stronger Foundations strategy have been positive developments from the standpoint of housing operators across Alberta, especially as they relate to the transfer of ownership, the move toward a more diverse income mix among tenants, and commitments toward new units. Indeed, the recommendations appear sensible to most stakeholders, notwithstanding the fact that most recommendations depend on new provincial funding (not yet announced).



***Homelessness: Additional funding and bias toward the faith community***

UCP budgets were very status quo with respect to homelessness. Having said that, not everything has been status quo on the provincial homelessness front, as is outlined below.

The de-indexation of various income assistance programs in the face of high inflation will almost certainly lead to evictions and new homelessness across Alberta.

Pandemic-related funding for homelessness allowed for improvements in physical distancing across Alberta's homelessness sectors. Having said that, the fact that most shelters were unable to create two metres of physical distancing between individuals throughout the pandemic was revealing and disappointing.

It is not clear that preferential funding for faith-based organizations in the homelessness sector is good public policy. It likely is not, and reflects a willingness on the part of this government to play to its core supporters.

The work of the Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force resulted in important funding enhancements.

***Harm reduction: A wedge issue and a move away from evidence***

While not a central focus of this chapter, harm reduction is closely related to homelessness; most harm reduction initiatives have targeted persons experiencing homelessness, and the UCP government has been quite active on this file.

Harm reduction has been a wedge issue for the UCP, with the provincial government using its action on this file to distinguish itself from the NDP. The UCP has reduced access to harm reduction services, which has likely resulted in poorer health outcomes for vulnerable persons and has almost certainly resulted in the premature loss of lives. However, this government has shown an interest in providing funding enhancements for abstinence-based treatment, and some even for harm reduction (as announced in October 2022).

**Conclusion**

On the affordable housing front, this government's release of a 10-year strategy signalled the potential for improved policy. The strategy appears to open the door for better program design and more subsidized units. Having said that, the bold objectives articulated in the strategy have not yet been supported with appropriate funding, effectively making the strategy a North Star in search of a budget (though admittedly some of the strategy's recommendations may not require additional budgetary authority).

Under the NHS, it is commendable the GoA secured the maximum available federal funding amounts. However, many affordable housing advocates in Alberta are disappointed the GoA reprofiled existing provincial funding to count as its matching funding for the new CHB initiatives (rather than use *new* provincial funding). And while federal RHI funding has flowed in Alberta, supported units are still awaiting word on whether the GoA will provide operating funding.

No major funding changes for homelessness were announced during budgets, but a \$63-million funding enhancement announced on Oct. 1, 2022 was welcome news for many. This government also signalled an interest in improved oversight of emergency shelters, with greater focus on the flow of people out of shelters into housing (but without additional funding to support successful transitions into permanent housing). Having said that, the inability of most of the province's emergency shelters to create two metres of physical distance between shelter residents during the pandemic revealed the extent to which emergency shelters were indeed under-resourced during this government.

Under the UCP, a major disappointment for practitioners, advocates, and researchers has been harm-reduction policy. The UCP appears to have used it as a wedge issue with voters, reducing access to harm-reduction initiatives in favour of abstinence-based approaches. This has likely resulted in a deterioration in health outcomes for both the vulnerably housed and those experiencing absolute homelessness. It has also quite likely resulted in the premature loss of lives of vulnerable Albertans.

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## Appendix: Interview guide

Hello,

I'm writing a book chapter on the UCP government's performance on affordable housing and homelessness. The book in question is being co-edited by Trevor Harrison and Ricardo Acuna.

Here are some questions I'd like to ask you about your respective realm of expertise (I'm assuming you're more knowledgeable in one of the two areas, and not necessarily both). Please note that this interview would be non-attributable, meaning you would not be identified by name in what I write.

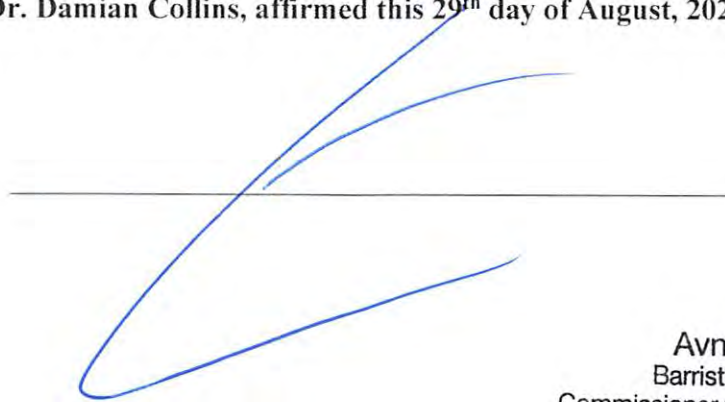
1. Let's assume you're talking to someone who knows the area in question (i.e., affordable housing or homelessness) but not the Alberta context. What are 3-4 Alberta-focused contextual factors such a person should know about in order to understand the policy area in question?
2. In the policy area in question, what are 3-4 significant things that this government has done?
3. What significant things has this government done relating to housing/homelessness and the overdose crisis?

14. Many would say that this government tried to shift GoA's focus from harm reduction to treatment. To what extent would you agree with that? To what extent were they effective in doing this? And to what extent were newly-developed treatment options accessible to persons experiencing homelessness?
5. What significant things has this government done relating to housing/homelessness and Indigenous peoples?
6. Of the things they've done in your area, which ones are you happiest with? In other words, describe why these things were good, and why this government deserves credit for doing those specific things.
7. What are some specific things this government has done in the area in question that you're unhappy with? What should people understand about how this government has let the sector down?
8. To what extent has the homelessness sector been tightly-aligned with the housing sector?
9. What about the alignment between the homelessness sector and the emergency shelter sector? Are those two systems working together cohesively?
10. The following types of roles are very important: ministers; backbench MLAs; senior public servants; mid-level public servants; and junior-level public servants. To what extent would you say that, under the UCP, these various players were all "on the same" page with each other?
11. To what extent did the various players listed above listen and dialogue respectfully with housing providers and senior homelessness officials in the community sector (e.g., CBOs)?
12. To what extent did they listen and dialogue respectfully with municipal governments?
13. Under this government, did you feel you could freely talk to your Minister and their staff? When you did try to dialogue with your Minister and their staff, to what extent was there a senior public servant (or several) trying to interfere or undermine those conversations?
14. What should the next government do to make positive changes in the policy area in question? In other words, what would be the 3-4 policy or program asks on your wish list, for the sector as a whole, for the next provincial government?
15. Do you have advice for the next government in terms of which types of people should be in key staffing roles in the senior public service?
16. Is there anything else you'd like to say about what we've discussed today?
17. Would you be willing to review a draft of this chapter?

**NOTES**

- 1 Trevor Harrison and Ric Acuna worked diligently to create the anthology in which this chapter finds itself. They provided inspiration, structure, and guidance to all authors. Sixteen research participants gave generously of their time toward this chapter. They all provided invaluable insight; many also provided detailed feedback on an early draft. The identity of participants is being protected due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter. Gary Gordon, Shaun Jones, and Steve Pomeroy provided feedback on an early draft. Others who provided comments requested their identity be protected. Susan Falvo and Jenny Morrow provided helpful proofreads of this chapter before it was submitted to the editors.
- 2 Unfortunately, this same criticism can be directed at most provincial and territorial governments, as well as at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.
- 3 This was eventually extended to seven years.
- 4 The Rapid Housing Initiative is a federal program discussed later in this chapter.

This is Exhibit "12" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal black line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

International Journal on Homelessness, 2023, 3(2): page 124-138.

## 'Forced to Become a Community': Encampment Residents' Perspectives on Systemic Failures, Precarity, and Constrained Choice

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Received: 13 Nov 2021  
Accepted: 13 Sept 2022

### Abstract

Homelessness is a serious public health concern with devastating consequences for health and wellbeing of homeless people. Visible signs of homelessness often appear in the form of encampments or tent cities. Such sites often raise controversies about public health and safety without attention to the structural, systemic and individual factors that contribute to their existence, including deficits in basic determinants of health and a failure to protect human rights to housing. The purpose of this paper is to explore the conditions that contribute to homeless encampments and ongoing issues of precarity, and right to housing from the perspective of residents of one encampment. The data set was comprised of 47 affidavits taken from 33 people from one tent city in Victoria, British Columbia (BC) in anticipation of legal action to remove residents and their belongings in 2016. We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis to identify, analyze and report patterns within the data. Residents spoke to systemic failures within the homeless sector itself as a factor in decisions to live in an encampment. Participants highlighted the challenges of 'being chained to a backpack' with nowhere to go and the impact of bylaws and policing on their health and well being. They acknowledged that while living in an encampment is a last resort it is often a better option than the streets or shelters with the benefits of a community, albeit a forced one with ongoing precarity. Public health responses to encampments should focus on centring human rights to adequate housing including self-determination and access to determinants of health. Such responses are aligned with public health commitments to health equity and social justice and require public health infrastructure.

### Keywords

Homelessness; encampments; tent cities; public health; human rights

## Introduction

In the United States (US), over 580,000 people experience homelessness on a single night in 2020 (Henry et al., 2021). In Canada, there are 235,000 people with 35,000 on a given night (Gaetz et al., 2016). Homelessness is a serious public health issue in which individuals experience poor

health, lack of access to health services, and deficits in key social determinants of health such as housing, food, and income as well as high levels of stigma and discrimination and lack of self-determination (Buccieri et al., 2020; Fowler et al., 2019; Frankish et al., 2005, 2009; Hwang et al.,



2011; Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario) & Berenbaum, 2019; Riley et al., 2012; Sleet & Francescutti, 2021; Tsai et al., 2017). As the National Healthcare for the Homeless Council (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2019) observes "being without a home is a dangerous health condition" and "no amount of healthcare can substitute for stable housing" (p. 2).

Homeless people often face multiple and intersecting sources of systemic stigma and discrimination based on economic status, gender, ethnicity age, substance use, mental health and other issues impacting health, and access to housing and services (Frankish et al., 2005; Pauly, 2014). In the absence of safe and affordable housing, some people create shelter outdoors in homeless encampments (Cohen et al., 2019). Encampments existed pre COVID but public health measures put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 reduced shelter spaces and increased visible homelessness in encampments with increasing risks and harms for people experiencing homelessness and nowhere to shelter (Allegrante & Sleet, 2021; Perri et al., 2020).

Encampments are met with varied community responses from community sweeps and displacement with or without supports to tacit acceptance and/ or in a few cases sanctioning (Cohen et al., 2019). Public controversies surrounding visible encampments are often closely intertwined with discussions of public health and public safety including lack of sanitation and increasing crime as reasons for displacement (Lorinc, 2020; Olson & Pauly, 2021). These discussions take place in a political and policy landscape that displaces and/or criminalizes people for acts of living such as eating, sleeping, and performing bodily functions in public amidst lack of access to basic public health infrastructure and safe, acceptable, and affordable housing for living (Rankin, 2019, 2020). In fact, government officials often cite lack of public health infrastructure as a reason for eviction and displacement of encampments (Speer, 2016).

Rankin (2019, 2020) found that a person experiencing homelessness is no more likely to commit a crime than a housed person, with the exception of laws that specifically punish people

for performing "necessary, life-sustaining activities in public" (p. 99), making it difficult to survive as a homeless person without breaking the law (Langeegger & Koester, 2017). Russell (2020) found that the majority of charges laid in geographic areas surrounding encampments were non-violent drug offences and that nearly a third of encampments in Portland, Oregon had a crime concentration less than that of the rest of the city. Further, narratives that displace and criminalize people experiencing homelessness employ neo-liberal arguments that criminalize and blame individuals for their choices while ignoring the systemic and structural issues that produce homelessness in the first place. For those who are visibly homeless, the stigma is especially intense contributing to negative attitudes and violence towards homeless people (Harter et al., 2005), obscuring structural and systemic causes and limiting public health responses rooted in the social determinants of health and rights to housing.

Increasingly, US cities rely on anti-camping, 'quality of life ordinances,' 'move on' orders or street checks to 'remove visible poverty from its city streets' by continually displacing people experiencing homelessness with nowhere to go (Ruan et al., 2018) (p.1). Rankin (2020) highlights that the latter (without ordinances) type of 'civil enforcement' evades courts and legislation, and thereby meaningful reporting and accountability. While civil enforcement is more widely used by municipalities than criminal charges. Rankin (2019) notes that both civil and criminal enforcement increases people's likelihood of remaining homeless, getting sick, self-medicating, becoming incarcerated, or dying. Other researchers have found that the constant presence and threat of policing and displacement in homeless people's lives contributes to difficulties with sleeping and poor mental health as well as trauma and emotional distress (Cohen et al., 2019; Westbrook & Robinson, 2020).

Homelessness arises from a complex interplay of multiple structural, systemic, and individual factors (Allegrante & Sleet, 2021; Fowler et al., 2019; Gaetz et al., 2013). Structural factors include lack of investments in affordable housing; erosion of social safety nets and inadequate incomes; and multiple forms of discrimination including racism, classism, and sex and gender discrimination (Gaetz et al., 2013).

Systemic factors include the failure of social systems of care and support such as discharges from hospitals, corrections and child welfare, which in turn require a reliance on the homelessness sector (Gaetz et al., 2013). Structural and systemic factors intersect with personal situations to produce a set of conditions in which individuals become unhoused. Homelessness can be understood as a consequence of multiple policy decisions at every level of government (Allegrante & Sleet, 2021)

Displacement and criminalization as responses do little to address the structural and systemic factors that produce homelessness, propel stigma and limit self-determination with potential violation of human rights of homeless persons. In contrast, public health responses, centred in health equity and social justice, emphasize responses that seek to address social conditions such as housing, income and discrimination that impact health and access to basic determinants of health (Community Solutions; Health, 2008; Olson & Pauly, 2021).

Determinants of health, such as housing, food, non-discrimination and self-determination are enshrined as human rights in international treaties and covenants and central to public health promotion and the realization of other human rights (Braveman, 2010; Meier et al., 2018). In 2019, Canada passed the National Housing Strategy Act recognizing international rights by legislating the right to housing and recognizing that housing is inherent to health and well-being (Government of Canada, 2019). Encampment residents are subject to human rights violations given the deficiencies in determinants of health such as water, food, housing, non-discrimination, and self-determination. Further, ongoing homelessness and failure to implement a human right to housing is contributing to precarious living, poor health and premature death for homeless persons (The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation & The National Right to Housing Network, 2021).

Precarity can be understood as 'the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks' thus impacting their ability to live healthy lives and remain free from 'injury, violence, and death' (Butler, 2009). Precarity finds its roots in a deteriorating social safety net, a reality made through the 'power relations and structural

violence' of neoliberal capitalism (Shaw & Byler, 2016) and ongoing colonization. Often, homelessness is mythologized, as being the result of individual choice, or a series of deviant choices (Parsell, 2012). Precarity draws attention to the breakdown of 'social, political, and economic institutions' that force people into a situation of constrained choice, having to choose between staying in unsafe situations, emergency shelters or living outdoors and responded to imposed precarity through sites and techniques like encampments.

There has been limited Canadian research on encampments, and little focus on perspectives of encampment residents regarding structural and systemic factors that impact their decisions to take up residence in an encampment and the role of encampments in their lives. Such understandings are important beginning points for realizing housing as a human right. The purpose of this paper is to explore the structural and systemic conditions that contribute to homeless encampments and ongoing issues of precarity from the perspective of residents of one encampment in Victoria, British Columbia (BC): Super Intent City (SIC). The specific research questions were: 1) what were the benefits and challenges associated with living in SIC compared to the streets and shelters? and 2) what were issues related to accessing shelters and housing? We begin with a description of SIC, followed by describing our methodology, and findings.

### **Super in Tent City (SIC), Victoria, BC**

SIC was an encampment located on the unceded traditional territory of the *sx̱w̱eŋx̱w̱əŋ* (Swengwhung) Family of the Lekwungen People, known commonly as Victoria, British Columbia (BC), Canada. Victoria is the capital city of BC and has been home to several tent cities including Cridge Park (Sargent, 2012) that have challenged current laws and regulations related to camping in public spaces. In 2008, the BC provincial court found that it was a violation of human rights not to allow people to erect shelter to protect themselves. Following this judgement, the City of Victoria introduced 7 to 7 camping restrictions in which shelter can only be erected from 7 pm to 7am and a cycle of daily displacement. In 2015, the provincial courthouse lawn in Victoria, BC

became home to a growing number of tents and informal structures in direct response to an emerging housing crisis in the city and across the province. The approximately 120 residents of what became known as SIC forced regional discussions about the right to adequate and affordable housing and the role of public health in responding to homelessness. The residents came from diverse housing histories and situations, many of which included experiences in shelters and supportive housing.

This encampment was located on provincial land and therefore excluded from municipal bylaws prohibiting sheltering between 7am and 7pm. Thus, being under provincial jurisdiction allowing residents to shelter in place. However, while the encampment stood on provincial land for the better part of a year, its status always remained uncertain due to public disapproval and two provincial injunctions petitioning the courts for eviction. SIC residents, like others who are homeless, were living in uncertain and precarious situations regarding access to public health resources, particularly in regard to housing, but also food, water, hygiene, and sanitation.

### Methodology

For this paper, we conducted a secondary analysis of legal affidavits using a thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke's (2006) to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data. The data set was comprised of 47 affidavits taken from 33 people of SIC (30 residents, one part-time resident, two supporters with lived experience of homelessness) between December 2015 to June 2016 in anticipation of legal action to remove residents from the current site. Affidavits were initially gathered and sworn for use in the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Affidavits formed the basis of this secondary analysis. The affidavits were used as a matter of public record with additional approval for their use for the purpose of research analysis from the Counsel for the Defense and legal firm who originally collected them. Public use of affidavits are outlined in the Supreme Court of BC Court Record Access Policy that states "[t]he public may access an affidavit and an exhibit which is attached to an affidavit where that affidavit is

filed with the court unless a statutory provision, common law rule or court order restricts or limits access.' Further ethical approval outlining procedures for maintaining confidentiality and ethical processes for handling data was obtained from the University of Victoria (Certificate number 21-0067).

The thematic analysis began with a full reading of all 47 affidavits by both authors and duplicates removed. One author (Pauly) had been present and attended Super Intent City meetings and acted as an expert witness in both legal actions. The first author (Olson) coded the affidavits for available demographic information (gender, ethnicity, length of time homeless) and removed identifiers from any statements. Documents were re-read and coded by the first author to identify initial codes related to the benefits and challenges of living in an encampment as well as challenges related to obtaining housing. With subsequent readings, inductive coding was employed to identify salient ideas and inductively derived themes were developed by both authors. All data and related documents were kept on a secured shared drive. Data were grouped into categories, mapped thematically in Adobe InDesign, with quotes grouped thematically in a Word Document. At the end of the initial coding process, the concept map was synthesized to clarify main themes and subthemes, after which subsequent quotes were reorganized to reflect themes and select quotes that most accurately represented each theme and subtheme. In reporting the findings, we have included direct quotes identified with a participant number.

### Results

We identified four themes that describe issues related to housing and shelters that lead to being in an encampment and the experiences (benefits and challenges) of living in an encampment: 1) systemic failures in the homeless sector; 2) chained to a backpack and running out of places to go; 3) forced to be a community; and 4) precarious stability.

#### Systemic Failures in the Homeless Sector

Drawn from a diverse group of up to 120 people, SIC participants cited unique structural,

systemic, and individual circumstantial factors contributing to their experiences of homelessness. For example,

*"Yes, me and my girlfriend applied for a bachelor suite in a market housing, and we were accepted and signed an intent to rent form with the landlord as required by the Ministry of Social Development in order to get the shelter portion released to the landlord. However, the Ministry took over a week to process the intent to rent form and release our shelter portions and over this time the landlord found someone else to rent the suite to." -ST21*

For many homelessness had begun at a young age. Of particular note were systems-level failures such as governmental misconnections, policy gaps, inadequate service delivery and lack of supports which included inaccessibility of mental health services, ageing out of government care, being released from correctional facilities, and lacking appropriate or adequate housing options.

However, primary among the systemic failures cited were that of the homeless sector itself. Residents highlighted systemic failures within the homeless sector such as particular rules and restrictions that made shelter and supportive housing sites functionally inaccessible.

*I make most of my income by bottling, and the best time for me to go bottling is during the night. I often bottle all through the night. In most shelters there is curfew, so if you are out late you cannot get a spot. -ST12*

The following resident cites rules disallowing partners and guests depriving them of important social supports.

*...you can't have guests over. This is not an option for me as I want to live with or at least see my boyfriend and my social network regularly. I would rather sleep outside than not be able to spend time with my boyfriend and social network. They are a main part of my supports in staying healthy, so I need them around. -ST10*

As this participant observes, their social network is a key social support important to staying healthy and that they would choose to sleep outside over not being able to access their social network illustrating the forced choices

available to participants. Additionally, rules barring pets from shelter spaces also meant that shelters were functionally inaccessible for residents with pets who are often a key emotional support. Another participant describes the challenge and impacts of being the same space when there are conflictual relationships.

*"I can't go to [name of shelter] as there are people living there that I have personal issues with and I do not want to live in that shelter because I will end up living in depression. When I get depressed I turn to self-harm. I can't go to some of the shelter mat programs because there are also people there that I can't be around." -ST13*

Shelters are communal spaces and not necessarily safe spaces with shelter rules that delineate curfews, bed checks, wake-up, minimum requirements, and monthly stay limits. These settings and consequent rules can be incompatible with earning income, lifestyles, and access to community supports while restricting stability, safety, and ability to take care of oneself.

Despite often being understood as having good intentions, residents saw shelter staff as entities of enforcement and the human manifestation of the rules, which make shelters inaccessible, unrealistic, and impossible for some due to feelings of surveillance and monitoring:

*[Shelters] remind me of being in jail. When there are people on walkie-talkies telling me what I can and can't do and at what time it is triggering for me and brings me back to the feeling of being in jail...I don't mean any harm to the people that work there but being there felt like I had done something wrong. I felt tense. It felt like the staff were cops even though I know they weren't trying to be. -ST9*

Other residents with experience in shelters saw staff as invasive, inexperienced, and patronizing, bringing up negative past experiences with criminalization, institutionalization, surveillance, and self-worth. The pervasiveness of these rules and their enforcement, as well as being unable to avoid theft made residents feel 'less than' (ST11) in a society where they already experienced stigmatization. The shelter environment was experienced as the opposite to feelings of home:

*A shelter is somebody else's home, with somebody else's rules, and somebody else's politics. If it's a*

*government run shelter, than (sic) there are government rules. A home is something you build for yourself. It's your safe place. A community centre is not my safe space. It will never be mine. It is whoever runs it. A safe place is my place. -ST11*

For SIC residents, experiences with supportive or transitional housing were similarly restrictive to the point of making living in these settings untenable. The process of applying for and acceptance into supportive housing, associated waitlists, and program costs were described as deceptive and confusing. One resident cited surveillance, infantilization, and program structures that restrict tenancy rights as reasons that supportive housing was not an option for them:

*Supportive housing is not supportive. Supportive housing allows you to be evicted with 24 hours' notice. Not being under tenancy laws gives you less protection. You are also subject to having staff monitor you. I am an adult and I do not need to be monitored. Supportive housing should mean treating me like an adult. -ST21*

This resident is highlighting the lack of security of tenure and is referring to program agreements that allow for 24 hours eviction notices without timelines and protection afforded by the residential tenancy act. Rules restricting guests in housing sites proved to be both a barrier to accessing supportive housing, as well as a reason people experienced eviction, and the 'institutional' (ST23) feel prompted by surveillance and no-guest rules were found to be trigger past negative experiences in government institutions. Further, these residents are highlighting a failure in the right to adequate housing including security of tenure. SIC residents outlined a wide range of reasons that shelters, and supportive housing were not realistic or accessible, whether socially, physically, or based on personal safety or disability; in short, systemic inadequacies contributed to their experiences of homelessness and subsequent residency at Super in Tent City. "Arbitrary," impractical, and inflexible rules (ST6) enforced in shelters and supportive or transitional housing sites made these settings unrealistic or functionally inaccessible for SIC residents. Rather than being spaces where individuals fail to abide by the rules, residents

saw these spaces as failing users due to a lack of choice and autonomy through imposed rules and requirements that were out of touch with their daily realities and past experiences. The inaccessibility of shelters and supportive housing further constrained their accommodation choices, thereby creating or recreating precarity and effectively leaving participants with the forced choice of sheltering outside.

### **Chained to a Backpack and Running Out of Places to Go**

Residents spoke to their experiences of living outdoors under bylaws that only allowed for erection of shelter from 7 pm to 7 requiring them to move daily. *The words I hear every day are move along. Time to go. We are running out of places to go (-ST11).* Another participant describes the physical and mental toll of having to move one's belongings on a daily basis to ensure they were not taken by the authorities, a concern stated widely by SIC residents.

*Before I lived in the camp, I had to move my belongings during the day. This was very limiting for me and very difficult. I had to set up after dark and tear down in the morning. I was chained to a backpack for the rest of the day, so it was difficult to get things done -ST11*

The above resident's analogy (or possible reality) of being chained to a backpack encompassed many residents' experiences with enforcement and displacement from police and bylaw officers when staying in other parks that disallowed 24/7 camping. Further, people had difficulty getting sleep and few places to go in the day.

*"As a homeless person I typically had a very late schedule. I wouldn't sleep much, would often stay up most of the night and then, if I found somewhere safe to sleep, would get woken up at 7 AM. I didn't have anywhere to go sleep in the day. [Name of drop in] doesn't allow that, so I would take drugs to stay up and frequently stay up for 2-3 days at a time and then crash hard. Typically, I would be very sleep deprived as are most people I know who live on the streets. This had a huge effect on my ability to function and take care of myself." -ST6*

Adding to the physical and mental toll was stigma associated with sheltering outdoors.

*Living in a city park is humiliating. It is not good for my self-worth. Everyone looks at you like you are a piece of crap. I am constantly viewed as a drug user or troublemaker just because I shelter in a park." -ST32*

These participants like others highlight the impacts of sheltering outdoors and constant moves on their health and wellbeing.

When camping on the street or in parks outside of SIC, residents described constant impound of personal belongings, displacement, and criminalization of poverty at the hands of city employees including parks staff, bylaw enforcement, and police. This resident outlines one experience:

*When I camp in City parks, the Authorities take my belongings. They don't take our belongings here at Tent City. The authorities took my ID. This has been very hard for me because getting ID back is a long process. I went through the process of getting my ID back, but the authorities took it – along with all my other belongings – from a park weeks after I got it back. -ST30*

Having identification, medication, and survival gear like sleeping bags, tarps, and tents seized and being unable to retrieve them was described as highly destabilizing in regards to sleep, nutrition, finances, and overall mental health. Under threat of SIC being shut down, as was the concern during several injunctions in summer 2016, this resident expressed anxiety that they would again lack the stability in their lives that was helping with health and well-being:

*If we were forced to move, I guess I'd be back to focusing on packing up and trying to stay dry. I don't have time to make appointments and all that stuff. I would hope that the city doesn't nail us for our sleeping bags. I have six layers of tarp on my tent right now that are quite insulating, but if the city hits us up for all our stuff we'd be freezing. -ST31*

Living in a park, being forced to setup and teardown each day, daily displacement, carrying and keeping possessions safe, was described as humiliating and exhausting with negative impacts on their health and well-being as well as

negatively affecting access to services and employment.

### **Forced to be a Community**

*The residents of Tent City work together and take care of each other. No one person is in charge. When something needs to be done, someone steps up. I don't particularly like Tent City. It shouldn't have to exist. I am here because I have to be here. It is my last option. I am desperate. But I live here, and we were forced to become a community. -ST30-1-1*

For various reasons, residents saw SIC as their only choice or a choice of last resort given the limited options of shelters, supportive housing, or living isolated and alone 'on the street' chained to a backpack. While some SIC residents approached living in a tent city as a choice, they acknowledged it as one ultimately constrained by the precarious situations they are forced to live in due to structural discrimination, poverty, and systemic failures that include shelter and supportive housing inadequacies and enforcement and displacement that perpetuates criminalization and stigmatization. Given the unaffordability of market housing and inaccessibility of shelters and supportive housing, SIC, for many, became the only real option demonstrating an ability to survive despite the precarity in which they are forced to exist.

*Where the street community is, something like tent city is the only solution for some people – it's a no brainer, there is well-trained 24 hours staff on site – we just need the governments to listen to us and support us. We can run the site, we just need help out with things like location, stipends, and other incentives. -ST1*

Highlighting their skills as residents to management an encampment speaks to their resilience in finding a 'housing option'. Other participants highlighted the ability of SIC residents to manage housing if they had the resources. *I think with a core group of people from tent city we could manage transitional housing for half the price of what (name of two organizations) would charge (ST9)*. Participants stressed that it is essential that they be consulted when new housing options are created. The participant below highlights the lack of consultation or

recognition of rights to self-determination when the courts determined that SIC Residents could not be displaced until housing is available.

*No one from the camp was consulted at all about how these new shelter options would be managed and run. Shame on the province for not including us in how our housing would be managed. -ST9*

Another resident described SIC as an accessible place where people are able to get their needs met despite being a choice of last resort and saw this built community as an entity that should be listened to and consulted by organizations and policy makers (ST24). Regardless of situation or solution, whether an outdoor encampment, indoor communal living space like a shelter, or supportive housing, SIC residents highlighted the important imperative of being consulted and right to self-determination as critical to success of any encampment, shelter or housing option. Thus, naming a key principle of their right to housing (Farha & Schwan, 2020).

### **Precarious Stability**

Participants highlighted that a key contributor to a sense of community and safety at SIC was the level of stability felt by residents; a product of being able to avoid constant movement, displacement, enforcement, and theft or seizure of personal belongings by the state experienced when sheltering on the street, outside of the SIC encampment.

*Now that I am staying here, I am better able to plan and keep appointments. I am better able to take care of my health now that I am staying here. I see this in others also. When people are not concerned about survival and finding a place to stay, we are able to work on our lives. -ST10*

This resident attributed improved well-being to a sense of physical, geographical permanence. Similarly, others suggested that being at SIC allowed them to connect with outreach workers in ways they were not able to before (ST10), to comply with parole reporting requirements (ST5), and that being close to the city's core made accessing resources far more attainable, even leading to a reduced need to commit crimes in order to meet survival needs like eating and sleeping. *Tent City keeps people out of jail, as they don't need to commit crimes to find somewhere to sleep*

*and find food (-ST5). When staying in other parks or doorways in the downtown core, daily displacement, loss of belongings at the hands of government employees, and regular contentious interactions with police were associated with destabilized physical and mental health, and impacted ability to work on necessary legal and personal circumstances. SIC allowed residents to better access services and worry less about survival or threats of enforcement and the ability to take care of their own health and well-being.*

SIC created what one resident called 'the closest thing to stable housing that my girlfriend and I ever had' (ST5). Another resident describes,

*At tent city I realized that I need a solid foundation to organize other things from and not be stressed out – from there I can start working on my life and figuring it out. I have found this at tent city. I am noticing that am able to function better and keep better track of day-to-day appointments and to better organize my life in general. Not having to move my belongings every day is a big part of this -ST24*

Physical or geographical stability for SIC residents is what allowed them the time and space to work on emotional and mental stability and for some, safer, more stable substance use.

Although SIC remained in one geographical location for nearly a year, injunctions and community pushback meant ongoing precarity. When the physical stability of SIC was directly threatened through several injunctions, so was the residents' 'physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health' (PT3). As described above, in spite of the built-in precarity of the geographical location of SIC, residents found ways to bring relative stability to the inherent instability that accompanies homelessness, especially in contrast to sheltering on the street, outside of the SIC encampment context.

### **Limitations**

The data for this paper were drawn from affidavits whose original purpose was to inform the courts about the experiences of residents living in the encampments and the benefits afforded over other potential but often unavailable spaces. Thus, the affidavits had the limitation of not specifically addressing or highlighting challenges associated with living in

encampments as the focus of the affidavits was to speak against an injunction to displace the camp. SIC was unique as an encampment in that it was defined by the residents as a community. Many encampments are informal and may differ in size and structure as well as experiences of the residents with differences in feelings of being a community. This encampment was located in an urban setting near the site of government in the provincial capital compared to other encampments or tent cities in less visible or more rural areas. These affidavits were collected in 2016. However, since that time, ordinances and anti-camping bylaws have continued to be enforced and, in some municipalities increased through investments in bylaw and policing of homeless encampments both pre and post COVID (Hermer, 2021; Hermer & Fonarev, 2020; Manno, 2022).

## Discussion

### Poverty Management Measures as Systemic Production of Homelessness

Systems failures that contribute to homelessness are generally understood to arise from gaps or shortcomings of mainstream services outside of the homelessness sector, such as corrections, health care, or foster care (Gaetz et al., 2013). However, SIC residents, highlight that their experiences within the homelessness sector in shelters and supportive housing are systems failures leaving them with little choice but to shelter outside. While shelters may offer a temporary response for some, they are not a housing solution (Hurtubise et al., 2007) and have been found to constrain expressions of home and experiences of privacy and safety (Speer, 2017). When studying the spatial confinement of anti-homeless laws in Denver, Colorado, Langegger and Koester (Langegger & Koester, 2017) regarded shelters as having the potential to exacerbate homelessness by depriving shelter users 'the autonomy necessary to conjure home-like spaces' (p. 454).

Previous research about SIC interprets 'push and pull' factors that led people to this particular encampment (substance use, mental health, lack of affordable housing), but did not include factors related to supportive housing and shelters (Young et al., 2017). We expand on the previous

research by adding insights from SIC residents about problematic experiences with shelters and supportive housing in terms of rules, evictions, institutionalization, and surveillance that contribute to encampments. Thus, the homeless sector itself is a site of systemic failures that compound homelessness and ongoing precarity. Simply put, SIC residents identified shelters as another factor forcing them to shelter outside. These findings provide insights for the homelessness sector in terms of rules (e.g., curfews, pets, couples) and the importance of attending to cultures of institutionalization and surveillance that contribute to decisions to stay outside.

Supportive housing, while offering more security, privacy, and potential permanence, was experienced by SIC residents in much the same way as shelter spaces. SIC residents made clear that supportive housing, as a solution to homelessness, is effective only insofar as it considers the individual needs and desires of the residents. Rules and restrictions contribute to negative feelings and past traumas related to institutionalization. Failing meaningful and ongoing consultation and self-determination, supportive housing risks being another systemic factor perpetuating precarity and homelessness. Further, program agreements and 24-hour evictions contribute to lack of security and safety of residents. Supportive housing should adopt a human rights approach to ensure security of tenure and tenancy rights rather than program agreements which lack security of tenure and violate the right to housing.

Daily criminalization of homelessness through the enforcement of bylaws made sheltering outside exhausting and unsafe, leading SIC residents to view an encampment as a more viable option due to its ability to most effectively and equitably respond to the physical, mental, and emotional needs of residents. The use of anti-camping ordinances as part of a system of 'poverty management' measures meant to 'concentrate and conceal' people experiencing homelessness are 'designed to purify urban space' (Langegger & Koester, 2017). SIC residents experienced these poverty management techniques as systems that contribute to ongoing destabilization by violating human rights and denying access to public health resources and key determinants of health. Poverty management



techniques such as laws that criminalize homelessness and poverty are costly without contributing to goals of ending homelessness and even work against such goals by increasing distrust and other harms (Cohen et al., 2019; Rankin, 2019).

For both Canada and the US, homelessness needs to be further understood in the context of colonialism and displacement of Indigenous people. The 'exclusion of Indigenous people' and high prevalence of Indigenous homelessness in a contemporary context is rooted in a historical and ongoing displacement and 'destabilization of culture which depended on the ethnic cleansing, linguicide, domicide of Indigenous peoples (Thistle, 2017)(p. 14). Colonial foundations underpin contemporary laws of displacement that continue to exist for people experiencing homelessness across the continent. It is through this lens of forced precarity, and constrained choice rooted in colonization and neoliberal capitalism that encampments, shelters, and supportive housing can be understood and the need for Indigenous self-determination and rights.

### **Constrained Choice**

In their study on the relationship between choice and homelessness, Parsell and Parsell (Parsell & Parsell, 2012) state that the idea of constrained choice is incompatible with the ideals of neoliberal capitalism, which instead considers homelessness as a direct choice of an autonomous individual, or the result of a series of deviant choices. Several authors have described the choice to take up residence in an encampment as an 'environmental' one—a decision based on negative experiences within treatment, healthcare, and/or shelter settings (Cohen et al., 2019; Larsen et al., 2004). The many barriers faced by people in encampments have led to a 'general consensus [among encampment residents] that services have not helped residents to meet their needs' (Cusack et al., 2021; Ruan et al., 2018; Young et al., 2017). Encampments have been identified as preferable alternatives to more institutional settings like shelters or transitional housing, in particular because of the 'material and moral benefits of camps over shelters' (Herring, 2014) such as autonomy, community,

and security (Cusack et al., 2021; Junejo et al., 2016; Loftus-Farren, 2011; Young et al., 2017).

Herring (Herring, 2014) determined that encampments would not simply 'disappear if more [shelter] beds were made available' (p. 306), but that encampments exist because of the 'moral and material benefits' found therein and denied in shelters. The experiences of SIC residents expand upon Herring's assertion suggesting that the reason participants sheltered at SIC was not simply a direct choice influenced by the amenities and benefits of an encampment, but that it was a constrained choice. A constrained choice due to an unaffordable rental housing market, the realities of sheltering outside, and the restrictions and deficiencies of shelters and supportive housing, making encampments the only remaining accessible option. The idea of being a 'forced community' (ST30-1-1) demonstrates how some SIC residents did not choose to take up residence in that space for moral and material benefits, but rather were placed in a situation of constrained choice and relied on a built sense of community to respond to the precarity in the midst of structural and systemic failures. Community and safety have been found by other researchers to be the major benefits of life in an encampment (Cusack et al., 2021; Junejo et al., 2016; Loftus-Farren, 2011; Young et al., 2017). Here we point to the importance of recognizing encampment residents as rights holders whose right to housing is being violated, the solution being to recognize these rights in responses to homelessness including rights to self-determination and participation in designing housing solutions and homelessness services (Farha & Schwan, 2020).

### **Precarity, Public Health, and Human Rights**

Encampments are manifestations of government and public health deficiencies: their 'failure to successfully implement the right to adequate housing' (Farha & Schwan, 2020)( p.2), failure to design responses to homelessness and encampments that meaningfully centre the voices of people experiencing homelessness, and provide other imperative public health provisions like food, water, social supports, and self-determination. Encampments are a result of structural and systemic failures and are a self-determined response to the subsequent

precarity—in the absence of adequate housing, SIC emerged as one of the only viable options for residents and allowed for a level of stability unachievable elsewhere.

While SIC was a result of systemic failures of responses to homelessness and consequent constrained choice, it also emerged as an assertion of human rights in the midst of precarious access to essential determinants of health. The precarious stability offered at SIC was a direct counter to the ongoing precarity of being unhoused and being unable to access the basic public health resources necessary for health. Instead of using public health arguments to dismantle and displace encampments, as was done in *British Columbia v. Adamson BCSC 1245* (2016), public health should align with human rights to housing and rights to self-determination to participate in ensuring safe, appropriate, and affordable housing options and/or ensuring public health infrastructure in the absence of housing. A few researchers have suggested the need for proactive planning to mitigate public health concerns, and the importance of including the perspectives of encampment residents in discussion of public health responses and solutions (Junejo et al., 2016; Wilson, 2020). In fact, the excessive costs of eviction efforts and land remediation could be prevented by providing safe, appropriate and adequate housing in the first place (Wilson, 2020). In the absence of adequate housing, providing encampments with the necessary public health resources such as water, sanitation, food storage, and outreach supports emerges as the more 'humane and cost-effective response' to encampments (Junejo et al., 2016) (p. 24) (Speer, 2016). Without being rooted in a human rights perspective, the public health sector risks joining other poverty management systems such as shelters, police and bylaw enforcement perpetuating not solving homelessness.

Displacement and enforcement tactics through city ordinances and bylaws have been found to have only a short-term effect on visible homelessness, and impacts residents' health and access to health services because of further isolation (Cousineau, 1997). In places where encampments are tolerated or sanctioned, researchers found this approach to be 'complementary, rather than contradictory' to criminalization and displacement of

encampments in 'prime spaces' (Herring, 2014)(p. 296), both as 'socio-spatial contraptions of homeless containment' and as a space preferred by many people experiencing homelessness to other alternatives such as shelters (p. 286). Other responses, such as the Encampment Resolution Pilot used in San Francisco and Philadelphia encampments emerged as alternatives to immediate displacement. In this model, municipalities set a date to remove encampments and offer housing and shelter options (Cusack et al., 2021). However, many encampment residents saw this as a delayed displacement and another way to 'put them out of sight' (p. 5155) because of lack of permanent solutions with integrated care (p. 160).

A public health response to encampments that is rooted in a human rights perspective such as the National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada (National Protocol), first and foremost would acknowledge the human right to housing (Farha & Schwan, 2020). Five years prior to the release of the National Protocol, SIC residents expressed the human rights-based imperative of consulting people experiencing homelessness in decisions made regarding responses to encampments and housing—the second principle of the National Protocol. In the absence of adequate housing as determined by encampment residents, a public health and human rights response that prioritizes meaningful engagement and housing or basic resources for health in the absence of housing is imperative given the precarity experienced by encampment residents. Without meaningful consultation, residents of SIC suggested that shelters and supportive housing options—proposed as alternatives to SIC and solutions to homelessness—will continue to perpetuate situations of precarity and constrained choices.

As outlined elsewhere, we have argued that public health guidance related to encampments could be strengthened through incorporation of a human rights approach and the 8 principles of the National Protocol (Olson & Pauly, 2021). The culture of criminalization and surveillance, as demonstrated in people's experiences in shelters, supportive housing, and public spaces, also threatens to find its way into public health responses to homeless encampments. Effective public health 'requires explicit and concrete

efforts to promote and protect human rights and dignity' (Pan American Health Organization, n.d.). Until public health responses to homelessness and encampments commit to aligning with human rights and centering the voices of people experiencing homelessness, such responses will fail to protect rights to housing and contribute to ongoing homelessness rather than ameliorate it.

### Conclusion

The homeless sector itself is a systemic factor contributing to encampments. When faced with situations in shelters and supportive housing that residents identify as unsafe, being under surveillance or overly restrictive, they experience a constrained choice in that they can choose to live under these conditions or shelter outdoors. In sheltering outdoors, they are subject to civil ordinances that seek to displace homeless people and increase the challenges associated with daily living and survival in which they felt chained to a backpack. Encampments offer a last option in which individuals are forced to create a community with the benefits of increased safety and less precarity allowing them to stabilize. Approaches to homelessness and encampments specifically should incorporate a human rights approach that emphasizes self determination, right to housing and basic determinants of health. Such a response is aligned with public health commitments to promote health equity and social justice through action on the social determinants of health.

### Declaration of Interest Statement

The second author of this paper, acted as an expert witness for Super Intent City in both of the legal cases in 2016. The author visited and participated in community activities such as meetings 255th throughout the duration of the encampment.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the article reviewers for their time and contributions to revising and enhancing this manuscript. It is with deep gratitude that we acknowledge the many residents of Super Intent City whose affidavits

informed this paper. In particular, we acknowledge Chrissy Brett (RIP) who reviewed a final version of this paper and provided her feedback on the accuracy of this analysis. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support from Bernie Pauly's Island Health Scholar in Residence Fund helped partially support (Nic Olson) to conduct the analysis and develop this publication.

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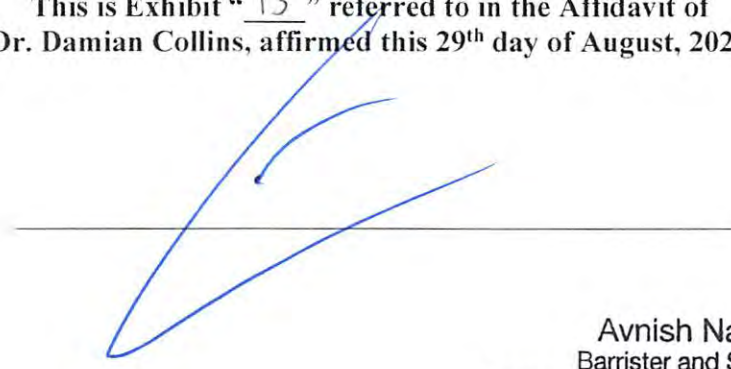
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This is Exhibit "13" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta

# Homeless Encampments Through a Human Rights Lens

**Municipal Policies and Recommendations  
September 2022**

**Alison Brown, Sarah Gillies, Victoria Marshall, Hannah  
Mcgurk, Dr. Laura Pin**



# Executive Summary

The visibility of unhoused people living in encampments, on public or private lands has drawn attention to the growing issue of unsheltered homelessness, and highlighted socioeconomic and legal challenges of regulating these spaces.

This paper builds on a community-engaged research project with the Region of Waterloo and uses a socio-legal perspective to provide a comparison of encampment protocols among seven municipalities: Waterloo, ON; Sudbury, ON; Toronto, ON; Hamilton, ON; Kingston, ON; Brantford, ON; and Winnipeg, MB. Municipal encampment responses were classified to assess the degree of criminalization present and whether policies were consistent with a human rights approach to housing and homelessness.

Our analysis found significant variation among municipal approaches, even among jurisdictions in the same provincial policy context. Responses to encampments on public and private land differed, as did the degree of engagement of encampment residents and outreach services offered. The findings suggest that municipalities could better engage with human rights principles in responding to encampments.

# Acknowledgements

We appreciate assistance from staff at the Region of Waterloo in conceptualizing and thinking through this project. We also are appreciative of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness agreeing to host this project. We are very grateful to Shawna Reibling, Knowledge Mobilization Officer, Wilfrid Laurier University for her editorial and design work in producing the final report. Any errors, inaccuracies or omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.

In so-called Canada, discussions of housing, homelessness, and eviction are intimately connected to the forced displacement of Indigenous peoples from these lands. In Waterloo Region, this includes the failure to honour the Haldimand Treaty of 1784 and the displacement of Six Nations of the Grand River from treaty territory in the Region. We recognize that researching and writing about housing and homelessness as settlers requires working towards more just relations with Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous peoples where we live and work.

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# Overall Recommendations

**01 Recognize that addressing encampments cannot be a substitute for addressing homelessness.**

The creation of more permanent affordable housing, including supportive housing, is the only long-term solution to the problem of unsheltered homelessness. Encampments are but one symptom of the problem of unsheltered homelessness.

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**02 Implement a human rights-based response to homeless encampments based on the National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada.**

The findings suggest that municipalities could better engage with human rights principles in responding to encampments. This should begin with greater consideration of how current laws and bylaws align to commitments to housing as a human right.

The following recommendations detail how to implement a human rights-based response:



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# Recommendations Consistent with Principle 2

Ensure meaningful engagement and effective participation of encampment residents

**03** **Respect the autonomy of residents regarding their housing decisions.** For many residents, encampments may be the only viable shelter option. Even if emergency shelter spaces are available, these spaces may not be safe or suitable. Encampment residents should have opportunity to express their personal needs, and outreach staff should work with residents to find individualized options that meet a given residents' needs.

**04** **Use a trauma-informed approach when engaging with residents to work towards meaningful interactions and opportunities to build trust.** One aspect of a trauma-informed approach would be to use a single point of contact (SPOC) approach to communication, which will reduce the retelling of traumatizing stories related to the needs and choices of encampment residents. This may include an organized system of information gathering which is easily transferable.

**05** **Ensure transparency and accountability in all engagements with encampment residents.** This may include mechanisms for residents to provide feedback and note concerns in relation to interactions with staff, bylaw and other municipal actors. Most importantly, transparency and accountability are key factors when information gathering occurs, as it is crucial to notify residents what the information gathered is being used for, and how it will be stored.

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# Recommendations Consistent with Principle 4

Explore all viable alternatives to eviction.

06

**Harmonize and update municipal bylaws.** Many bylaws in the municipalities reviewed were over 10 years old, and do not reflect the dire nature of the affordable housing crisis in Canada, nor do they reflect the increased presence of encampments across municipalities nationwide.

07

**Explore pathways for developing sanctioned encampment locations, either provisionally or permanently.** Provisionally sanctioning an encampment can provide time for outreach workers to develop safe, appropriate and permanent housing alternatives with encampment residents. Permanently sanctioning an encampment lessens fear of forced removal, creating an opportunity to refocus the relationship between encampment residents and staff on addressing the factors contributing to homelessness and working with individual residents to develop housing alternatives.

08

**Take steps to reduce the criminalization of people experiencing homelessness.** Housing advocates hold the view that enforcing fines for minor provincial offences and bylaw transgressions are concerning when issued to homeless individuals not only because of the tension they create between law enforcement and homeless communities but also because of the steep nature of imposed fines, many of which are never paid. Issuing fines is a reactive encampment management technique, not a proactive one, which may create significant financial barriers for unhoused people in accessing housing, employment and public services.

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# Recommendations Consistent with Principle 5

Ensure that any relocation is human rights compliant.

09

**Relocation should be voluntary and to housing that meets human rights standards and the individual needs of residents.** If needed, storage should be provided for personal belongings of residents during relocation.

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# Recommendations Consistent with Principle 6

Ensure encampments meet basic needs of residents consistent with human rights.

10

**Address safety concerns at encampment locations without resorting to forced removal of residents.** When safety concerns arise, work with encampment residents to provide services that address the specific safety concerns. Water, garbage disposal, sanitation, and fire safety education are all services provided to residents by municipalities and the first response to safety concerns should be the provision of these services.

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# Recommendations Consistent with Principle 8

Respect, protect, and fulfill the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples in all encampment engagements.

11

**The existence and management of encampments has important implications for relationships between municipalities and urban Indigenous communities.** Indigenous people are overrepresented in the unsheltered homeless population, therefore international human rights treaties and Indigenous leadership must be considered in encampment management discussions. The consultation process must consider engaging Indigenous peoples in a transparent manner, consistent with recognition of land and treaty rights and Canada's human rights obligations.

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# National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada

Adapted from Farah and Schwan, 2020

This protocol, produced by the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing and her research team, identifies that encampment residents are rights holders should not be criminalized for their lack of permanent housing (Farah and Schwan, 2020). It outlines eight principles for a government response to encampments grounded in human rights principles.

This assessment compares municipalities utilizing five of the eight principles in the National Protocol when responding to managing residents in homeless encampments. The principles were chosen due to their relevance to municipalities as policy actors.

- 01 PRINCIPLE 1: RECOGNIZE RESIDENTS OF HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS AS RIGHTS HOLDERS.
- 02 PRINCIPLE 2: MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF ENCAMPMENT RESIDENTS.
- 03 PRINCIPLE 3: PROHIBITION OF FORCED EVICTIONS OF ENCAMPMENTS.
- 04 PRINCIPLE 4: EXPLORE ALL VIABLE ALTERNATIVES TO EVICTION.
- 05 PRINCIPLE 5: ENSURE THAT ANY RELOCATION IS HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLIANT.
- 06 PRINCIPLE 6: ENSURE ENCAMPMENTS MEET BASIC NEEDS OF RESIDENTS CONSISTENT WITH HUMAN RIGHTS.
- 07 PRINCIPLE 7: ENSURE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED GOALS AND OUTCOMES, AND THE PRESERVATION OF DIGNITY FOR ENCAMPMENT RESIDENTS.
- 08 PRINCIPLE 8: RESPECT, PROTECT, AND FULFILL THE DISTINCT RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN ALL ENGAGEMENTS WITH ENCAMPMENTS.

Farha, L. & Schwan, K. 2020. [A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada](https://www.make-the-shift.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-National-Protocol-for-Homeless-Encampments-in-Canada.pdf). Online at [make-the-shift.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-National-Protocol-for-Homeless-Encampments-in-Canada.pdf](https://www.make-the-shift.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-National-Protocol-for-Homeless-Encampments-in-Canada.pdf)

# Four Types of Community Responses to Encampments

Typology created by Cohen et al. (2019)

This analysis uses a human rights approach outlined by The National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada on the previous page and the Four Types of Community Responses to Encampments Typology outlined below. The National Protocol and this typology guide a government response to encampments.

## Clearance with little or no support

- Encampment residents only given a few days' notice of sweeps
- Short-term storage of belongings
- Few referrals
- High likelihood of police involvement

## Clearance with support

- Notice of sweeps given weeks in advance
- Long-term storage of belongings
- Referrals provided
- High likelihood of bylaw and/or police involvement

## Tacit acceptance

- Persist regardless of laws
- Basic services provided
- Outreach workers provide housing support
- Moderate likelihood of bylaw and/or police involvement
- Selective enforcement of municipal regulations

## Formal sanctioning

- Encampments permitted by law on public or private property
- Infrastructure provided
- Case management for housing or other benefits
- Moderate to low likelihood of bylaw and/or police involvement



# Encampments in Canada - Setting the Scene

Homelessness is a policy concern that extends across the country. For individuals experiencing homelessness, there are typically three options for seeking shelter. The first is through emergency shelters providing housing and crisis services (Goering, 2014). The second is “couch surfing” – temporarily staying with a friend or relative. The third option is staying in an encampment. Colloquially, encampments are often referred to as tent cities, although using “encampment” instead of “tent city” takes into consideration the fact that not all shelters being utilized are tents.

An example of an encampment local to Waterloo Region is the recently established “Better Tent City” in Kitchener, which is composed of tiny homes for individuals to dwell in and communal resources like laundry and bathing facilities that are shared among residents (Duhatschek, 2021b).

Many encampments, however, are structurally more temporary, and most lack formal amenities. Since encampment structures are not intended for long-term occupancy, it is difficult for policymakers to understand why an individual experiencing homelessness would opt to live in an encampment rather than in a homeless shelter (Cohen et al., 2019).

Encampments are defined as “any area wherein an individual or a group of people live in homelessness together, often in tents or other temporary structures (also referred to as homeless camps, tent cities, homeless settlements, or informal settlements)” (Farha and Schwan, 2020: 5).

# Encampments Across Canada

The overall presence of encampments in Canada appears to be on the rise (Farah and Schwan, 2020; Moore and Gray, 2021). Although there is no national data on encampments Point-in-time (PiT) counts are used as a base measurement of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in Canada, consistent with the federal "Everyone Counts" initiative. PiT counts are intended to capture a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness at a given time, and therefore cannot fully determine the extent of homelessness in a given area (Strobel et al. 2021).

Data from the most recent (2021) PiT counts across Canada indicates many municipalities have experienced growth in the number of people experiencing homelessness, and the number of people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered (Duhatschek, 2021a; CBC News, 2021). Highly relevant to Canada's settler colonial context is the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples among those experiencing homelessness (Anderson and Collins, 2014; Uppal, 2022).

In some municipalities, like the Region of Waterloo and the City of Winnipeg, researchers estimate more than 50 percent of the homeless population is Indigenous (Groleau, 2021, Distasio et al., 2018). Thus, the existence and management of encampments by municipalities has important implications for relationships between municipalities and urban Indigenous communities.

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# Encampments: Push Factors

There are several reasons why people experiencing homelessness live in encampments: Some reasons are a result of push factors:

- Absence of shelters (Ha et al., 2015; Haley et al., 2022).
- Shortage of beds (Ha et al., 2015; Haley et al., 2022).
- Absence of appropriate shelter facilities (Ha et al., 2015; Haley et al., 2022).
- Restrictive criteria that dissuade homeless individuals from accessing this housing (Cohen et al., 2019; Donley & Wright, 2012; Young et al., 2017).
- Shelters require check-ins at a certain hour; Individuals who arrive late are turned away (Cohen et al., 2019; Ha et al., 2015).
- Sobriety requirement - individuals may not qualify for overnight stay if there is reason to believe they are inebriated, which is an issue embedded in the broader criminalization of homelessness (Bardwell et al., 2018; Cohen et al., 2019).
- Threat of theft of belongings and conflict with residents can deter use of shelters (Ha et al., 2015).
- Shelters are not appropriate to all family structures. For example, if there is an entire family seeking shelter together and the shelter only accepts female residents, families might opt to live together in an encampment instead (Cohen et al., 2019, Haley et al., 2022).
- Pets are typically not permitted at shelters.
- Criminalization can also be a barrier to shelter use. Donley and Wright (2012) note that a deterrent to shelter use among homeless individuals is concern about the enhanced presence of police officers near shelters and an increased risk of arrest.
- Stigma associated with shelter use (Ha et al., 2015).
- Stigmatizing interactions with shelter staff (Ha et al., 2015).

# Encampments: Pull Factors

People may live in encampments rather than shelters because of pull factors:

- Encampments permit more freedom for residents: they can come and go as they please and are able to self-govern and self-regulate among one another.
- Lack of permanence associated with shelters, where individuals feel as though they are guests who are expected to only be visiting in the short term and there is some possibility for incompatibility among residents (Cohen et al., 2019).
- Individuals may live in encampments for the sense of security offered. Since encampments contain groups of people co-existing as a community, individuals experiencing homelessness who live on their own do not experience this same sense of security (Cohen et al., 2019; Kauffman, 2020; Young et al., 2017).

**Research suggests encampment residents appreciate a sense of autonomy in encampments, whereas shelters are perceived by individuals as institutions that are heavily monitored and controlled. (Cohen et al., 2019; Donley & Wright, 2012)**

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# Legal Context of Encampments

The regulation of encampments closely relates to the criminalization of homelessness. Olson and Paul (2021) discuss how encampments are frequently portrayed through three intertwined narratives:

## **Individual Shortcomings**

This narrative relies on the assumption that homelessness is a result of individual shortcomings. This ignores the self-determination of residents and views homelessness in a pathologized way. It implies that individuals can be 'cured' of homelessness as a result of intervention by social service providers and medical professionals (Dej, 2016; Olson & Paul, 2021).

## **Mental Health and Substance Use**

Common mental health and addictions treatment programs can play into the individual deficiencies narrative through an emphasis on taking personal responsibility for addiction, rather than examining systemic factors that marginalize people who use substances (Dej, 2016). Social service providers encourage people experiencing homelessness and using substances to embrace these programs, which pathologizes the responsibility a homeless person is expected to take to 'cure' themselves of addiction and this presents homelessness as an individual pathology rather than a systemic issue exacerbated by underinvestment in affordable and/or supportive housing (Dej, 2016).

## **Criminalization**

Substantial academic work has examined the criminalization of homelessness, that is, how homeless individuals are portrayed as frequent violators of laws, and how survival actions of homeless individuals have been defined as criminal offenses in provincial and municipal legislation.

**Public opposition to encampments is often rooted in these narratives, bolstered by a fear of increased crime and the belief that encampments impose a risk to public health (Olson and Paul, 2021). These common narratives of homelessness fail to account for the structural factors that cause homelessness and deny encampment residents the human right to access adequate food, housing, and sanitation (Dej, 2016; Olson & Paul, 2021).**

# Legal Regulation of Encampments in Canada

Some advocates believe that the legal regulation of encampments at any level can enhance the criminalization of encampment residents since regulation often calls for the involvement of police (Talge, 2010: 782). Herring and Lutz (2015) discuss how discourse related to the criminalization of homelessness often arises from antisocial behaviour laws that give police the authority to expel homeless people from public spaces. Recent encampment evictions involving law enforcement, including those that have taken place in Toronto, ON, Hamilton, ON, and Kitchener, ON, have become controversial due to the levels of police enforcement and destruction of residents' shelters and belongings (Gibson, 2021; Bron, 2021; Bholla, 2021).

Scholars have identified the criminalization of homelessness as an emerging model of urban governance, purifying the streets through punitive measures (Herring and Lutz, 2015: 690). Broadly speaking, these punitive measures can stem from the pathologizing of homelessness as noted by Dej (2016) in that court-ordered mental health and/or addiction treatment can be seen as both a punishment and a cure for elements of homelessness. The criminalization of mental illness operates in tandem with the criminalization of homelessness both in the delivery of social services, law enforcement, and in academic research (Dej, 2016). In response to this, municipalities with large populations of people experiencing homelessness have opted for one of two strategies:

## Containment

- In the American context, it includes the centralization of a homeless population.
- Used in Los Angeles
- Can provide more centralized relief and service access to people living on the streets (DeVerteuil et al., 2009).

## Revanchism

- Well-known for its use in New York
- Views public space as territory belonging to municipalities
- Seeks to force homeless people to relocate (DeVerteuil et al., 2009).

Ultimately, it is the provincial and municipal levels of governments that structure the legal response to encampments.

# Provincial Regulations: Laws and Fines

People who are experiencing homelessness can be subject to tickets and fines under provincial legislation. Since many municipalities have not developed bylaws specific to encampments, law enforcement often relies on issuing provincial offence charges to discourage or dismantle encampments. The Trespass to Property Act 1990 (TPA) is one article of provincial legislation that supersedes any municipality's bylaws pertaining to property access. According to Section 2 of the TPA, individuals convicted of trespassing in provincial court can receive a monetary fine up to \$10,000. This legislation is applicable on both private and public property.

Since the spaces or infrastructure are owned regionally or by provincial governments, those being served notices to vacate and are also subject to tickets and fines under Ontario's Highway Traffic Act 1990 (HTA). Law enforcement personnel have the power to fine trespassers for littering pursuant to HTA Section 180, which holds that anyone seen to be keeping or discarding of materials outside a designated receptacle can receive a fine between \$85 and \$500 (Ontario Court of Justice, 2021).

Similarly, Ontario's Safe Streets Act 1999 (SSA) targets homeless individuals and communities. Disposing of syringes or sexual wellness materials in public spaces, which can include land owned by municipalities, imposes fines of \$100 per offence. Fines for soliciting in or near public washrooms, transit vehicles, or transit stops costs offenders \$50 per violation (Ontario Court of Justice, 1999). Scholarly review of the SSA has found that it is more concerned with what is considered "anti-social behaviour" than public safety and reflects broader legislation development trends that attempt to discourage homeless people from using public spaces (O'Grady et al., 2013). These trends have been identified in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.

**Housing advocates hold the view that fines for these offences are concerning when issued to homeless individuals not only because of the tension they create between law enforcement and homeless communities, but also because of the steep nature of imposed fines, many of which are never paid.**

# Provincial Regulations: Fines

O'Grady et al (2013) have indicated that Canadian municipalities' areas of overlap with provincial legislation like Ontario's SSA make for a jurisdictionally complex legal case, as those found to be violating a bylaw that is also a provincial offence can be ticketed/finned for both. According to Homeless Hub (2021), the first eleven years of SSA enforcement cost the City of Toronto and Province of Ontario more than it was able to earn back in fines:

- over \$4 million worth of fines were issued under the SSA in Toronto alone from 2000 to 2011.
- 99% of those tickets went unpaid.

The SSA also allows homeless and street-involved individuals to be imprisoned for second and subsequent commissions of offences, which although rare, could cause them to lose access to the financial benefits and social supports they may need to stay alive (Homeless Hub, 2021). Under the HTA, individuals with unpaid provincial offences tickets (including those issued under the TPA and SSA) are unable to apply for drivers' licenses or renewals of existing licenses, which creates additional barriers for those who are working to overcome chronic homelessness and may need a drivers' license to secure employment.

**Enforcing provincial offences against homeless people is not financially productive for any branch of government involved in the prosecution of those offences. It also deepens the cycle of poverty experienced by homeless people.**



# Municipal Bylaws

Municipal bylaws can also be used to govern encampments on municipally owned land, even if they do not address encampments specifically. Many bylaws in the municipalities reviewed were over 10 years old, and do not reflect the dire nature of the affordable housing crisis in Canada, nor do they reflect the increased presence of encampments across municipalities nationwide. Many of the municipal bylaws relevant to the governance of encampments concern municipally owned parks and greenspaces. City parks remain under the jurisdiction of individual municipalities pursuant to Ontario's Municipal Act 2001.

The City of Toronto has park dwelling bylaws similar to those in other medium and large sized cities, including Kitchener and Cambridge, although Toronto's bylaws 608-13 and 608-14 guide pertain specifically to complaints about homeless encampments in city parks. As per the City of Toronto's 2021 bylaw directory, residents aware of a homeless encampment in a public park are able to call 311 and file a report. While not all municipalities direct citizens to report encampment sightings to bylaw enforcement, the presence of similar bylaws in many municipalities can lead to criminalization and eviction of encampment residents (Gibson, 2021; Casey, 2021).

In two tier municipalities, there is additional complexity in terms of the relationship between lower tier and regional governments in setting local bylaws. For example, the Region of Waterloo's three largest municipalities – Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge – all have similar yet separate bylaws that can be used to govern encampments on municipally owned land. City of Cambridge bylaw 162-10.3.m and City of Kitchener Municipal Code section 270.4.2.h prohibit individuals from dwelling and establishing structures (temporary and permanent) on municipal grounds, specifically in public parks. Although the City of Waterloo does not have a similar bylaw in relation to parks, its public nuisance bylaw 2011-25.2 contains language and directives that could be used to ticket or remove those establishing encampments in city parks.

**The City of Toronto's handling of encampment evictions has been controversial, especially regarding its use of Toronto Police Services. During the eviction of encampment residents, journalists, protesters, and observers were injured and/or arrested by Toronto Police. More context: [Investigation finds officer used unnecessary force at clearing of homeless encampment, Toronto's Ombudsman to Investigate Homeless Encampment Clearings](#)**

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# Municipal Bylaws

The Region of Waterloo's 2013 Code of Use Bylaw (13-050), passed in 2013, is the Region's most recent and most relevant bylaw when it comes to the regulation of encampments. It was engaged in the Region's demolition of an encampment on November 26, 2021.

**Five residents of an encampment behind a transit stop on Charles Street in Kitchener, ON., were evicted on November 26, 2021. [Details](#)**

Although part of the bylaw pertains to signage posting guidelines on regional property, much of its content addresses trespassing on property owned by the Region. This includes buildings and grounds owned by the Region as well as public transportation vehicles but also includes regionally owned land around roadways, bridges, and over/underpasses. Under this bylaw, trespassing itself is considered a prohibited activity that is first addressed through verbal warnings, then written warnings and posted signage if the preliminary means of communication are not effective.

While unpaid fines might be considered a costly consequence of ticketing homeless people and encampment residents at the municipal and provincial levels, it is not the only cost that requires consideration: dispatching law/bylaw enforcement to dismantle encampments and evict their residents is also extremely costly.

In 2021, the City of Toronto spent over \$840,000 dismantling encampments at Trinity Bellwoods Park, Alexandra Park, and Lamport Stadium, in addition to the over \$792,000 spent re-landscaping the parks' amenities afterwards (City of Toronto, 2021). These high totals also do not include the costs of involving police, which was also heavily criticized for the high levels of physical force officers used on encampment residents and protestors during various 2021 evictions (Gibson, 2021).

**The costs of encampment eviction and management when eviction remains the main goal go far beyond what some municipalities may be able to anticipate or budget.**

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# Municipal Bylaws

In response to the increasing prevalence of encampments, as well as concerns for the cost-effective regulation of these spaces, municipalities are developing new protocols to manage encampments on public and private lands. These protocols typically provide guidance for staff concerning the appropriate application of relevant bylaws, procedures to be followed once the municipality becomes aware of an encampment, and guidance on when and how specific municipal agencies should become involved. Many municipal protocols also intersect with Housing First guidelines for addressing homelessness.

**The Housing First approach is an evidence-based approach that holds that individuals experiencing homelessness will be in a much worse position if they continue to remain homeless and should be housed without any preconditions for accessing mental health or substance use treatment (Turner, 2014).**

The approach asserts that stable housing and the necessary support in place is the first step to recovery of an individual experiencing homelessness. Other core principles of a Housing First approach include offering any required treatment services as well as integrating housing to the community and promoting self-sufficiency for residents (Turner, 2014).

For a municipality to successfully apply a Housing First approach to their encampment protocol, oftentimes the entire organizational infrastructure must be aligned in a way that supports its implementation (Turner, 2014).

# Study Comparisons

## Municipalities Compared

In November 2021, we reviewed protocols for managing encampments from six municipalities:

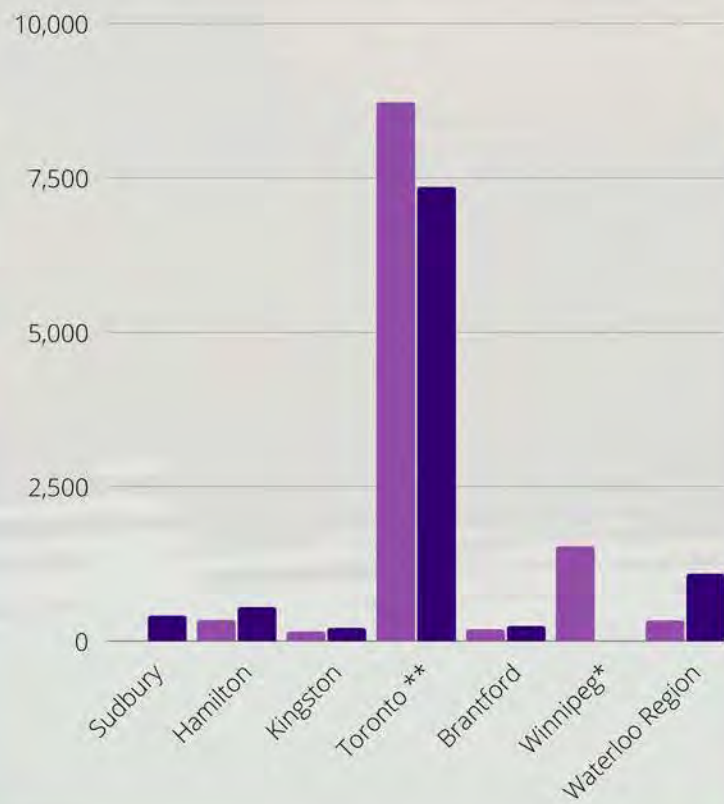
- Sudbury, ON;
- Toronto, ON;
- Hamilton, ON;
- Kingston, ON;
- Brantford, ON; and
- Winnipeg, MB.

These municipalities were selected based on available data regarding unsheltered homelessness over the last five years and are representative of a variety of demographics and sizes: some cities some are larger, and some are more rural. These cities were not chosen for having similar approaches to encampments but were chosen based on available data for the purposes of a comparative analysis.

The PiT count for the selected cities in 2018, including available 2021 PiT for ROW and Toronto. Data regarding the PiT was not available for 2021 for all cities.

\* Some data missing because enumeration did not follow federal PiT guidelines, so is not directly comparable

\*\* The City of Toronto attributes this decline to a decline in the number of refugee families in due to COVID-19 related border restrictions



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# Municipal Protocol Comparisons

## How do Communities Respond to Encampments?

The view that housing is a human right guides the federal government's current housing policy as well as some municipal approaches (NHS, 2018; City of Toronto, 2022; City of Winnipeg, 2022).

The right to housing is also reflected in international human rights principles. Canada is a signatory, specifically to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Since Indigenous people are overrepresented in the unsheltered homeless population (Hoye, 2021), international human rights treaties must be considered. Indigenous leadership in discussions of encampment management is crucial. The consultation process must consider engaging in Indigenous peoples in a transparent manner that consistent with cultural and traditional practices and Canada's human rights obligations.

**Of the municipal encampment protocols assessed, several began with a listing of guiding principles, such as the protocols of Kingston, ON and Winnipeg, MB. These principles relate directly to some or all eight of the National Protocol's principles and are positioned in ways that guide the operational framework, goals, or objectives of each set of protocols. These principles guide the comparison of encampment response protocols in the selected municipalities and cities.**

# Responses to Encampments on Public or Private Lands

Several protocols provided a distinction between public (greenspace, municipal land, or not prohibited) and private (prohibited) land. These include Brantford, Kingston, Hamilton, and Winnipeg. Cities that distinguish between public and private land protocols focus on enforcing individual property rights on private land and municipal bylaws on public land. Cohen et al.'s (2019) typology focuses primarily on public land protocols, as frequently the response for private land protocols is reliant on owner responsibility and police presence. Kingston, ON and Hamilton, ON offer assistance for residents of encampments on private land through street outreach staff. Full protocols in Appendix A.

## Public and private encampment protocols in select municipalities

City	Public Land Protocol	Private Land Protocol	Typology
Brantford, ON	Outreach efforts are accompanied by bylaw enforcement staff or community agencies. Staff post bylaw notices. Initial outreach to removal takes approx. 1 week, quicker (48hrs) for repeat encampments.	Property owners' to notify individuals their presence is not permitted. Outreach staff do not visit sites unless permitted. Police can assist with removal if individuals refuse to evacuate.	Clearance with little to no supports
Kingston, ON	Communication and initial ID between bylaw and street outreach staff. Bylaw will then issue a 48hr notice. Serious health, safety, or criminal activity may warrant immediate removal. Street outreach will support individuals with alternatives where necessary through enforcement (which may include police services).	Private landowners contact Kingston Police Services, who will offer support of street outreach (with consent of the landowner). If unsuccessful, police will respond.	Clearance with little to no supports

**An important distinction within private land protocols is whether some form of outreach will occur prior to eviction, or whether immediate police intervention and eviction occurs.**

# Responses to Encampments on Public or Private Lands

## Public and private encampment protocols continued

City	Public Land Protocol	Private Land Protocol	Typology
Hamilton, ON	Municipal law enforcement and social navigator program staff provide notice of 14 days. Daily engagement with the response team regarding immediate options follows.	Identical response to public land protocol, without providing a notice of 14 days.	Clearance with support
Winnipeg, MB	Residents will not be asked to leave: an outreach service provider is immediately called to the site and provide any needed support. Process is guided by the City of Winnipeg Encampment Strategy Planning Group and the Kíkinanaw Óma: Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers Strategy Group.	Property owners' responsibility to reach out to Winnipeg Police Services.	Tacit acceptance

Additional information about each protocol is available in Appendix A.

## Evidence of Practices Consistent with Principle 2

Kingston, ON and Sudbury, ON provided detailed examples of appropriate guidelines for communication and engagement with encampment residents. While other cities touched on the importance of respectful engagement from a human rights approach, these cities detailed main practices and concerns with engagement within each of their protocols.

### Engagement responses in Kingston, ON

Main Practices	Main Concerns	Focus
On-site engagement with street outreach staff utilizing trauma-informed approaches who complete intake & referral forms, when possible. Residents are provided with information, resources, opportunities.	Engagement is conducted in a way to ensure encampment residents can participate in decisions that directly affect them.	National Protocol (Principle 2), as it focuses on discussions with, and participation of current encampment residents in decision-making.

### Engagement responses in Sudbury, ON

Gather info. on all current encampments (location, structures, risks) and its members (names, current and previous services used, birth date, income sources, etc.), with consent, and consolidate in one place.	Gaining consent and sharing information. Ensure any entity attending the site shares information by way of social services.	Use Housing First approach. Gathering info. is important to assist encampment residents and working to ensure fewer individuals face homelessness.
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By obtaining consent to gather and share this information across all entities involved, it ensures that residents do not have to repeat their stories, which may be re-traumatizing.





## Evidence of Practices Consistent with Principle 4

Principle 4, “Explore all viable alternatives to eviction” focuses on effective participation of encampment residents regarding the future, where alternative options to eviction should be presented. Similar to Principle 2, Principle 4 includes some form of communication process with encampment residents to assess any barriers they may face to housing. In terms of the protocols assessed, the majority of them offer a framework for communication with residents prior to the eviction process. For example, in Sudbury’s operational framework, they provide a focus on “individual needs by assisting them access services and supports, including permanent housing” (City of Greater Sudbury, 2021).

Although most of the cities assessed explore alternative housing options with encampment residents, consistent with a Housing First approach, these are most often provided during the outreach and removal processes.

Only one city, Winnipeg, does not immediately provide an eviction date for residents. Instead, as noted within their protocol, those on public land or within transit shelters will not be asked to leave by an outreach service provider (OSP). Instead, necessary supports and resources are provided, including transportation to a shelter or transitional housing placement (City of Winnipeg, 2020).

**Most of the municipalities we compared did explore alternative housing with residents, but with the exception of Winnipeg, in all municipalities this occurred as part of an eviction process.**

## Evidence of Practices Consistent with Principle 5

Principle 5, “Ensure that relocation is human rights compliant” states that any relocation of encampment residents must recognize the principle “the right to remain in one’s home and community is central to the right to housing” and any relocation must involve the provision of adequate housing (Farha and Schwan, 2020). Several of the municipal protocols reviewed partially recognize this principle.

For example, Hamilton, Brantford, and Sudbury note that “voluntary closure” of an encampment is preferred to bylaw enforcement and/or forcible relocation. Both Kingston and Toronto use identical language, stating, “City priority is to assist homeless people access safer, sustainable, and healthier alternatives than living outside.”

Thus, in most of the protocols reviewed there is a recognition that relocation ideally is grounded in both voluntary removal and the provision of housing to former encampment residents. However, there are important limits to these provisions, particularly considering the barriers to emergency shelter access and housing. The City of Toronto’s guidelines explicitly state that a refusal of residents to enter the shelter system is not grounds to delay or desist in encampment removal, sentiments echoed in the protocols of Hamilton, Sudbury, and Kingston.

Only Winnipeg’s guidelines provide a process to support residents who choose to remain in an encampment, rather than seek shelter elsewhere. All the guidelines reviewed note that if there are “safety” or “criminality” concerns, encampment removal may occur immediately, regardless of whether residents have other housing options. Given the criminalization of encampment residents and public perception that encampments pose a safety risk, as well as the lack of specific qualification of what constitutes a “safety” or “criminality” threats, there is potential for this language to be used expansively to perpetuate removals in violation of Principle 5.

Finally, available municipal data indicates that in practice few encampment residents transition to formal housing options post-eviction (Beattie, 2021; Taekma, 2021). This suggests that the implicit assumption of the municipal protocols that encampment residents can simply choose to be housed elsewhere is not borne out by experience.

**In most of the protocols reviewed there is a recognition that relocation ideally is grounded in both voluntary removal and the provision of housing to former encampment residents.**



## Evidence of Practices Consistent with Principle 6

Principle 6, “Ensure encampments meet basic needs of residents consistent with human rights” is concerned with the adequacy of encampments for residents, discussing the need for water, sanitation, fire prevention, waste management, food support, resources to support harm reduction, links to social services, and rodent and pest management (Farha and Schwan, 2020).

Most municipal protocols have very limited consideration of service provision for encampments. The encampment protocol of Hamilton, ON does not reference any service provision beyond attempting to connect encampment residents with other housing options. Sudbury, ON and Kingston, ON both require outreach workers to provide individuals with a list of resources related to accessing support services, including transportation, medical services, and social services.

Only the encampment protocol of Winnipeg, MB references providing material support to encampment residents through the distribution of warm clothing, blankets, food, and harm reduction supplies.

**None of the protocols reviewed recognize a need to provide water, sanitation, pest management or garbage removal services to encampment residents.**

## Evidence of Practices Consistent with Principle 8

Principle 8, “Respect, protect, and fulfill the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples in all engagements with encampments” presents the important recognition of Indigenous peoples and their rights which are more than Westernized ideals of both property and possession.

It is crucial for the inclusion of Indigenous leadership in engaging with encampments because Indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented within the unsheltered homeless population (Hoye, 2021). Such inclusion would allow for representation of Indigenous Peoples and an opportunity to provide supports which align with cultural and traditional practices.

There is only one city which directly states an engagement with its Indigenous population: Winnipeg. In addition to their other support groups, Winnipeg is a key member of the Kíkinanaw Óma: Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers, which helps to guide their encampment support process. This group engages with first responders, City of Winnipeg officials, and other community agencies to support those living unsheltered, while recognizing the over-representation of Indigenous people within the unsheltered population (End Homelessness Winnipeg, 2020).

The other protocols reviewed do not discuss specific supports for Indigenous peoples in encampments, nor note the relevance of Indigenous rights to encampment protocols.

**There is only one city which directly states an engagement with its Indigenous population: Winnipeg.**

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# Discussion

Our analysis found similarities in approaches to encampments on private lands, but significant variation among municipal approaches to encampments on public lands, even among jurisdictions in the same provincial policy context, indicating potential for policy-learning among municipalities.

Most municipalities appreciated the importance of engagement with encampment residents to provide insight on the complexities of homelessness and connect individuals with services and housing options. The presence of this type of engagement is likely due to its consistency with a Housing First approach to homelessness, which many municipalities have adopted, however, it is also consistent with Principle 2 of the National Protocol, which emphasizes the importance resident engagement in a human rights approach.

When encampments are sanctioned, this serves as an interim measure in addressing homelessness in a manner consistent with a human rights framework (Cohen et al., 2019; Farah and Schwan, 2020). In our analysis, Winnipeg's encampment protocol was the only protocol consistent with a tacit acceptance approach and was also the only protocol to address key elements of Principle 6, "Ensure encampments meet basic needs of residents consistent with human rights" and Principle 8, "Respect, protect, and fulfill the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples in all engagements with encampments". Both the National Protocol and the City of Winnipeg's encampment protocol highlight the need to incorporate Indigenous land rights and cultural needs in all aspects of encampment management.

The findings suggest that municipalities could better engage with human rights principles in responding to encampment, but that before this can occur, there needs to be a greater consideration of current laws and bylaws in relation to commitments to housing as a human right. Fundamentally, measures that criminalize encampment residents are inconsistent with a view of housing as a human right. Given that many municipal bylaws governing parks and other public spaces predate the recent increase in prevalence of encampments, bylaws may need to be revised, with attention to their relationship to a human rights approach to encampments.

**In the municipal encampment protocols reviewed, protocols consistent with a tacit acceptance and sanctioning approach were more likely to be consistent with the human rights principles outlined in the National Protocol.**

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# Limitations

There are two main limitations to our analysis. First, there is a lack of previous research on encampments, as well as a lack of reliable cross-national data on unsheltered homelessness. This limits our ability to relate our findings to previous research and fully articulate the scope of homelessness in our comparator municipalities.

Second, our analysis relies on the encampment protocols as written in policy documents. We did not assess whether these protocols are consistently followed, nor consider the perspectives of encampment residents on the protocols. These are both important areas for future research.

# Conclusion

Encampments serve as vital short-term shelter for those that do not have safe and affordable housing, and for those that face barriers to accessing the emergency shelter system.

Many Canadian cities are currently in the process of developing their own encampment protocols. Therefore, within Canadian policy frameworks, systematic analysis of existing encampment protocols can help emphasize the need for these protocols to take seriously the human rights of encampment residents and provide guidance for future policy development.

However, addressing encampments cannot be a substitute for addressing homelessness. The creation of more affordable housing is the only long-term solution to the problem of unsheltered homelessness, of which encampments are but one symptom.

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



The following includes an official excerpt from each encampment protocol for the following cities: Sudbury, Hamilton, Kingston, Toronto, Brantford, and Winnipeg. This section will primarily focus on the specific protocols and communication (or mitigation) methods used in each city, where available.

## **City of Sudbury**

The Encampment Response Guide is grounded in three principles:

- A) Voluntary closure of an encampment is preferred to enforcement.
- B) People living in encampments have strengths and rights that should be leveraged and respected in the process of engagement, and when necessary, closure.
- C) All residents of Greater Sudbury should have access to public space, and no person, business or entity can or should claim public space as private space

Preparation: Coordinated Response Table, with Clear Senior Leadership

Greater Sudbury will benefit from creating an encampment coordinated response table with five core members, and a number of other entities that can be part of a broader response table. The five core members are: By-law Enforcement; Greater Sudbury Police Service; street outreach provider; Indigenous service provider; and, Social Services.

Operational Framing

1. Greater Sudbury, and its funded agencies, are committed to working with homeless individuals living outside to respond to their individual needs by assisting them access services and supports, including permanent housing.
2. Greater Sudbury will use a coordinated approach between City departments, including police and by-law in responding. Activities will also be coordinated with community agencies to access a mix of supports and resources, streamline access to services, and avoid duplication of effort.
3. Greater Sudbury and partners involved in engaging and resolving encampment will engage in ongoing proactive communication with homeless individuals, the public, service providers, community agencies and other groups as necessary.
4. The priority is to assist homeless people access safer, sustainable, and healthier alternatives than living outside, not enforcement. Enforcement will occur after all support efforts have been attempted without success, provided that the individual has been notified that they are required to vacate a public space. In the event of exceptional circumstances, however, intervention may be required to address immediate public safety concerns.
5. All parties acknowledge that homeless individuals cannot be forced to accept services and supports.

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## Protocol

1. The core leadership group will coordinate efforts to ensure that the timing of enforcement activities does not conflict with or impede outreach efforts.
2. Enforcement agencies are responsible for providing notice to individuals who camping is to be discontinued and that personal goods, debris and structures are to be cleared from the space.
3. Notices will be given to individuals in advance. The timing of issuing notices will be determined in consultation with outreach staff. Formal enforcement notices will provide relevant and clear communication to the individual. In addition, site specific information notices for each location will be attached to provide a list of resources to provide individuals with information regarding access to housing, support services and shelter in the area.

## Mitigation

Across Greater Sudbury, the Local Response Leader should work with all partners to gain information on:

- The location of each encampment
- The structures at each encampment
- The volume of people residing at each encampment
- Any known risks or hazards associated with the encampment, including potential risks pertaining to individuals within the encampment

Through engagement, information needs to be collected on the following from individuals within encampments:

- Name
- Aliases/nicknames
- Date of birth
- Individual, couple or family
- Length of homelessness
- Homeless services still currently or previously used
- Income source(s) and total income amount
- Identification by type of identification
- Whether or not they are interested in working with a service agency of their choosing to explore housing options
- Whether or not they will accept offers of available shelter options
- Immediate barriers to housing (such as documentation needs) to be resolved
- Pet(s)/service animals
- Description of structure (e.g., colour and location of structure or tent)

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## City of Hamilton

The City's Encampment Response Team works with encampment residents to help them transition to safer, more humane, and legal accommodations, support the move with their belongings, and then ensures abandoned belongings are cleared and the site is cleaned. The Encampment Response Team includes representatives from the City of Hamilton Housing Services Division and Street Outreach Team, Municipal Law Enforcement, Public Works and Hamilton Police Services Social Navigator Program. Encampment Response Team reviews location and determines if the site is Prohibited or Greenspace.

### If the site is Prohibited:

- Municipal Law Enforcement (MLE) along with Social Navigator Programs staff (SNP) notify individuals at encampment that the area is a Prohibited site, and that they will have to leave the area.
- Response team subsequently engages with individuals to discuss immediate options: shelter, hotels or housing, and begins process of developing individualized housing plan. If the individual is not already known, the VI-SPDAT is completed at this point.
- Deadline day for removal of encampment is determined.
- At deadline day, MLE (with SNP/Hamilton Police Services (HPS) support) assists in ensuring remaining individuals vacate the area. Response Team provides support in the vicinity with arranging transportation, etc.
- Public Works assists with clean up of any discarded items once individuals have vacated site.

### If site is determined to be Greenspace or not Prohibited:

- MLE with SNP support notifies individuals at encampment that they may only remain in that location for maximum 14 days. Notice of the deadline to vacate the area is provided for the end of that period
- Response Team subsequently engages with individuals daily to discuss immediate options: shelter, hotels or housing, and begins process of developing individualized housing plan. If the individual is not already known, the VI-SPDAT is completed at this point.
- At deadline day, MLE (with SNP/HPS support) assists in ensuring remaining individuals vacate the area. Response Team provides support in the vicinity with arranging transportation, etc.
- Public Works assists with clean up of any discarded items once individuals have vacated site

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## City of Kingston

### Encampment Protocol Procedures

These procedures will be executed when dealing with one or a few tents/structures that have appeared in public spaces and on private properties.

#### Municipal Land

1. Initial identification and communication will occur with Street Outreach in collaboration with City By-Law. Street Outreach and By-Law staff:
  - visit the site,
  - determine the situation,
  - complete a high-level assessment of health and safety on site,
  - complete a high-level assessment of needs & provide information on services available,
  - inform Housing & Social Services Department of the situation and individuals' needs assessment.
2. By-Law staff will issue a 48-hour notice of trespass. Serious health, safety, or criminal activity circumstances may warrant lesser time or immediate removal. This 48-hour timeframe could also change based on the capacity and availability of other services. During that period of time, Street Outreach and Housing & Social Services staff continue to provide ongoing supports and work with individuals to provide alternative service options, including but not limited to shelter, Integrated Care Hub, motel/hotel, apartment, medical services, storage and transportation. All interactions and assessments are documented.
3. By-Law follows up at site to enforce order of trespass once alternative service options have been provided to individuals. Street Outreach staff will be supporting and available to assist individuals with alternatives to camping where relocation is necessary through enforcement. Additional enforcement, such as police services, may be required depending on the situation.
4. By-Law will provide a 2-hour notice to individuals returning to that public property within 24 hour following a relocation which would have been based on an initial 48 hour notice.
5. Once public spaces have been vacated, By-Law and Public Works will determine the cleanup requirements in order to ensure that the space can be safely accessed and utilized by the public.
6. When Kingston Police receive an encampment complaint when By-Law officers are not available to respond, Kingston Police will contact Street Outreach and prioritize the encampment complaint, dispatch officers (Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team where possible) to investigate, submit duty reports and share the information with City By-Law.

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## Private Land

1. Private landowners will contact Kingston Police who will assess the situation and offer the support of Street Outreach to approach individuals that are camping on private properties. This would allow Street Outreach to make the initial communication as well as offer alternative services and supports. Street Outreach would inform Housing & Social Services staff of situation. Street Outreach can only access a private property upon the landowner's consent. If the owner refuses to provide Street Outreach with initial access, Kingston Police would then be required to attend to the property as a first point of contact to manage the relocation from the private property. Where possible, Kingston Police will dispatch the Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team and invite Street Outreach to be present for support.
2. Should the efforts of Street Outreach and Housing & Social Services staff not be successful to have individuals relocate to alternative services, the landowner will be advised that Kingston Police will respond to address the issue of trespass on private property.
3. Property clean-up will be the responsibility of the private landowner. The City may provide support to not-for-profit property owners.

## Existing Practices and Accommodations: Meaningful Engagement and Effective Participation of Encampment Residents (Principle 2)

Current processes include on-site engagement of clients, including:

- Street Outreach staff are expected to engage clients utilizing trauma-informed approaches and existing protocols.
- Street Outreach staff complete intake and referral forms for those willing to engage in an assessment.
- Engagement is conducted in a manner to ensure that encampment residents are able to participate in decisions that directly affect them:
- Engagement is grounded in the inherent dignity of encampment residents and their human rights.
- Engagement of encampment residents takes place in the early stages of the development of the encampment.
- All residents are provided with information, resources, and opportunities to support decisions that affect them.
- Engagement of residents includes a review of individual needs & options available to best meet these needs (e.g., language, accessibility, timing, health, harm reduction, location, etc.)
- All engagements with residents regarding the encampment are documented and made available to encampment residents upon request.

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## **City of Toronto**

### The City of Toronto Interdepartmental Service Protocol For Homeless People Camping In Public Spaces:

This document sets out the interdepartmental protocol intended to guide City staff in providing outreach services to homeless individuals camping outside in public spaces to assist them access permanent solutions, prior to the enforcement of City by-laws which may cause their displacement and the removal of their belongings.

#### Overview and Goals:

The goal of the City outreach initiative is to assist and encourage people currently camping in public spaces to access safer and healthier alternatives to living outside, including housing, support services and shelter. The initiative also seeks to balance the need to provide appropriate supports to vulnerable individuals camping in public spaces with the civic responsibility of maintaining the use of public spaces for public use. The outreach initiative to homeless persons provides a more intensive, proactive and coordinated effort among City departments. Outreach efforts to the homeless also include connecting and coordinating the activities of relevant community and government agencies to access a mix of supports and resources, streamline access to services, and avoid duplication of effort.

The outreach initiative provides the coordination and delivery of human services prior to any enforcement activities related to public spaces, such as removal of unauthorized structures, personal goods and debris. In many circumstances it is anticipated that given the appropriate outreach and supports over time, individuals will be assisted in securing better alternatives than sleeping outside and will voluntarily vacate public spaces making enforcement unnecessary.

To respond to the needs of homeless individuals, the outreach initiative is delivered on a case-by-case basis and focused on a site-by-site approach. Staff efforts will focus on larger sites where more people are in need of assistance, where there are encampments, and where there are safety concerns. Staff efforts will also seek to address the needs of single individuals camped in parks, public transit shelters and city streets.

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



The following five principles guide the initiative:

1. The City is committed to working with homeless individuals living outside to respond to their individual needs on a case-by-case basis by assisting them access services and supports, including permanent housing.
2. The City will use a coordinated approach between City departments in responding to the needs and issues related to homeless people camping outside. Activities will also be coordinated with community agencies to access a mix of supports and resources, streamline access to services, and avoid duplication of effort.
3. The City will engage in ongoing proactive communication with homeless individuals, the public, service providers, community agencies and other groups to assist in the successful implementation of the protocol.
4. The City priority is to assist homeless people access safer, sustainable, and healthier alternatives than living outside, not enforcement. Enforcement will occur after all support efforts have been attempted without success, provided that the individual has been notified that he or she is required to vacate a public space. In the event of exceptional circumstances, intervention may be required to address immediate public safety concerns.
5. The City acknowledges that homeless individuals cannot be forced to accept services and supports. However, the refusal of an individual to accept services and supports is not sufficient reason to prevent the enforcement of City by-laws prohibiting camping in public places and erecting structures.

## Program Delivery:

The outreach initiative provides intense street outreach supports to homeless people and, only when necessary, enforcement and removal activities. City departments involved in human service programming such as Shelter, Housing and Support, Social Services and Public (SHS) will participate in the outreach initiative, with SHS having the lead role. As part of this process the initiative will focus and prioritize the provision of human services including street outreach, drop-ins, shelters, income support, housing access, and related support services. City departments with enforcement responsibilities include Works and Emergency Services, Parks and Recreation, and Facilities and Real Estate. Enforcement activities will depend upon the success of outreach activities, the need for such services, the location of the site, and the department responsible.

## Focused Outreach:

The City will be proactive in responding to the needs of homeless people living outside. Locations where outreach services are needed will be identified by Shelter, Housing and Support, Works & Emergency Services, Parks & Recreation, other departments and agencies.



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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## City of Brantford

Staff from several City departments including Health and Human Services, Parks, Operations, Housing, Property Standards, along with representatives of the Brantford Police Service created an encampment response protocol. The primary objectives of the encampment response protocol are to provide humane and compassionate care for individuals living unsheltered, while:

- Preventing the development of established and entrenched encampment site(s);
- Preserving public spaces for their intended uses;
- Protecting the health and safety of individuals living unsheltered, City and partner agency staff, and the general public.

In general there are three phases to the response. Responsibility for activities in each phase may vary depending on whether the encampment is on public land, park land or private land.

### A) Outreach/Notice

On-site outreach efforts are made by City homelessness staff, sometimes accompanied by community agencies or by-law enforcement staff. Outreach occurs within 48 hours of the initial report. For safety, staff travel in pairs. The outreach effort seeks to connect individuals to the resources they need before commencing any cleanup activities. Individuals are told by outreach staff that cleanup is imminent and a plan is needed for alternative shelter.

Wherever possible, individuals at the sites are given advance notice for scheduled cleanup efforts unless the presence of the encampment creates an immediate health and safety risk or impedes access to a public area. Parks staff post copies of the current park by-law in a visible location to make individuals aware that overnight camping is prohibited. There are plans to install permanent signage eventually in every City park. Outreach efforts focus on encouraging individuals to leave the site voluntarily with their belongings. There is no fixed time frame for the outreach/notice period. Situation assessments by the Encampment Network are made on a near-daily basis. The response will move from outreach to removal within 1 week, although it is often sooner for repeat encampments (approx. 48-72 hours).

### B) Removal

**Public Property:** If the occupants do not leave the site voluntarily following the completion of outreach efforts, the dismantling of the site can commence by City staff or contractor. This stage may be supported by police presence if the Encampment Network has assessed that there is the potential that occupants may resist the removal of belongings or if safety of staff has the potential to be compromised.

**Private Property:** For encampments on private property, the property owner is responsible for notifying unwanted individuals that their presence is not permitted. Police can assist if the individuals refuse to vacate the property. Outreach staff do not visit encampment sites on private property unless permission has been given by the property owner.

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## C) Site Cleanup

In the cleanup stage, any debris remaining after occupants have vacated will be cleaned up by City staff or contractors. For encampments on private property, cleanup is the responsibility of the property owner. The Encampment Network continues to communicate and meet regularly to discuss sites of ongoing concern and to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing strategy and process for improvements.

## City of Winnipeg

### General Description

Typical support provided by OSPs includes, but may not be limited to:

- transportation;
- transfer to emergency shelters;
- distribution of warm clothing;
- provision of blankets, water, coffee, food and harm reduction supplies; and
- wellbeing checks.

### Process Implementation

#### Outreach on Private Property

Encampments on private property are a police matter. Any private property owner with concerns regarding an encampment on their property should reach out to WPS.

#### Outreach on Public Property

1. Where there is ongoing or imminent criminal activity or a person who may be in medical distress, the WPS or WFPS will be dispatched as appropriate;
2. Otherwise, the Outreach Service Provider (“OSP”) for the area is immediately contacted with available details about the encampment;
3. OSP staff attend the site with the objective of providing any needed supports to the residents, and attempting to offer and connect them with available supports;
  - a. If the resident wishes to be transported to a shelter, transportation is arranged;
  - b. Some residents will simply choose to go elsewhere on their own;
  - c. If an alternate destination is desired by the resident, OSP will provide that resource;
  - d. If the resident is prepared to enter a transitional housing placement (which requires a daily cash payment upon entry), OSP will transport the individual and the City will make arrangements with the provider to cover the initial funding for a period of up to 1 month, or until Provincial Income Assistance can begin to cover the daily cost;
4. Some residents will express the intention to remain at the encampment, and not wish to leave for any accommodation or resource. Even in these circumstances, the OSP will continue to maintain communication with the resident(s) on an ongoing basis.
5. Where an encampment site becomes vacant, crews with the Public Works Department visit the site as upon its vacancy to remove any garbage, debris and other abandoned material to remediate the site to its former state.

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## Outreach Due to Fire and Life Safety Concerns

There are numerous elements of encampments that are frequently of concern from a fire safety/life safety perspective, including but not limited to:

- a) Combustible nature of materials used;
- b) Open fires;
- c) Proximity of structures/shelters to each other and to other combustible structures; City of Winnipeg Non-Emergent Encampment Support Process
- d) Improvised heating sources being used including candles, fires, and propane heat in close proximity/within the entrance of the shelter, leading to concerns regarding shelter fires and the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning; and
- e) Accumulations of material and debris that could impede the egress of residents from their shelter/structure in the event of an emergency.

1. If any of the above are noted at any point in time, representatives of the City's Fire Prevention Branch will conduct an inspection of the site in question. Additionally, those representatives will explain the risks to residents, and where needed, provide direction regarding risk reduction.
2. Where informal direction is not heeded, and a pattern of persistent behavior that is a risk to life continue the Assistant Chief under the authority of the WFPS Fire Paramedic Chief will issue an Order necessary, typically including an Order to Vacate.
3. Where vacancy has been ordered, the WFPS has an established protocol that includes collaboration with encampment resident service agencies, Public Works and the WPS. The OSP will continue to work with the residents, explaining the necessity of vacating the site, and working collaboratively to identify necessary supports.
4. As above, if any of the residents are prepared to enter a transitional housing placement (which requires a daily cash payment upon entry), the OSP will transport the individual and the City will make arrangements with the provider to cover the initial funding necessary, until Provincial Income Assistance can begin to cover the daily cost.
5. Upon reaching the ordered date for compliance, the Fire Paramedic Service, with any required support from WPS for safety concerns and Public Works for immediate clean up efforts, will proceed to ensure compliance with the Order.
6. Where an encampment site becomes vacant, crews with the Public Works Department immediately visit the site to remove any garbage, debris and other abandoned material to remediate the site to its former state.

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# Appendix A - Excerpts from Encampment Protocols



## Occupancy of Transit Shelters

1. As above, if there is or imminent criminal activity or a person who may be in medical distress, the WPS or WFPS will be dispatched as appropriate;
2. Otherwise, the first response is provided by Winnipeg Transit, with a Transit Inspector and/or Transit Supervisor attending to assess the situation.
3. If the initiating complaint/observation was mistaken and the occupants of the shelter are awaiting bus service, nothing is done.
4. If it is determined that one or more occupants are present for the sole purpose of: a. Occupying for an undue period of time with no intention of boarding a bus; b. Causing mischief; c. Using substances; or d. For any other purpose that would contravene the Transit By-law; then the attending Inspector/Supervisor will request that those occupants exit the shelter.
5. Should those occupants not agree to leave, the Inspector/Supervisor will cause the area OSP to be contacted to attend the shelter. City of Winnipeg Non-Emergent Encampment Support Process
6. The OSP will attempt to engage with the occupants, explaining the necessity of leaving the shelter, and working collaboratively to identify necessary supports.
7. As above, if any of the residents are prepared to enter a transitional housing placement (which requires a daily cash payment upon entry), the OSP will transport the individual and the City will make arrangements with the provider to cover the initial funding necessary, until Provincial Income Assistance can begin to cover the daily cost.

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# Appendix B - Policy



## Recommendations from Kingston's 2021 Report: City Encampment Protocol/ Procedures

Below is a list of common best practices identified within all municipalities researched, as outlined in Kingston's 2021 report: City Encampment Protocol/Procedures and United Nations:

1. **Community Partner Involvement:** All cities/municipalities have robust outreach teams that are employed by third party service providers/community partners. Their role is to ensure that the individuals residing at encampments have access to the necessities they require. Outreach staff teams liaise with the city/municipality and keep them apprised of ongoing engagement and developments with residents.
2. **Offer Indoor spaces:** Outreach staff and service providers regularly ensure that they are aware of how many spaces exist within the shelter system and actively offer access to indoor space to all residents of encampments. This is a preliminary approach to the relocation of people residing in public spaces.
3. **Ensuring fire safety at all encampment locations:** This year, cities such as Toronto have seen an influx of small wooden / plywood and tarp type structures in encampments. These structures are often built by residents of encampments and in some instances, local builders. Deadly fires have occurred in these structures as a result of improper construction or use. The City's Fire Department and City officials are tasked with the removal of items such as propane heaters and barbecues being used inside structures to promote fire safety. This is an ongoing challenge for municipalities in the balance of autonomy for encampment residents.
4. **Food Provision –** Outreach partners in all cities work with local volunteer food providers to ensure meals are made available to residents of encampments. Food provisions may be brought on-site to an encampment for residents or require residents to access food at an alternative location. Members of the public also frequently donate to provisions to encampment residents.
5. **Counselling and Care –** In most cities / municipalities, service providers collaborate to work with individuals at the encampment site. There are often nurses, doctors, occupational therapists and other practitioners who attend encampments to offer basic care and provide referrals for both physical and mental health / addictions concerns. Relationship and trust-building are key components of the complex support system provided to individuals navigating the homeless system.

This is Exhibit "14" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
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# Residents, businesses take aim at Edmonton's approach to homeless camps | CBC News

Natasha Riebe · CBC News · Posted: Sep 19, 2022 7:00 AM MDT | Last Updated: September 19, 2022

The City of Edmonton's approach to dealing with homeless encampments this year is pushing social disorder to new neighbourhoods and new levels, business leaders and residents say.

The city's encampment response teams have taken down more than 1,370 homeless camps so far this season, a spokesperson told CBC News last week.

In 2021, the city dismantled 1,780 for the entire year.

The city said public complaints about encampments have gone up 25 per cent. In 2021, the city had 6,693 complaints and it's received 5,693 complaints so far this year.

Michael Shandro, general manager of the Best Western Plus City Centre Inn on 113th Avenue and 109th Street, said every day, his employees have issues with people who aren't guests.

"Daily, I'm getting reports of them being either verbally or physically assaulted," he said of his staff. "People refusing to leave."

Shandro said his staff have discovered people who aren't guests of the hotel drinking in the hallway, and others setting up camps along the side of the inn.

"It used to be like every week or two we'd have an incident, we'd talk about it, we'd deal with it and that was it," he said. "My staff are getting jaded."



Police order campers to leave a property on 106th Avenue and 96th Street Thursday afternoon. (Craig Ryan/CBC)

Ellie Sasseville, executive director of the Kingsway District Association, said they've noticed more camps in the area, one recently behind the building on 118th Avenue.

She said they paid \$700 to have cleaners haul away trash and debris left by campers last week and businesses shouldn't have to do that.

## **Refocusing patrols**

In May, police and city peace officers started refocusing patrols in Chinatown, downtown and on Edmonton transit, after two men were killed in Chinatown.

Since then, smaller camps have appeared beyond the inner core in places like Kingsway, along 107th Avenue and Whyte Avenue.

Mayor Amarjeet Sohi said he's hearing concerns from business leaders and residents.

"Problems are spilling over into neighbouring communities," Sohi told CBC News.

Sohi said he hopes a fully staffed Healthy Streets Operations Centre, set up in Chinatown, will allow hot-spot policing and enforcement.

"That will help neighbouring communities as well, so I hope that will work," he said. "But we know that enforcement is a Band-Aid solution."

## **[Edmonton's Chinatown worries about safety, decline in business after killings](#)**

### **[Edmonton mayor unveils steps to curb crime in Chinatown](#)**

Tim Pasma, manager of homeless programs with Hope Mission, also said clamping down on camps in the inner city means pushing people out.

However, he thinks the increased police presence in Chinatown, where there's typically a lot of social disorder, has helped make the neighbourhood safer.

"There's been a lot of crime, there's been a lot of pain suffered by the community, you know, from a lot of the encampments," Pasma said in an interview last week.

"We do feel like it's safer," he said. "There's still a lot of issues that need to be addressed. So it's really, it's a Band-Aid solution. I think everybody knows that, but it's at least one step in the right direction."

## **Taking down tents**

The number of people identifying as homeless doubled from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than 2,750 people have no permanent home and almost 1,300 people are sleeping outside or in shelters on any given night, the city and housing agency Homeward Trust report.

The city developed a new encampment strategy last year, with response teams made up of social agency workers, police and city peace officers clean-up crews.

Last Thursday, the city's encampment response teams dismantled a camp of at least 20 tents at 96th Street and 106th Avenue.

Barb Laidlaw, a resident living across the street for 15 years, said she complained about the social disorder more than



two weeks earlier.

"This is the worst year that it's been for all these camps," Laidlaw said. "It's very exhausting. We're always filing 311 complaints about drug use and litter and stolen property."

A day later, tents appeared again on the same site, CBC News found.

### [Organizers to leave Pekiwewin encampment as temporary shelter opens](#)

The city's new approach to dealing with camps stems from preventing a huge encampment like Camp Pekiwewin in the Rosedale neighbourhood and the Peace Camp in Old Strathcona in summer and fall 2020.

Pasma said large encampments are a safety risk to the general public, first responders and people living in the tent city, where there's exploitation, drug use and crime.

"A lot of the effort has been placed on making sure that these encampments don't grow exponentially to a point where we can't control it anymore," Pasma said.

## **Winter plan**

City, social, agencies and the province are still working on a plan to create more winter shelter spaces but they don't know where that will be.

Last winter, the Spectrum building at the Northlands property on 118th Avenue and Commonwealth Stadium were used as temporary emergency shelters, but the city said neither site is likely to be used this year.

In 2020, the Edmonton Convention Centre was the designated 24/7 shelter during the first winter of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### [City extends pandemic shelter at Edmonton Convention Centre to April](#)

### ['More or less in a corner': Despite expected issues, council OKs new warm-weather shelter plan](#)

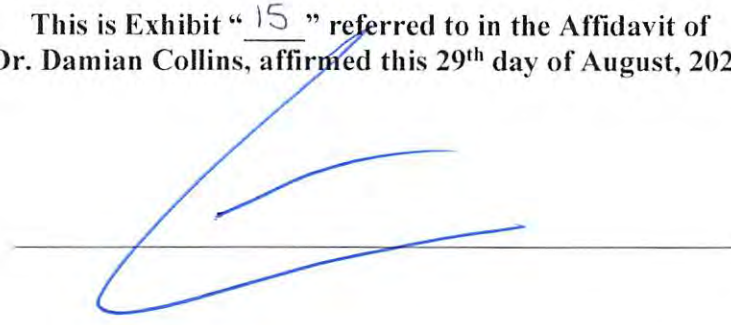
"I think there is an urgency to it," Pasma said. "I think everybody that works in the sector and from a funding level is aware of the urgency."

It's a challenge to find temporary spaces, staff, and the logistics of setting up and operating an emergency shelter, Pasma noted.

"As soon as we can have something in place, the better."

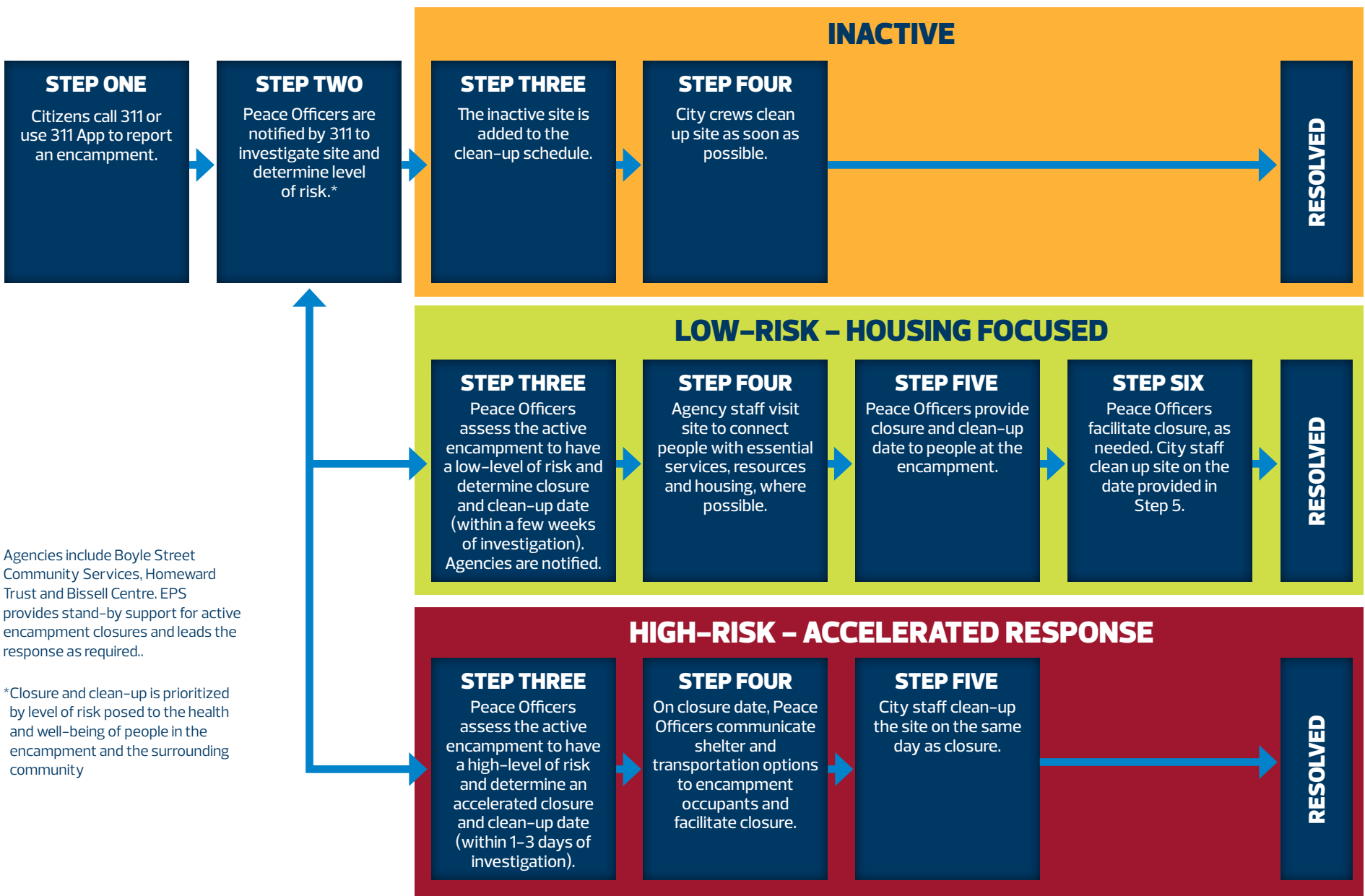
Sohi said he's hopeful the province will come through with funding for winter shelter spaces and then longer-term housing solutions for more of Edmonton's homeless population.

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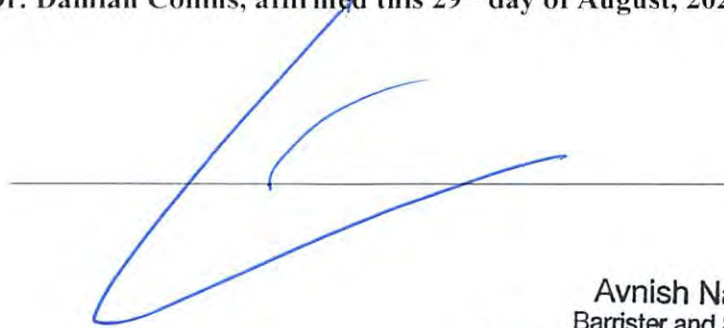
# How the City and its partners respond to encampments on public land



Agencies include Boyle Street Community Services, Homeward Trust and Bissell Centre. EPS provides stand-by support for active encampment closures and leads the response as required.

\*Closure and clean-up is prioritized by level of risk posed to the health and well-being of people in the encampment and the surrounding community

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## 'Take whatever you can get': practicing Housing First in Alberta

Jalene T. Anderson-Baron & Damian Collins

To cite this article: Jalene T. Anderson-Baron & Damian Collins (2019) 'Take whatever you can get': practicing Housing First in Alberta, *Housing Studies*, 34:8, 1286-1306, DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2018.1535055](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1535055)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1535055>



Published online: 20 Dec 2018.



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# 'Take whatever you can get': practicing Housing First in Alberta

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## ABSTRACT

Housing First (HF) is an increasingly widespread and influential response to chronic homelessness. Programs using an HF approach typically rely on market apartments to house homeless clients as rapidly as possible. This reliance means HF programs are dependent on the availability and affordability of market housing. Little attention has been given to how shortages of affordable rental housing influence the practice of HF. To address this gap, we undertook qualitative research in Alberta, Canada. Interviews with service providers revealed that high rents and low vacancy rates had profound impacts on program operations, and complicated efforts to follow HF principles. Clients often experienced delays in being housed and felt pressure to accept the first apartment they were offered. In response, HF programs devoted resources to improve relationships with landlords. Ultimately, however, reliance on market housing undermined programs' ability to fulfil the potential of HF in the Alberta context.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 January 2018  
Accepted 5 October 2018

## KEYWORDS

Alberta; homelessness;  
housing affordability;  
Housing First

## 1. Introduction

Housing First (HF) is an increasingly widespread and influential approach to addressing chronic homelessness (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013; Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016). It operates on the premise that housing is the first need of people experiencing homelessness on a long-term or episodic basis. To address this need, most HF programs rely on scattered-site housing in market apartments coupled with separate services based on client choices (Baker & Evans, 2016). At the centre of this approach is a fundamental (if usually unspoken) assumption that programs can access market housing and cover rental costs on an ongoing basis. However, very little consideration has been given to how the availability and affordability of market housing influences the *practice* of HF. How do programs implement HF when vacancy rates are low and rents are high? To what extent can they follow core principles of the HF approach under these circumstances? And, just as importantly, what difference do shortages of affordable housing make for HF clients, especially in terms of wait times and rehousing experiences? In addressing these questions, this article also speaks to the larger and fundamental issue of whether and how HF can be implemented in a way that

‘maintain[s] fidelity to its ethos [while] also taking into consideration local necessities and specificities’ (Lancione *et al.*, 2018, p. 40).

Evidence for HF’s effectiveness stems primarily from the Pathways to Housing program, founded by Sam Tsemberis in New York City in 1992. The majority of research into HF examines programs that follow the Pathways Housing First (PHF) model – including the largest field trial of its effectiveness, Canada’s \$110 million *At Home/ Chez Soi* project (Goering *et al.*, 2014). PHF was innovative for offering rapid housing in market apartments to long-term homeless clients with a dual-diagnosis of mental illness and addictions, followed by separate support services. It imposed two main requirements; each client was to meet regularly with a staff member, and to pay 30% of their income towards rent. Especially in North America, PHF has often been ‘viewed as the “authentic” housing first model’ (Baker & Evans, 2016, p. 27). In practice, however, HF has developed ‘innumerable variations’, and often functions as a malleable idea and fuzzy construct, rather than a highly-prescribed approach to housing and service delivery (Baker & Evans, 2016, p. 28). As Lancione *et al.* (2018) argue, the plasticity of HF has enabled it to be adapted to diverse contexts, contributing to its mobility as a powerful set of discourses and practices. In turn, as HF travels, it is continually ‘[brought] up against practices, thinking, customs, desires, resources and systems that tend to modify it’ (Lancione *et al.*, 2018, p. 46).

In this paper, we report on qualitative research conducted in Calgary and Edmonton, metropolitan centres in Alberta, Canada. Housing affordability challenges in Alberta are most marked during cyclical economic booms, which routinely lead to steep rent increases and low vacancy rates (Evans, 2015). At the same time, provincial social assistance (welfare) payments are very low, especially for those deemed employable (less than \$8000 per year for single adults in 2016), and are not adjusted for inflation (Kneebone & Wilkins, 2016). In this context, thousands of people in Calgary and Edmonton live in emergency shelters, on the streets and in informal encampments.

This situation is reflective of a broader national context, whereby an increasing proportion of Canadian households, particularly renters, struggles to afford housing. Despite repeated calls to increase the stock of affordable rental housing, it remains scarce in cities across Canada (Gaetz *et al.*, 2014). In addition, low levels of social assistance in all provinces leave many recipients without the income necessary to secure even minimum-quality housing. Tweddle *et al.* (2017, p. 41) report that, almost without exception, ‘welfare incomes fall well below the designated [low-income] cut-offs for all household types and in all jurisdictions’. In many provinces – including Alberta – social assistance payments are below 50% of these cut-offs, which serve as de facto poverty lines.

Over the last decade, responses to homelessness in Alberta have centred on HF. In 2007, Calgary became the first Canadian city to adopt HF as formal policy, followed by Edmonton the following year. In 2008, Alberta became the first province to adopt a 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness based on HF. Subsequently, HF was taken up as the central response in the federal homelessness strategy, which funds communities across Canada to implement local HF programs (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016). Homelessness service delivery in Alberta’s cities thus occurs in a context where all

three levels of government formally endorse and fund HF. Numerous housing service agencies across the province deliver HF programs, including (at the time of this research) 12 in Edmonton and 10 in Calgary. Collectively, they have rehoused 15,000 people since 2007 (Government of Alberta, 2017a).

## 2. Housing First

Housing First is often characterized as a ‘principled’ approach to address homelessness (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013; Goering *et al.*, 2014). A related claim holds that, collectively, these principles constitute a ‘philosophy’ (e.g. Lancione *et al.*, 2018; Waegemakers Schiff & Schiff, 2014). However, there is no universal agreement on HF’s defining principles. Various authors have identified tenets they consider to constitute its ‘core components’ (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016) or ‘ethos’ (Lancione *et al.*, 2018). With regards to PHF, Sam Tsemberis outlined four essential elements in a 2010 chapter (Tsemberis, 2010a), and eight principles in a manual published the same year (Tsemberis, 2010b). As HF has been adopted in diverse contexts, other sets of principles have been articulated. For example, the *Canadian Homelessness Partnering Strategy* (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014) identifies six principles of a ‘HF approach’ – which differ in wording and emphasis from those originally associated with the PHF model (see Table 1). Adoption of these six principles is formally mandatory for all programs receiving federal HF funding in Canada (including those in Calgary and Edmonton).

Despite differing numbers and variations in emphasis, the two descriptions of PHF outlined in Table 1 articulate four common principles. The first is *consumer choice*, which applies to housing, as well as engagement in treatment and pursuit of personal goals. Clients may choose to live in buildings and locations that best support their own goals for safety and recovery (Zerger *et al.*, 2014). Choice in these areas has been found to promote housing retention and mental health (Greenwood & Manning, 2016). The second principle is a *recovery orientation*, including acceptance of a harm reduction approach. Clients are more likely to stay motivated and engaged with service providers if service plans are based on their own treatment goals. They are also able to have open conversations with service providers about psychiatric symptoms or substance use (Tsemberis, 2010a, 2010b). Together, these principles provide a strong foundation for client self-determination in HF (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016).

*Community integration* is the third principle, valued for reducing clients’ social isolation and stigmatization, and increasing their opportunities for recreation and employment (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013). Conventionally, this has been promoted by way of a scattered-site housing model that encourages clients to engage with surrounding communities (Tsemberis, 2010a). However, there is a growing interest in congregate approaches to HF, whereby clients are housed and supported in shared buildings. Somers *et al.* (2017, p. 6) note that both approaches may foster community integration, albeit by different means: scattered site housing entails joining ‘an established community’ with a mix of homes and residents, whereas congregate settings offer ‘a



**Table 1.** Housing First principles.

Pathways Housing First (Tsemberis,2010a)	Pathways Housing First (Tsemberis,2010b)	Housing First approach (Employment and Social Development Canada,2014b)
<p><b>1. Consumer choice.</b> Clients actively participate to choose their housing arrangement and support services.</p> <p><b>2. Separation of housing and treatment.</b> The program uses a scattered-site, independent housing model and rents in market housing. Clients have access to time-unlimited support.</p> <p><b>3. Recovery orientation.</b> Clients choose their own goals and define their needs. The program also utilizes a harm reduction approach.</p> <p><b>4. Community integration.</b> This is promoted through the scattered-site housing approach and by supporting clients to reconnect with family, meet neighbours, and participate in their community.</p>	<p><b>1. Housing as a basic human right.</b> Every person is given support and a chance to succeed in an apartment of his or her own. Clients do not have to earn housing.</p> <p><b>2. Respect, warmth and compassion for all clients.</b> Create a healthy, positive, forward-looking relationship and program culture.</p> <p><b>3. A commitment to working with clients for as long as they need.</b> Once clients enter the program, staff must convey a consistent message of commitment. If support is no longer required, a client may 'graduate'.</p> <p><b>4. Scattered-site housing; independent apartments.</b> The program rents suitable, affordable, decent apartments scattered around the city from property owners in the community.</p> <p><b>5. Separation of housing and services. All clients have ready, reliable access to treatment and comprehensive support services.</b> Most services are provided in a clients' natural environment and service is time-unlimited.</p> <p><b>6. Consumer choice and self-determination.</b> Clients are given an active choice in their housing arrangement, goals, treatment, etc.</p> <p><b>7. A recovery orientation.</b> Clients' service plans are based on their own treatment goals.</p> <p><b>8. Harm reduction within the context of client-defined goals.</b> Focus is not placed on stopping substance use but rather how drugs and alcohol may interfere with the clients' goals.</p>	<p><b>1. Rapid housing with supports.</b> Clients are directly assisted to locate and secure permanent housing as quickly as possible. Housing readiness is not a requirement.</p> <p><b>2. Offering client choice in housing.</b> Clients must have choice in terms of housing options and the services they wish to access.</p> <p><b>3. Separating housing provision from other services.</b> Acceptance of any support service, including treatment programs, is not required to access or maintain housing. Programs must commit to rehousing clients as needed.</p> <p><b>4. Providing tenancy rights and responsibilities.</b> Clients are required to contribute a portion of their income, preferably 30%, towards rent, with a rent subsidy covering the remainder. Clients have rights under the applicable landlord and tenant act.</p> <p><b>5. Integrating housing into the community.</b> Scattered-site housing in both public and private rental markets should be promoted. Other housing options such as social housing can be offered when available and if clients choose.</p> <p><b>6. Strength-based and promoting self-sufficiency.</b> The end goal of the program is for clients to stabilize and successfully exit the HF program.</p>

new community' with on-site programming and tenants who share a history of homelessness.

Finally, *separation of housing and services* is prominent in both descriptions of PHF. Clients *may* choose to pursue treatment for health issues or problematic substance use once they are housed, but this is not required (Tsemberis, 2010a). A recent systematic review of HF program outcomes (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016) found

strong and consistent evidence that this approach is successful in achieving significantly higher levels of housing retention than other program models; however, evidence for improved mental health and reduced substance use in HF programs relative to alternatives was inconsistent. Similarly, *At Home/Chez Soi* reported housing retention rates twice as high in HF programs as in Linear Residential Treatment, while clients' mental health symptoms and substance use problems improved by a similar amount in both programs (Goering *et al.*, 2014).

Comparing this set of four PHF principles with those articulated by Employment and Social Development Canada, there are clear parallels with respect to *consumer choice in housing*, *community integration* (via scattered site apartments), and *separation of housing and services*. However, there is no direct inclusion of a *recovery orientation* and no references to harm reduction (although the absence of sobriety requirements is acknowledged). Instead, there is an emphasis on promoting self-sufficiency, which is linked to the 'end goal ... for clients to stabilize and successfully exit the HF program.' While the notion of a successful exit may imply recovery, it might equally be used to justify the imposition of time-limited support and expectations of graduation from HF (Anderson-Baron & Collins, 2018).

### **2.1. Pathways Housing First and other models**

To measure how closely programs follow PHF principles, various fidelity scales have been developed (see, e.g., Stefancic *et al.*, 2013). Several studies have demonstrated significant associations between higher fidelity programs and superior outcomes for clients in areas such as housing stability, problematic substance use, and engagement with services (Gilmer *et al.*, 2014; Goering *et al.*, 2015). Higher fidelity may also be effective in reducing the costs associated with clients' use of public services (Gilmer, 2016). However, fidelity scales and the positivist forms of measurement they enable have limited utility in contexts such as Alberta, where most programs do not purport to follow the PHF model.

This departure from PHF reflects a broader international trend, whereby HF is not a single model, but a broad set of approaches that are modified and adapted to local circumstances. The resulting proliferation of HF-based approaches is sometimes labelled 'model drift' (Baker & Evans, 2016; Pleace, 2011; Stefancic *et al.*, 2013). It follows that HF cannot (and should not) be reduced to PHF. Understanding what HF actually consists of requires setting aside preconceptions about what it is or should be, and 'examining this program/policy as it is accomplished in practice' (Hennigan, 2017, p. 1434).

Although some HF programs have adopted congregate housing arrangements (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016; Somers *et al.*, 2017), most retain the PHF approach of housing clients in independent market apartments. This recourse to the market is a key commonality among diverse HF programs. In this respect, HF 'attempts to reintegrate individuals into the capitalist marketplace through offering an apartment lease' (Hennigan, 2017, p. 1420). The main rationale for this approach, as articulated by Tsemberis (2010a, p. 47), is that the 'community norms and social pressures' found within mixed neighbourhoods help to sustain normative behaviours, promote

recovery, and encourage social and economic inclusion. Positive social bonds and a sense of inclusion in turn support housing stability and client wellbeing (Johnstone *et al.*, 2016). However, reliance on rental markets may leave HF programs vulnerable to rising rents and low vacancy rates.

## **2.2. Housing market context and Housing First in practice**

Housing market conditions are known to influence the prevalence of homelessness at the local scale. Community-level research in the United States has ‘consistently identified significant relationships between increased rent levels, decreased vacancy rates, and increased homelessness’ (Byrne *et al.*, 2013, p. 609). Rent levels have particularly strong positive associations with local homelessness rates. For adults living in poverty, Byrne *et al.* (2013) found that a \$100 (USD) increase in median rents was associated with a 15% increase in homelessness in metropolitan areas, and a 39% increase in non-metropolitan areas. A statistical model developed by Hanratty (2017) indicated that a 10% increase in median rents was associated with a 9% increase in local homeless numbers. Given this connection, both studies indicated that increasing incomes (via social assistance, housing subsidies, and/or employment) was critical to addressing the affordability problems that are major drivers of homelessness. Kneebone and Wilkins (2016) reach similar conclusions in the Canadian context, finding that modest increases to social assistance rates (of \$1500 per year) or rent subsidies (of \$1200 per year) would reduce demand for emergency shelter beds by about 20%.

Much less is known about the impacts of housing market conditions on *programs* that seek to end homelessness. The cost and availability of rental units is likely to impact HF programs at two critical junctures: intake and placement (where their ability to house clients rapidly, and to offer choice in housing, may be severely compromised) and exit (as affordable units are essential if clients are to retain housing after HF supports end). To date, these issues have received limited attention in accounts of HF. Zerger *et al.* (2014) provide a rare insight into the HF placement process, with reference to the Toronto *At Home/Chez Soi* site. Whereas an early PHF program was successful at moving 52% of clients into housing within one week (Tsemberis *et al.*, 2003), the goal in Toronto was to house participants within 3 months of enrollment, and only those who waited more than 4 months were classified as experiencing delayed entry. A large majority (84%) was housed within 4 months, due in part to structured communication between case managers, housing workers and clients. However, placement could be slowed when HF programs prioritized client choice in housing over rapid access, which were perceived as ‘two competing HF mandates’ (Zerger *et al.*, 2014, p. 46). Research on housing outcomes after program exit has begun to be considered in the US, with Byrne *et al.* (2016) reporting on risk factors for repeat homelessness among veterans leaving rapid re-housing programs.

Several Canadian commentaries have outlined the necessity of an adequate supply of affordable housing for HF programs to function (Doberstein & Smith, 2015; Gaetz, 2011; Shapcott, 2011). Longer reports have noted that programs encounter challenges in matching new clients to suitable accommodation (Waegemakers Schiff, 2014), and that they are reliant on rent supplements to access and maintain market housing for

**Table 2.** Characteristics of case study cities.

Year	Population (millions)		Homeless counts		Avg. monthly rent (2-brm apartment)		Avg. monthly rent (bachelor apartment)		Rental vacancy rate	
	2012	2014	2012	2014	2012	2014	2012	2014	2012	2014
Calgary	1.12	1.12	3190	3555	\$1150	\$1322	\$776	\$906	1.3%	1.4%
Edmonton	0.82	0.88	2174	2307	\$1071	\$1227	\$742	\$843	1.7%	1.7%

Sources: CMHC 2012; 2014; Turner, 2015.

existing clients (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013). This reliance stems from HF clients' contributions towards rent being capped at 30% of their incomes, which in itself is seldom sufficient to secure housing (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2013; Polvere *et al.*, 2014). An assessment of *At Home/Chez Soi* recognized the lack of affordable housing as a barrier to program implementation across all five sites (Nelson *et al.*, 2014). Reflecting further on the Canadian context, Katz *et al.* (2017, p. 141) note that HF programs are reliant upon 'a limited supply of what can be a weakly regulated, often poorly maintained rental stock.' In Australia, Bullen and Fisher (2015) found that shortages of affordable housing led to lengthy waitlists in HF programs, and otherwise eligible clients being deemed unqualified. However, HF could still be effective where agencies were assertive in finding housing and in supporting clients while they were waitlisted.

Beyond operational questions, a theoretically-informed body of literature on HF gives some consideration to issues of affordability. Sparks (2012) argued that HF emphasizes the personal failings of homeless individuals (in terms of mental illness, addictions, etc.) over the role of the housing market in producing homelessness. For Harris (2017), this disregard is *intentional*; it reflects a conscious choice to overlook structural challenges in favour of simplistic explanations for homelessness grounded in individual pathology. This can allow poverty and inadequate housing supply to remain unaddressed in policy contexts dominated by HF (Pleace, 2011). Indeed, HF is not *intended* to 'alter the structural conditions that reproduce and distribute housing insecurity and deprivation' (Willse, 2010, p173), but rather seeks to work within existing systems to (re)house the victims of these conditions. Our study was situated in a context in which economic conditions undermined rental housing affordability, exacerbated homelessness and created challenges for the operation of HF programs.

### 3. Research context and goal

In Canada, there is no standard definition of affordable housing, but the term commonly refers to adequate housing offered at a price where, after rent and utility costs, a household is still be able to meet other basic needs on an ongoing basis. In the context of homeless and marginally-housed populations, adequate housing would often consist of basic rental apartments (bachelor suites or one-bedrooms) at a price that is reasonable for persons on very low incomes (earned from social assistance and/or low-wage labour). Here, "reasonable" would likely be defined with reference to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) standard, whereby housing

must cost less than 30% of before-tax household income to be considered affordable. However, neither the City of Edmonton nor the Government of Alberta have adopted such a precise figure, and define affordable housing as that which ‘is modest in terms of floor area and amenities, that meets household needs and that has rents or payments below Average Market Rent in the community or area in which the unit is located’ (Community Plan Committee, 2012, p. 64).

In Alberta, demand for affordable housing has been fuelled by high levels of domestic and international in-migration. At the same time, processes such as gentrification and condominium conversion have reduced supply (Collins, 2010). Despite large investments in plans to end homelessness, affordable rental units remain sparse. In 2008, the provincial government committed to the creation of 8000 new units of affordable housing. However, 5 years later, funding had been allocated for less than 2000 units, very few of which were actually constructed (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2013). This combination of factors contributed to high average rents and low vacancy rates, prior to the economic downturn in mid-2015 (see Table 2). These trends contribute to producing and sustaining homelessness; they may also inhibit the operations of HF programs, in terms of their ability to secure housing that is affordable, based on their own funding plus clients’ contributions towards rents. The specific goal of this research was to assess how shortages of affordable housing in Calgary and Edmonton influence the practices of HF programs.

#### 4. Methods

Data collection involved in-person interviews with two groups of participants in Edmonton and Calgary. First, key informant interviews were conducted with service providers - professionals working in front-line or managerial roles within the homelessness system. These interviews were semi-structured in character, with questions focused on the day-to-day actions that agencies and their staff carried out to implement an HF approach and/or deliver services to clients. We did not pre-determine what this approach consisted of, in part because only two of 22 HF agencies across the two cities specifically followed the PHF model. Service provider participants were prompted to reflect in detail on housing market conditions in their city and how it influenced the operation of HF programs.

In both cities, biographical life history interviews (see May, 2000) were conducted with service users - people with lived experiences of homelessness or severe housing need, who were past, current or prospective clients of HF agencies. Questions encouraged participants to discuss what affordable housing meant to them, what the main barriers to accessing housing were, and whether they had ever lost housing because of inability to pay rent. They were also asked to reflect on their interactions with HF programs (from initial contact through to being housed and receiving a rent supplement, etc.).

In terms of recruitment, service providers were initially contacted by e-mail, based on public contact information. Those who expressed interest in participating were contacted again to set up interviews. In some cases, the initial contact passed on information to others at their agency, and additional (or alternate) participants were

identified in this way. For service user participants, the primary method of recruitment involved posters and cards placed at housing agencies, shelters and libraries within the two cities. Members of this group were offered a \$20 gift card as an incentive for participation.

In total, 35 participants were interviewed in Edmonton and Calgary. This number included 22 service providers (11 in each city), who collectively represented eight HF programs (four in each city). It also included 13 service users (seven in Edmonton and six in Calgary), with diverse housing circumstances at the time of interview. Overall, four were currently housed and receiving HF support, six were currently homeless (four waitlisted for HF services, one former HF client, one eligible for HF support but not connected with an agency), and three were precariously housed (one former HF client, one waitlisted for HF, one eligible for HF support but not connected with an agency).

Interviews were conducted between July 2014 and March 2015, and ranged in length from 30 minutes to nearly two hours. Approval for this project was granted by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. Prior to being interviewed, participants received written and verbal descriptions of the research, and were then asked to sign an informed consent form. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission, which was granted by all but one participant (for this exception, detailed hand-written notes were taken). To protect the anonymity of interviewees, in the results presented below, they are identified by codes which indicate only their city (C for Calgary; E for Edmonton) and participant group (SP for service provider; SU for service user). We make particular use of service provider perspectives, as their professional roles granted them sustained insights into the systematic nature of housing affordability challenges, and the associated consequences for HF programs.

Interviews were transcribed in full, and then analyzed using the “framework” approach (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). This method was developed specifically for applied policy research and is grounded in the original accounts of participants in a manner that allows for between- and within-case analysis. Our analysis followed the five-step process set out by Ritchie and Spencer (2002) in order to enable the systematic indexing of themes, and the identification of associations and patterns within the data. To enhance rigour, we held community feedback sessions in both cities, to check that participants’ accounts had been appropriately interpreted and expressed.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Market conditions

All service provider participants were concerned by the limited availability of affordable rental housing, and the impacts this had on HF programs. Most believed the issue had worsened over recent years, due to decreasing supply and increasing demand:

One of the issues we were dealing with at the time was the conversion of rental stock to condos, and that continues to go on. ... We were losing rental stock and nobody was building rental stock. Now there has been some building since, but we’re still experiencing ... a very close to zero vacancy rate, which makes it difficult. (C-SP3)

... there is no rental housing being built, let alone affordable rental housing. There's no new stuff coming on. In fact, older more decrepit buildings are being bought up and being redeveloped into ... you know, upscale condos. So that's not helping. (C-SP11)

People are just drawn to Alberta for the money. And they are separated from their families from all over Canada or North America or wherever, and it's stressful and you can't find a place to stay and maybe things are working out with your friends – and all of a sudden it doesn't. (E-SP8)

One participant suggested that because the rental market was so constricted, the efforts of HF programs may have been contributing to new cases of homelessness for those who were already precariously housed. This was because both groups competed for the same (limited) stock of 'marginal housing':

You're taking your people who are homeless, getting them into that marginal housing, and then the people who are barely making it as is are falling out at this end. ... You can take people out of homelessness, but if you're not stopping new people from falling in, it's a cycle that will never end. (E-SP11)

In addition, service providers emphasized the inadequacy of social assistance on which almost all HF clients rely. The key provincial program – Alberta Works – allocated a 'core shelter amount' of just \$323 per month for a single adult in private housing (\$436 for an adult couple; \$546 for a single adult with one child) (Government of Alberta, 2017b). Service providers were aware of the severe disconnect between these income levels and high rents:

Alberta Works gives them \$323 for rent. There's not even a room, I haven't even found a room rental for \$323. ... It's like, I'm finding people the worst room rentals and they are like \$600, \$800 for the one [bedroom], or if it's a bigger room \$850. ... If we could get people on subsidies faster or if we could just find a place where this \$323 actually made sense, then we would have huge turnover I think at [emergency shelter]. (E-SP3)

And for people who are on income support ... affordable housing [is] still not affordable enough. Like not even close. So, there might as well be no affordable housing for those people. Like what does it matter to them? \$600 is still twice too much. \$900 is three times too much, it doesn't matter. (E-SP1)

This mom received \$977 [including \$546 for shelter] from Alberta Works last month. Her rent is \$1350, so right there I mean that's not even covering her rent. ... She was feeling extremely frustrated this morning and I was saying, "... but you aren't supposed to be comfortable on Alberta Works. It's supposed to be so uncomfortable that you get out there and you get a job." But she's going, "They don't even give me enough to cover the basics. I'm not talking about money to go the movies. I'm talking about basic needs - covering my rent and food. I can't even do that." (C-SP7)

In general, housing was understood to be affordable in Edmonton and Calgary only where rents were geared-to-income (as in social housing), or when agencies could provide rent subsidies to offset the cost of a market apartment (as in HF programs). It was considered impossible for a homeless person to secure an "affordable" unit in the market without some form of assistance. Moreover, agencies *themselves* struggled to secure housing that was of appropriate quality, and some were forced to work with 'slumlords' or to rent units in the least desirable neighbourhoods:

The cost of rent is huge. It's wherever we can find them [apartments]. Because of the housing crisis, we're finding that, I'm gonna use this term, that slumlords are the ones that are willing to take our clients. (E-SP2)

[There's] a slum landlord who owns an apartment building out on the west end. And I mean ... HF participants must make up at least three-quarters of their suites. ... And even then, it's \$1000 [per month] for a one-bedroom suite! (E-SP4)

[Affordable apartments] are in bad areas of town. It's really hard because yeah, they are subsidized, but then there's no walkability and so they [clients] need bus passes. (E-SP5)

Reliance on undesirable housing stock and/or neighbourhoods potentially undermines the HF principle of community integration, in that these options are stigmatized, and less likely to promote positive social norms. This said, they allow HF programs to continue to work, something that becomes increasingly difficult in constricted housing markets:

I mean it makes the work harder, let's be honest. It slows down intakes, it makes the work harder ... (C-SP5)

... and makes us panic if someone does get evicted for some reason right. Or if all of a sudden we're not renewing these leases, it's like shoot, this could potentially mean people on the street and we want to take care of the people in our program but we also have people waiting to get housed. Yeah, there's not a cushion, right? (C-SP6)

In this context, agencies encountered specific challenges to delivering services in a manner consistent with commonly-recognized principles of HF. It is to these challenges that we now turn.

## **5.2. Client choice and competing demands**

Although service providers' understandings of HF varied, most stated that the principle of client choice in housing was valuable. There was a general consensus that clients deserved the opportunity to make decisions about their own living arrangements:

I think it [choice] is important, I think it's really important. One of the things that I learned when I first started this program is that people will choose a place in an area where they have fond memories. ... They don't want to move to a place where, ... where they have had a lot of history with other drug users and dealers and maybe they've had a history of working the streets. (E-SP8)

I think it [choice] is everything. Because it's the type of housing ... They [clients] are still humans too and I know people think they don't have these rights or they should just be grateful for what they have, but people are people and they want what they want. (E-SP5)

I think there's a lot of value to being able to choose ... there's a lot of autonomy and a lot of ownership in that for a client. (C-SP8)

However, *offering* clients a choice in housing was anything but straightforward in practice. For many service providers, facilitating choice involved compromise, strategizing, and making the best of any opportunities in the housing market:



Unfortunately, it's a timing issue a lot of the time, because the availabilities are so low, we find apartments, we schedule viewings, we take people to those viewings, and if they say "yes," it's like we apply right there on the spot and hope we hear the next day kind of thing. So, yeah I mean we do try to give people choice but that choice is still very limited because of the vacancy rate. (E-SP1)

We gotta raise the question, "where do you want us to put you?" ... Based on availability ... the market is very competitive. The vacancy rate is less than 1% ... So, those options may be there but what if it doesn't work? "Is there another alternative for you, or how else can we do?" ... So we have to be realistic within the budget. We look at all those constraints and all those questions. (E-SP6)

Such comments pointed to ambiguities in what it actually means to give or provide choice in expensive rental markets with low vacancy rates. The range of affordable options may be so constrained that meaningful choice becomes difficult for agencies to offer. Indeed, some participants concluded that these circumstances had rendered client choice essentially impossible:

There's so many [challenges] to choose from (laughs). I think the availability is the big one. Just being, if you're looking for housing you don't have the luxury of being choosy, you take whatever you can get. And that's an unfortunate reality that we face. (E-SP1)

Client choice is important. And there have been times we've been able to provide choice, but with the – I would say – shrinking rental market, that choice hasn't always been there ... So their initial apartment may not be so much choice - but we will work to get to where they want as suites come up. (C-SP5)

It [choice in housing] doesn't work, no. There was a time when it did, there was a time when apartments were kind of a dime a dozen so to speak... The rules have changed over the years ... a program could keep so many floater apartments available, but we can't do that anymore. And the vacancy rate is too low, and when we get an apartment we need to have it filled and we need to hold onto it as best we can. (C-SP8)

Several service providers described arrangements in which the principle of client choice was entirely over-ridden by other concerns. In one instance, a Calgary HF program owned apartments, and prioritized keeping these rented over any notion of choice. In another Calgary initiative, the *rapidness* of housing was emphasized over choice, to the extent that new clients would not be accepted until an apartment was available. In both instances, clients had no agency in the housing process; they were housed in pre-selected apartments that were ready for move-in:

We have our apartments, we try to build those up as we are acquiring more clients. ... We know which unit they are going to go into. ... It's whatever's available, just because we can't let apartments sit empty without the rent being paid, so we have to try and keep them as full as possible. (C-SP8)

We will not do an intake unless we have a spot to put them. We're different than most of the agencies in the city where they'll open up a case management spot and meet with them in community. We base our intake process on, once you're accepted we want you to have a place to move into right away. (C-SP6).

Several participants also questioned what it meant for clients to 'choose' housing, when the alternative to accepting what is first offered is likely remaining homeless.

They noted that clients were aware of the housing market situation, and that this played into their willingness to accept any apartment:

Most clients understand the market too. They'll say "listen, all my family live in the northwest, but I'm at the [shelter]". I will take far southeast if that's what you have right now. One day I'd love to but, heck, I'd rather - I choose southeast over the [shelter]. (C-SP6)

When you have a client who is what they call "sleeping rough" they are not going to be like "I am adamant, I want to live in Clareview and that's it." It's not going to happen. And even when we have clients who have identified a certain area and we can't find apartments or rental units in those areas, we offer them ... like it is up to them whether or not they take it, but them recognizing it's their only option, they will take it. (E-SP2)

### **5.3. Landlord challenges**

A key theme in service providers' narratives linked constrained rental market conditions to challenges with landlords. Some participants noted that the limited supply of rental housing and higher demand was contributing to a "landlords' market", in which landlords could be highly selective about tenants. This made it harder for HF programs to access and retain apartments:

In Alberta it's the boom and bust, right? And when it's bust, we don't have a lot of issues getting apartments because really the landlords appreciate the fact that the rent's gonna be paid every month, damages will be taken care of, all those kinds of things. But when it's booming they can be a lot more discriminatory. We've actually lost a few leases just in the last month .... (C-SP8)

It's a landlords' market right now. So where our families also have a real hard time is the landlords can pick and choose who they want in their units. (C-SP7)

During a housing shortage they [our clients] are never going to be the best candidates for an apartment. Landlords don't want people on welfare. (E-SP10)

Adaptations to these challenges included strengthening working relationships with landlords, treating landlords like customers, and sheer dedication to the process. Critically, every HF program had created staff positions dedicated to securing housing, with job titles such as housing locators, landlord liaisons and housing outreach workers:

I think it's been really great that we've had people who have been able to liaise with landlords. ...be friends with them and try to build that relationship between the landlord and the client and the program, to help landlords understand where our clients are coming from. (E-SP8)

"Housing Locator" is what we call them. And we learned about four to five years ago to separate the roles. And they advocate for the landlord, they don't advocate for the client. Social workers can do that. You can have that friction at work but it keeps that away from the landlord. Landlords stay happy, they'll continue doing business with us. (C-SP2)

We also have a “Housing Liaison” - okay so he goes out, strikes up relationships with landlords and tries to get them to rent to our families. He is actually fairly successful. (C-SP7)

High quality case management was also valuable in ensuring continued access to apartments. This was because many landlords considered it a positive to rent to tenants who were supported and ‘supervised’ by HF agencies:

We’re creative, we’re assertive, we partner, ... we have a lot to offer a landlord as well. Assured rent, damage deposit, multiple visits, we get them out during the day so they’re not floating around the building. So, you know we have found that being super assertive, we have been able to meet our housing needs but it is, I mean, it’s tight. (C-SP5)

#### **5.4. Service user perspectives**

In some cases, programs would not accept a new HF participant unless they already had an apartment available. However, most programs operated waitlists, and service users reported waits ranging from one month to two years. Long waits undercut the principle of rapid housing, which is sometimes considered pivotal to HF (see Table 1), but are consistent with the challenges identified by service providers, above:

Then I got involved in [HF program] and within a month they find me a bachelor suite. Rooming house. (E-SU5)

Yeah when they said I had all the paperwork and I was accepted, now let’s find a place, was about four months ... I was constantly being told, “oh this week, this week, this week” which I found aggravating because ... I never knew when I was going to be housed ... (E-SU1)

With [HF program], it had been two years to get in. (C-SU8)

The level of involvement in the housing process and choice that service users felt they had ranged from those who were taken to view numerous apartments with a support worker prior to making a decision, to programs that had apartments on standby for participants to move into directly:

My worker at the time told me I was able to look at anything anywhere. And go anywhere in the city I wanted from there, but I chose to stay in this area and that was one of the options and I liked it right off the bat. It was the only place I looked at but I was happy with it. (E-SU1)

They just say we have a unit for you and you either accept it or you go to the bottom of the list. (C-SU8)

They had one place lined up already, so I said let’s go check it out so I didn’t care. It was big. A big suite for a one bedroom. I loved it at first, but then after a while it kind of got to be really lonely cause it was dark and all that we had was a balcony and one window. And the kitchen was closed off. And there was no windows, it was just dark all the time. It was like freaky. (E-SU7)

Another service user drew attention to a key dilemma that HF program clients may face in a constrained housing market. Specifically, this participant was given the

option of viewing multiple apartments, but this offer came with the disclaimer that not taking the first apartment could mean waiting indefinitely for another to become available:

She said, “I’m going to show you one, if you like it you like it, if not you have to wait.” So I said “I don’t care, I’ll take it.” I didn’t even see it yet, and we were on our way, so I looked at her and said “okay go.” Cause I couldn’t handle the [shelter]. (E-SU5)

In this instance, the client felt that the “choice” offered was between the first apartment seen, and continued homelessness. This is arguably no choice at all, and contrary to the emphasis on self-determination that is part of the ethos of HF (see Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016).

## 6. Discussion

This research has addressed a gap in academic and policy knowledge of the housing market’s fundamental role in shaping the operation of HF programs. Alberta was a valuable context in which to explore these issues further, given well-established HF policies and programs, and recurring challenges with housing affordability in the rental markets of Edmonton and Calgary. Service providers offered rich accounts of how these challenges impeded their ability to implement HF principles. The foremost threat was to client choice in housing. Most service providers believed this principle to be integral to the HF approach, and almost all programs attempted to provide choice to clients. However, the constrained housing market led to a variety of compromises, and in some instances the availability of affordable rental units was so limited it was simply impossible to offer clients a choice.

These factors had profound impacts on service users’ experiences of being housed, with fewer apartment viewings and/or pressure to take the first housing offered. Many clients were influenced by their urgent need to obtain housing, and awareness of difficult market conditions. In this context, housing choice was often highly restricted – something also documented by Zerger *et al.* in Toronto, where many HF clients ‘had instead settled for the first housing option they were given out of fear that they would miss their chance to be housed and/or because their current living situation was unbearable’ (2014, p. 46). Although client choice is relatively easy to articulate (see Table 1), and its benefits are well documented (see Greenwood & Manning, 2016; Tsemberis, 2010a), in contexts where clients are desperate to obtain housing and very little is available, the principle may come to lack substantive content.

Shortages of affordable rental housing in Edmonton and Calgary also appeared to bring two HF principles into conflict with each other: agencies could pursue *either* housing choice *or* rapid housing, but not both. Put simply, when client choice was pursued, wait times for housing increased. Conversely, when agencies emphasized moving their clients into housing as quickly as possible, choice was restricted (or abandoned altogether). Which principle was prioritized in any given case was primarily a matter of choice for each HF agency. Some programs openly prioritized rapid housing in order to streamline their processes and prevent their own apartments from sitting empty. This represents a significant departure from the PHF model, in

that it does not use scattered-site market apartments and renders notions of choice essentially irrelevant.

Rapid housing is a common goal of the PHF model, as well as a HF principle articulated by Employment and Social Development Canada (2014). However, there is no agreed-upon definition of what timeframe this refers to, or the process HF agencies should follow to ensure it is achieved (Zerger *et al.*, 2014). In this research, timeframes (from intake to placement) ranged from 30 days to two years for those programs that operated waitlists. Shortages of affordable rental stock and difficulties in securing apartments (e.g. in a “landlords’ market”) contributed to inconsistent but generally increasing wait times for housing. The extra effort required to find appropriate housing, and to acquire/maintain landlord support, made the ‘work’ of providing HF harder and more time-consuming.

Implementing HF is an ongoing process, in which creative strategies are often necessary in response to changing circumstances (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013; Zerger *et al.*, 2014). HF agencies cannot exert influence over market dynamics, but can work to improve landlord recruitment and engagement, as was clearly evidenced in this research. Every HF program had developed staff positions dedicated to working with private landlords to secure housing. The significant commitment of agency time and resources reflected both general market dynamics, and the reluctance of some landlords to take on HF clients. It was a key strategy for enabling HF to continue to function in a challenging context.

This research was conducted in a policy environment characterized by robust and progressive commitments to ending homelessness across all levels of government. This has translated into widespread support for HF programs, but corresponding plans to increase the supply of affordable housing have not been realized. In addition, social assistance rates remain very low, and continue to be eroded by inflation, greatly impeding the ability of recipients to secure rental housing. Moreover, affordability declined markedly during a period of strong economic growth that prevailed until mid-2015. While this “boom” subsequently turned to “bust”, such cycles are a recurring feature of Alberta’s resource-dependent economy. Another marked upswing, with associated pressure on the housing market, would be consistent with recent history (Evans, 2015). As such, HF programs in Alberta operate in an environment in which they are likely to encounter significant shortages of affordable housing on a cyclical basis. In this context, long-term adherence to HF principles is difficult, and further innovation may be necessary to realize the central goal of securing permanent housing for the homeless. For example, although use of scattered-site, independent housing is key to the PHF model, greater acceptance of other housing options – including HF-program owned sites, congregate living arrangements, and living with roommates – may be necessary. Congregate housing models can offer greater on-site support and programming, and stronger connections with peers, which can be beneficial to client outcomes (Somers *et al.*, 2017).

## 7. Conclusion

This study was conducted in two cities experiencing profound shortages of affordable housing – a context that will not exist in every environment where HF programs

operate. However, such shortages are by no means unique to Alberta and are likely to complicate the implementation of HF programs elsewhere. Most HF programs rely on market apartments, leaving them vulnerable to rising rents and falling vacancy rates, particularly in cities with a residual social housing sector and few permanent supportive housing options – a common scenario across Canada (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013). Over time, these programs need to identify ways to adapt to or overcome the associated challenges. This research identified several such adaptations, including the creation of landlord-oriented staff positions, and the selective prioritization of rapid housing over client choice. Tension between immediate access to housing and client choice has also been reported in Toronto (Zerger *et al.*, 2014). In that case, the latter principle tended to be prioritized over the former. Further research is required to explore the range of responses developed in other contexts, both within and beyond Canada. These studies should be attentive to the role of private landlords – key actors in shaping access to the rental market, who remain under-examined in HF research.

While adaptation is a necessary part of HF implementation, it can also raise concerns about further drift away from the PHF model on which most evidence of effectiveness is based. While HF has proven to be a highly malleable approach to addressing the problem of chronic homelessness (Baker & Evans, 2016), there are surely important questions to be asked: How are different principles to be weighted when contextual factors bring them into conflict? When does adaptation erode the distinction between HF and non-HF approaches? At this point, the standard set forth by Tsemberis (2012) – namely, that modifications to HF are permissible when undertaken for client-centred motives – becomes an important analytical position. In our research, most programs maintained a strong client focus in their tenacious efforts to secure housing. However, in a minority of instances, programs appeared to focus more on utilizing their own apartments than on client needs *per se*.

Hennigan (2017) has recently emphasized the role of the housing market in “disciplining” HF clients – in that it mandates certain social and economic behaviours. Here we see that HF providers are also disciplined, going to considerable lengths to find and retain housing. At times when the rental market is relatively inaccessible, programs may be required to deal with slumlords, to accept housing in bad neighbourhoods, and to adopt a general attitude of ‘take whatever you can get.’ These adaptations are likely to limit programs’ potential to promote positive community integration, a key HF goal. If HF is to remain a “principled” approach to addressing homelessness (see Gaetz *et al.*, 2013; Goering *et al.*, 2014), it is necessary not only to examine the adaptations of HF programs, but also to problematize the contexts in which they operate. Doing so will draw attention to the necessity of increasing both the supply of affordable housing (particularly in non-market forms, which can be insulated from rent increases) and social assistance levels (so as to give more purchasing power to the poorest members of society). Without significant progress in both of these areas, the reliance of HF programs on market apartments needs to be questioned, as the promise of ending homelessness is unachievable when high rents and low supply put those apartments out of reach.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) [grant number 430 2016 00062].

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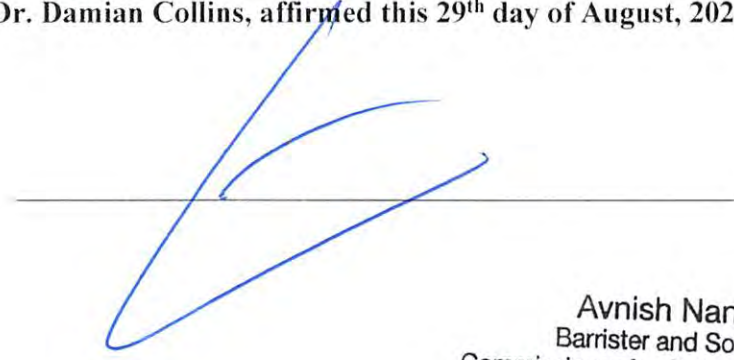
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This is Exhibit "17" referred to in the Affidavit of  
Dr. Damian Collins, affirmed this 29<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'Avnish Nanda'.

Avnish Nanda  
Barrister and Solicitor  
Commissioner for Oaths/Notary Public  
in and for the Province of Alberta



January 2023

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

PREPARED FOR  
CITY OF EDMONTON ENCAMPMENT RESPONSE TEAM

PREPARED BY  
MAPS ALBERTA CAPITAL REGION

The Complex Needs Banning Research Team acknowledges we are situated on land known as Amiskwaciwâskahikan on Turtle Island which is colonially referred to as Treaty 6 territory or Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. This is land occupied, travelled, and cared for by Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial to the present day.

We recognize this is a collective place many share as home. We honour and acknowledge that the inclusion for all who struggle with homelessness and complex needs is an act of reconciliation. We acknowledge these things as a reminder that we are all Treaty People bound to one another by the spirit and intent of treaty.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Edmontonians who experience marginalization because of unstable housing are negatively impacted when they are banned or barred from public spaces and more specifically spaces that provide services. These impacts are exacerbated for those who have complex needs and/or are staying outside.

This research project was a collaboration between the City of Edmonton's Encampment Response Team (ERT) and The Complex Needs Committee, a subset of the Sector Emergency Response Services. This project was funded by the City of Edmonton, Homeward Trust, and REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities, and carried out by Mapping and Planning Supports Alberta Capital Region (M.A.P.S.).

Two distinct reports arose out of this research: *Left Outside: The Experience of Being Banned in Edmonton* (n=118), and *Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton* (n=86: a subset of the 118 listed above). Data was also collected from Human Service agencies staff, City of Edmonton staff involved in encampment response, and mutual aid group workers.

The purpose of this project was to hear directly from community participants with lived experience of being banned or staying outside in the previous 12 months.

- The research team included two research assistants who were known and respected in the community and who had lived experience with being banned and staying outside.
- Outreach workers and a Research Assistant recruited participants who stayed outside to ensure that those who did not access services from data collection sites, were invited to participate.
- Data was collected outdoors when banning was a barrier, and in some cases agencies waived bans for the data collection times.
- To learn from those who work with people staying outside data was collected from agency staff, outreach workers, mutual aid workers and City of Edmonton Staff who respond to encampments.
- Data was collected from June to August 2022.

### People are Diverse

While the majority of respondents were Indigenous (3 in 4), within the categories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous diversity in a number of areas was found.

- Overall males form the majority at 61% vs. 39% for females.
- 87% of females were Indigenous meaning that Indigenous females were far more likely to be homeless than their non-Indigenous counterparts.
- While only 1 in 10 had elementary school or no formal education, 3 in 10 completed high school, and 2 in 10 had completed post-secondary education.
- Few respondents were in attached relationships as 1 in 8 people. For this study attachment meant having someone close to you that could be relied upon for support and companionship.
- While 8 participants had stayed outside exclusively for the past 12 months, the majority had stayed in many different types of dwellings. While some moved in and out of institutions or family situations, other transitions between rentals and homelessness.
- While income for the large majority of participants was unstable, some had steadier sources of income such as CPP, OAS, and AISH.

## **Impacts of Being Banned are Greater if you are Staying Outside**

- Staying outside meant living a public life. Carrying out private tasks in public spaces increased one's chances of being banned.
- Participants were more likely, than their housed counterparts, to be banned from spaces used by the general public, such as stores and malls.
- Participants were significantly more likely than their housed counterparts to be banned for reasons of trespassing, fighting, or sleeping, where the rates of being banned for these offences were at least 20% higher.
- Participants who stayed outside were also at least twice as likely to experience a range of negative impacts in many areas of their lives. The most prevalent negative impact was accessing personal care.
- Participants recognized how they were seen and judged in public places and worked at staying clean and tidy so that they could change their lives around, however, given their lack of access to facilities, this process was difficult.

## **Forcibly Moving People Reduces Opportunity and Dignity**

While moving encampments happens in the interests of public safety, the reality is that if people have nowhere to go, difficult situation and challenged lives continue in a new location. These moves make the lives of encampment residents even more difficult. When people are moved:

- They are often forced to leave possessions behind due to challenges with carrying items. For the safety of the staff cleaning up encampments, items left behind are considered hazardous and must be disposed of.
- They may no longer be in proximity to services they commonly use.
- They may become separated from their community.
- Outreach workers have greater difficulty finding their clients in their new location, often resulting in considerable delays, or missed opportunities for health and housing services.
- Moving difficulties are exacerbated when one has mobility, health, or substance use issues.

## **Motivations and Choices are Diverse**

The majority of participants did not see staying outside as a preference, but as a better option than staying in a shelter.

- Many reasons for choosing to stay outside rather than in shelters were offered, the top three reasons, at 50%+, were not feeling safe in shelters, shelters being over-crowded, and the lack of privacy at shelters.
- Reasons for not feeling safe in shelters included being near others with PTSD or addiction issues and being in a loud environment where one is afraid to fall asleep.
- Although only a small proportion of participants reported being in attached relationships, those who were, stated that they preferred to stay outside to be together.
- For male participants choosing spaces outdoors that were in proximity to services, such as food, was important. For others it was most important to be away from crowds in out of the way places as in the river valley or parkland.

- Female participants were more likely to report personal safety as the driving force in choosing a location to stay. While some said that being with a partner afforded them protection, others talked about choosing open locations such as under a bridge, to allow more than one escape route.
- Regardless of gender, many stated that it was safer to stay on the southside of the river where the homeless population was not as concentrated and there was less gang activity, even though there were fewer available services.

### Health Issues and Supports

- Participants experienced an average of just over 4 out of 6 areas of health challenge.
- The majority of participants experienced health challenges (Trauma – 76%; Addiction/Substance Use – 74%; Medical illness or condition – 70%; Mental health – 62%; Physical disability – 57%)
- Given the difficulties that people who live outside experience, their challenges of daily survival were exacerbated by health conditions and lack of treatment.
- Health care access was not commensurate with health needs, with those who stayed outside being far less likely to receive care than their housed counterparts.
- Only a minority of participants received treatment for their health problems and only 10% received treatment for the most prevalent problem of trauma.

### Mutual Respect and Relationships

Relationships built on mutual respect were key to successfully offering and receiving services. When one could see value in the other, understanding and empathy was fostered for community participants and those who helped them. This attitude was echoed by a large majority of participants.

- 3 in 4 community participants had contact with Outreach Staff, rating these contacts most highly at between *somewhat positive* and *very positive*.
- Rated second most positive, contact with Health Care Staff rated the quality of contact between *neutral* and *somewhat positive*, although only 33% of respondents had any contact with Health Care workers.
- Community participants recognized that they must work for positive interactions and respect those they come into contact with, however, they cited difficulties when they are desperate for service, using alcohol or substances, having mental health problems, or feeling that they are not respected.
- Those who provide supports indicated that the majority of the homeless don't cause trouble and would be relatively easy to house and support if appropriate space were available.

While housing for all Edmontonians is the answer to ending homelessness, the complexity of attaining this goal successfully means strong financial and human commitment. While working to this goal, it is imperative that those who are homeless are afforded fulfillment of their basic needs within a structure of dignity and respect. Suggested avenues to move forward include places and spaces for safe encampments, utilization of Indigenous knowledge, planning and service delivery, and working together for better communication and understanding.



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# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## INTRODUCTION

This report is one of two reports coming out of the Complex Needs Banning Research (CNBR) project, one focusing on banning and the other focusing on people who stayed outside in the prior 12 months and were also banned<sup>1</sup>.

CTV News reported in April 2022 that the number of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton had doubled since before the pandemic in 2020 (CTV News, April 5 2022). In the same news article St. Amand of the Bissell Centre described encampments as *a byproduct of the inability of systems to provide the appropriate support to folks*.

In October 2022, The Alberta government announced 187M over a two-year plan to address addiction and homelessness which included 5M to be spent in Edmonton to create up to 450 more shelter spaces for a total of 1,072 beds city-wide (CTV News, October 1, 2022). As of late November 2022 Homeward Trust identified 2,706 people experiencing homelessness (<https://homewardtrust.ca/data-analytics-reporting>).

While this funding is necessary and helpful to support shelters and addiction treatment, only a minority of the funding is available for low-income housing units and/or operational budgets. Although there is a clear understanding that the standard for success is housing that is integrated with recovery-oriented supports, the current funding announced falls short. The Report of the Coordinated Community Response to Homelessness Task Force points to additional factors

*Housing options remain limited, with glaring gaps when it comes to options suitable for clients with complex conditions. Options that used to be available have, over time, been dismantled or converted in response to Alberta's evolving economy. (Task Force, 2022, p6)*

*Over time, options that used to be available, such as single-room occupancy units, have disappeared or been converted. The resulting narrower continuum of options is undermining the effectiveness of community responses. (Task Force, 2022, p11)*

## The Complex Needs Committee

The Complex Needs Committee is a subset of Sector Emergency Response agencies in Edmonton. It consists of a group of service providers who meet regularly to discuss trends and identify gaps and potential solutions to issues arising within their sector. Following earlier work in Edmonton that explored the Banning of Youth (OSCMAP, 2017) they were interested in learning about banning practices and their effect on adults in the community; particularly the effect banning has on people with complex needs. From these interests the research project was born. Funding was provided by the City of Edmonton, Homeward Trust, and REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities (REACH).

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<sup>1</sup> Left Outside: The Experience of Being Banned in Edmonton

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

As background to the research project, it was imperative to clearly define this groups' understanding of those with complex needs. They drew on the definition as outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. *People with complex needs include a diverse population that experience multiple barriers to accessing services, fulfilling their basic needs, or otherwise enjoying the basic human rights.* Every person accessing a service will have multiple needs, but it's the interaction of these multiple needs that leads to complexity. Issues people with complex needs may be dealing with are homelessness, substance use, mental health concerns, and physical health issues (such as mobility issues), as well as involvement with justice, racism, disabilities, trauma, and loss, among others.

## Research Approach

This community-based research project recognized the strengths and perspectives of all members involved in the research. Community service providers and service users informed the process, vetted, and made meaning of the results. The intent was to facilitate understanding and change.

## Guiding Principles

Collectively, the community partners and researchers defined the following guiding principles as the framework for the project:

- Work with an Indigenous Elder and/or Wisdom Holder to integrate Indigenous practice as required in the community and to center our research team.
- Honour the truth of research participants.
- Work with partners to nurture working relationships and emphasize ethical practice in the community.
- Use the 7 Grandfather teachings of the Anishanaabe: Love, Respect, Wisdom, Courage, Honesty, Humility, and Truth as a guide for all activities.
- Work with agencies to appropriately engage with community members.
- Be sensitive to the demands placed on agencies and research participants. This included informing ourselves of other data collection projects to be careful to not over engage the same people participating in other projects.
- Hire research staff who have lived experience and a strong knowledge and awareness of the community.

## Setting and Background

Community-based research is subject to change, refocus, redesign, and differential perspectives and understanding. Researchers must be comfortable with ambiguity and change throughout the process and must be able to move outside the realm of expert to stand beside, and be guided and challenged by all involved.

Community involvement is imperative throughout the entire research project. Agency staff brought understanding through many lenses of inquiry, and through their subsequent perceptions and directions. Life experiences shaped the framework for the inquiry from which the project emerged.

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Who was involved?

### The Research Team

The role of the research team was to carry out the work guided by the advice, knowledge, and expertise of the community partner agencies. Deborah Morrison has well-established relationships of trust with community members, service providers, and local government and has served as the Executive Director and Partnership Enhancement Facilitator for M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region for over 20 years. Since Deborah's retirement during this project, Matthew "Gus" Gusul has taken Deborah's former role. Gus comes to M.A.P.S. with community experience and is known to many of the agencies involved in the CNBR project. Marlene Mulder's experience in research and data analysis, along with her work in the community with the homeless and with refugee sponsorships and settlement, grounds her in the community. Colette Cornejo brings experience interfacing between project teams and their stakeholders grounded in a wide variety of projects ranging from community health evaluations in remote First Nations communities to province-wide stakeholder consultations for Alberta Health. Jennifer Vogl supported the research project through her extensive knowledge of the human services sector in Edmonton as well as by securing A pRoject Ethics Community Consensus Initiative (ARECCI)<sup>2</sup> approval for the research project. The researchers have all lived and worked in Edmonton for most of their careers.

When hiring Research Assistants we wanted the research team to comprise experience and education. The job ad for research assistants was shared with our community partners. Research Assistant were recruited based on their experience with data collection, working in the community, and/or lived experience. They brought a wealth of experience to the project in Indigenous ceremony, front line work in partner agencies, as well as daily interactions with individuals staying outside. Research Assistants were also selected for their ability and willingness to work as part of a team and align with the approach and tools designed for the data collection.

Given the casual hours of work and the desire to retain staff, it was most important to offer training and experience that was of value to the research staff beyond the immediate project. Training included smudging, Indigenous research protocols, building rapport in the community, interviewing skills, data collection, and data entry. At the training session, time was also scheduled to role play, learn from each other, and build community.

Four research assistants were hired and retained throughout the project. The first was an Indigenous Elder, community knowledge keeper and prayer camp volunteer. This individual described their role in the community as being *to provide emotional, mental and spiritual supports to all*. Another Indigenous RA was well known in the community as *Uncle*, the person who cared and checked in on people. This individual had work experience in shelters and doing data collection with street level populations as well as first-hand knowledge of the inner workings of running encampments, including camp sustainability. The third research assistant was a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Masters in Counselling student with work experience in Edmonton as both a street team worker and a shelter worker for one of the community partner agencies. The final research assistant was a 5<sup>th</sup> year University of Alberta student completing a combined degree program towards a Bachelor of Arts in Native Studies as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://albertainnovates.ca/programs/arecci/>

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Indigenous Partner

This project was greatly enhanced by the involvement of staff from NiGiNan Housing Ventures. They provided guidance and resources to ensure Indigenous content and protocols were included in a respectful and meaningful way throughout the project. They supported the development of the project methodology and data collection tools and offered suggestions and insight for working in the community. They also helped start off the data collection phase of the work in a good way by hosting a Traditional Nehiyawak Feast in their ceremony room at Ambrose Place.

## Community Partners

Representatives from community partner agencies, comprised largely of members of the Complex Need Group, sat on one of two tables for the purpose of this research project. The Project Support Group (PSG) where members helped define the purpose, the potential actions and desired learnings from the research, provided the funding, and proposed project goals and membership. PSG members were from Homeward Trust Edmonton, Hope Mission, The Mustard Seed, The City of Edmonton, REACH Edmonton Council for Safer Communities, NiGiNan Housing Ventures, and the M.A.P.S. Research Team.

The Project Development Group (PDG) comprised people who were engaged with or had direct experience serving people with complex needs. The PDG was responsible for vetting the methodology, ensuring that the goals and scope of research, as defined by the PSG, shaped the question themes, and vetting data collection tools. Some members of this group hosted data collection events and recruited individuals to participate in the research. PDG members were from Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Homeward Trust Edmonton, Hope Mission, Jasper Place Wellness Centre, NiGiNan Housing Ventures, REACH Edmonton Council for Safer Communities, The Mustard Seed, and the M.A.P.S. Research Team.

## City of Edmonton Encampment Response Team

Early in the project, the research team was approached by City employees on the Encampment Response Team (ERT) with a proposed collaboration. The ERT was working on responding to a recommendation outlined in the 2021 Encampments Response Evaluation Report that *encampment occupants be engaged to help inform the encampment response* and had identified an overlap in the population who are impacted by banning and those who are likely to interact with the encampment ecosystem (Edmonton, 2021). The ERT was also interested in collaborating with MAPS because of their multi-dimensional approach to collaborative planning, which includes community mapping and the development of journey maps.

Out of a shared desire to not overburden this population, the two teams set out to define how questions related to encampment could be integrated into the data collection tools being developed for the research project. As part of the collaboration, MAPS committed to provide analysis and a separate report based on questions specific to the encampment experience to the ERT. The City of Edmonton provided additional funding to enable this work.

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## METHODOLOGY

Data collection methods and tools needed to be flexible to meet the needs and situations of community members and supporting organizations, but consistent to ensure that data could be compared and contrasted.

Data collection sites and locations were chosen depending on agency and research participants needs and situations. The majority of data collection was done at partner agencies. To address the challenge of finding individuals that do not engage with the shelter system one data collection event was held at a neutral venue that was neither a human services agency nor a shelter.

This event was meant primarily for individuals that stay in encampments near Whyte Avenue. The idea for the event and a large portion of the recruitment leading up to it are credited to the insight and efforts of one of the research assistants with lived experience of banning and homelessness. He walked areas where those who stay outside had tents or shelters to invite them to participate in the research. Outreach staff from partner agencies and from the host site also spent time in the days leading up to data collection promoting the event in their daily interactions with individuals who may not access services at agencies.

Research staff worked with partner agencies that offered to host data collection events at their sites. Prior to the event research staff visited each host site to collectively decide how to best use the physical space available and to help the community partners understand the approach and format that the research team would be using the day of the data collection. Agencies were also asked for advice about what type of food and gift cards would be appropriate for individuals at their site. These visits provided a good opportunity for research staff to address questions, and to reinforce with agencies the research teams' commitment to accommodate host and participant needs and interests. Sites were also provided with posters to advertise the upcoming data collection events. In neighborhoods with multiple agencies, sites also cross-promoted each other's events.

## Research schedule

A research schedule was developed with the goal of interviewing 100 individuals that had experience with being banned.

- October 2021 – May 2022: Seeking funding, meetings with project support group, project development group, and COE Encampment Response group
- June 2022: Traditional Nehiyawak Feast hosted by NiGiNan Housing Ventures
- June 2022: Ethics approval – A pRoject Ethics Community Consensus Initiative (ARECCI)
- June 6 – August 18, 2022: Data collection
- August – September 2022: Development of project maps
- August – October: Data analysis and report writing
- November 2022: Target for completion of Final report and dissemination of data products.



# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Data Collection

The study comprised two data collection components. Community participants completed a 9-page survey through a one-on-one in-person interview led by a research team member. This method allowed each participant to have designated time with someone who was there just for them. Following the completion of their survey, individuals were invited to a focus group discussion.

### On-site Practices

- Three hours were typically scheduled for data collection and all data collection was done during the day on a weekday. At the suggestion of several host sites, data collection was often done in the morning; when individuals would be more likely to participate. To be respectful of each collaborating agency's needs and nature, the data collection format as outlined below served as a guideline and could be modified as required. Research staff worked with agency staff on site who provided support by setting aside the space for data collection and by recruiting participants.
- Research staff arrived on-site 30 minutes prior to data collection to set up the physical space and be fully available and attentive to community members when they arrived.
- The lead researcher was present at every data collection and led all focus group discussions.
- A refreshment station was set up with tea and coffee for use throughout the data collection event.
- The Elder from the research team offered spiritual care as requested.
- The format and purpose of the research were explained by the research staff and participants were able to ask questions and voice concerns.
- Participants completed their survey through one-on-one interview with a member of the research team.
- Demographic information was collected so that we would be able to understand who is or has experienced banning and so that data could later be analyzed through different lenses.
- At the beginning of the survey, a qualifying question was asked to screen for experience of banning.
- Research staff took notes on observations and reflections at focus group discussions.
- Focus group sessions were audio recorded and subsequently used to ensure the staff notes were accurate.
- Research staff cleaned and organized the space to leave it in the same condition as found on arrival.
- Research team debriefed following each data collection.
- All materials needed for data collection, from hard copies of the survey to disinfectant wipes to sanitize areas used to serve food, were carried to and from each data collection. This was done to minimize the burden on hosting agencies.

### Participant Recruitment and Inclusion

For the purpose of this work, we were looking for individuals who had experienced being banned in the past 12 months. Participants were screened based on having had experienced being banned. This determination was self-defined. Individuals with these experiences are referred to in this report as *community participants*. Within this group those who had also stayed outside within the past 12 months were asked additional questions.

## Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

It was effective to depend on the research assistants with lived experience to talk to people, ask the screening questions, and invite them to participate. Because they had lived experience their invitations were authentic and legitimate:

*We need your voice.*

*During this process for two hours, you're helping us.*

*You'll actually have a thumbprint in change, if that matters to you.*

Some individuals were not able to participate because they were banned from the agencies where data collection was taking place, so the team moved their work outside on several occasions.

In the event that a community member was unable to stay long enough to complete both a survey and a focus group, the focus group questions were integrated into the surveys for that person. A major reason for not being able to stay inside the data collection site was concern for personal belongings that were left unattended outside. For these reasons, accommodation was required.

### Compensation and Appreciation

- Community participants were given a \$25 gift card to thank them for their time. Choice was offered between a dollar store, a grocery store or a fast-food restaurant to accommodate participant needs and preferences. To meet our funder requirements, community participants were asked to sign for these cards, however, if there was discomfort around divulging a name, pseudonyms were welcomed.
- At whatever point in time seemed best for the participant, they were offered a meal. Often individuals arrived hungry and eating first would make it easier to sit and concentrate on the questions they were being asked. The best food the budget would allow (\$25/person) was ordered and it was always gone by the time the event wrapped up.
- Community participants were also given tokens of appreciation up to a value of approx. \$5/person. Items such as smokes, bus tickets, bus ticket pouches, and rain ponchos were helpful for putting people at ease and offering a small amount of comfort to individuals.

### After Care Strategy

When organizing data collection events researchers requested that a staff member plan to be nearby during data collection in case a participant needed additional support during or after they participated in an interview or focus group. Community participants were offered a handout with the name of the staff on site that could be available to provide extra support for them if they felt they needed it in the hours and days following data collection. The handout also included the researchers' names and contact information with directions on how to access research findings.

### Community Focus Groups

Focus groups were held to gain the perspective of other groups in Edmonton that work with those experiencing banning and those who live in encampments.

Two focus groups were held for staff that work at human services agencies. The first for staff that work inside the facility, primarily as drop-in or shelter staff and the second for staff that work outreach; meeting people and supporting them wherever they meet them. An additional focus group was held with a mutual aid group that provides outreach support to the street level population in Edmonton. Finally, a focus group was held with City of Edmonton staff that are involved in the various areas of the City's response to encampments. The questions focused on encampments.

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Deliverables

### Sharing the Data

All research products will be broadly shared. Copies will be sent to the community partners and will also be available to download at no charge from the M.A.P.S. website at: <https://mapsab.ca/community-based-research/>

### Research Documents

- Two research reports:
  - Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton
  - Left Outside: The Experience of Being Banned in Edmonton
- Executive summary or project highlights
- Infographic for community participants
- Journey maps
  - Research findings
  - Everyday in the Life of Homeless Edmontonians<sup>3</sup>

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

To learn about experiences of staying outside, the following entities were included in the research:

- 86 community participants who had been banned and stayed outside within the past 12 months (a subset of the 118 who were interviewed regarding their banning experiences)
- 10 staff from Human Services agencies
- 6 City of Edmonton staff involved in encampment response
- 4 Mutual Aid group volunteers

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE HOMELESS

People who stayed outside in the prior 12 months comprised 73% of all community members in the Complex Needs Banning data collection. With the exception on the section including banning comparisons, this report refers to only the 86 persons who had lived stayed outside in the preceding 12 months. It is important to note that proportions and numbers are reported in many areas of this report. When using proportions, especially with low numbers it is prudent to note when a proportion is larger than the number it represents.

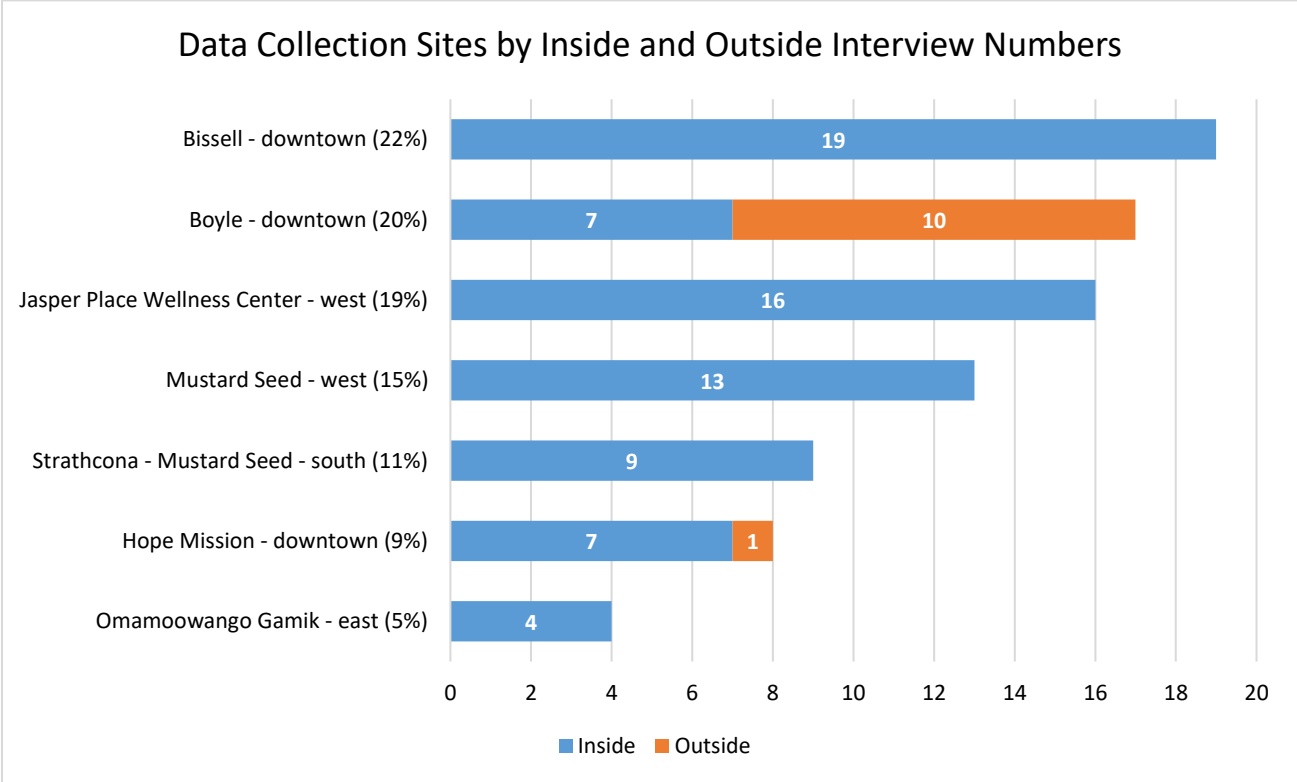
In order to reduce the likelihood that people had participated twice in the research the age and gender of all community participants were compared during the data analysis to ensure there were no duplicates. The same group of Research Assistants was used for every data collection event which provided the continuity required for staff to notice if an individual had tried to participate more than once in the study.

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<sup>3</sup> Jerry McFeeters, an Indigenous storyteller from Cold Lake First Nations Alberta who has first-hand experience living in encampments in Edmonton and supporting those staying outside as “Uncle Jerry” who supports the community.

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

Seven agencies hosted data collection events. Because some of the community members, who wanted to participate in this project, were banned from the buildings where data collection was held, data collection was moved outdoors as required. One of the agencies waived all bans for the data collection event. The following table shows the number of community members who participated at each agency, as well as the delineation of those interviewed outside of the buildings.



## Demographics

### Age, Gender & Origin

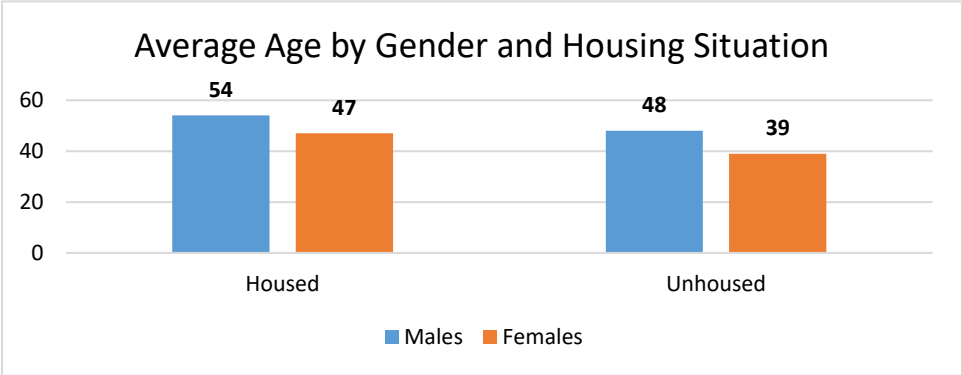
Three in four community members (64) identified as Indigenous. Indigenous participants came from 30 First Nations or communities. The Saddle Lake Cree Nation was most heavily represented with 8 respondents. The majority of Indigenous participants were First Nations – Treaty at 62%, followed by Métis at 25%, Non-status Treaty at 10%, and finally Inuit at 3%. While 2 in 3 Indigenous participants had personal experience at residential schools, day school, and/or the foster care system, almost all had relatives or friends with this experience.

Of the 86 community participants only three were born outside of Canada with the country of birth being reported as Africa, El Salvador, and Somalia. Four in five non-Indigenous participants identified as being racially ‘White’. A small minority reported being ‘Black’ (2), and ‘Latino’ (2).

Approximately 61% of participants identified as male, 37% identified as female, and two respondents identified as being non-binary. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the females staying outside were Indigenous compared to only 13% who were non-Indigenous.

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

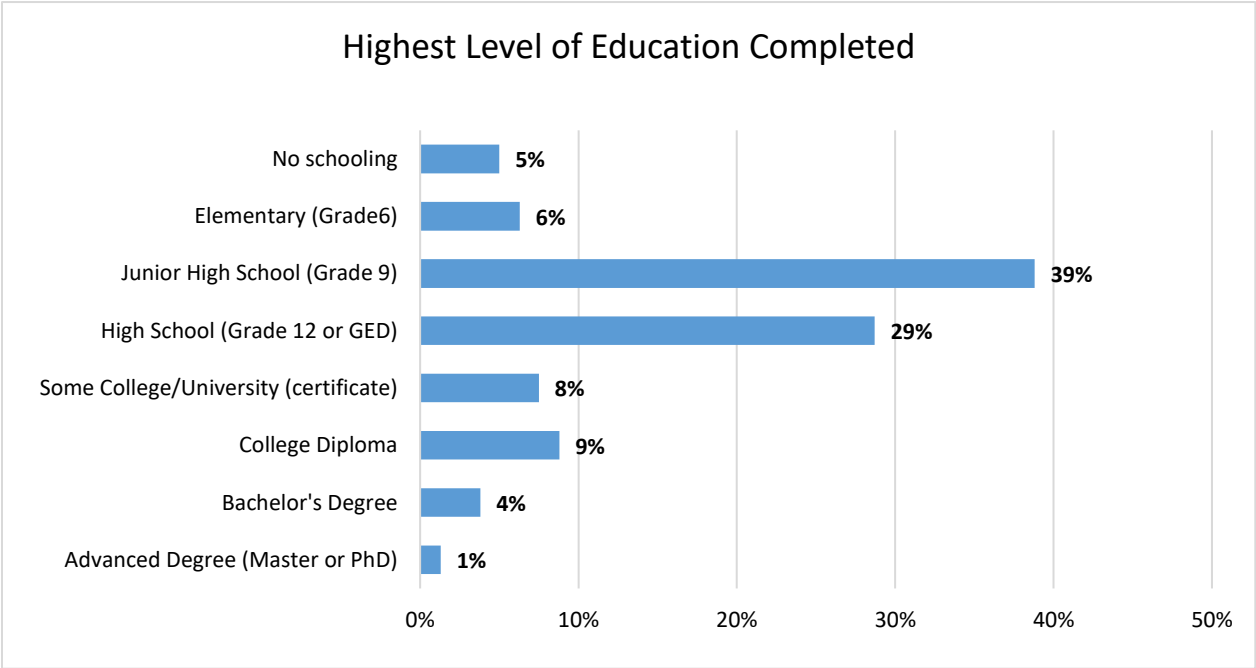
The average age for those who had stayed outside was 44 years with a range of 21 to 73 years old. Females who stayed outside were significantly younger than their male counterparts with an average age of 39 years as compared to the males whose average age was 48 years. A comparison also showed that those staying outside are significantly younger than those with housing regardless of gender.



Only one in ten participants reported being in an attached relationship (having a partner). Having an attached relationship can make a big difference in terms of safety. When asked to describe what it is like to live outside alone one participant responded, *Danger... people shooting up and fighting and stealing your stuff. You feel like you're in danger if you are by yourself.*

### Education

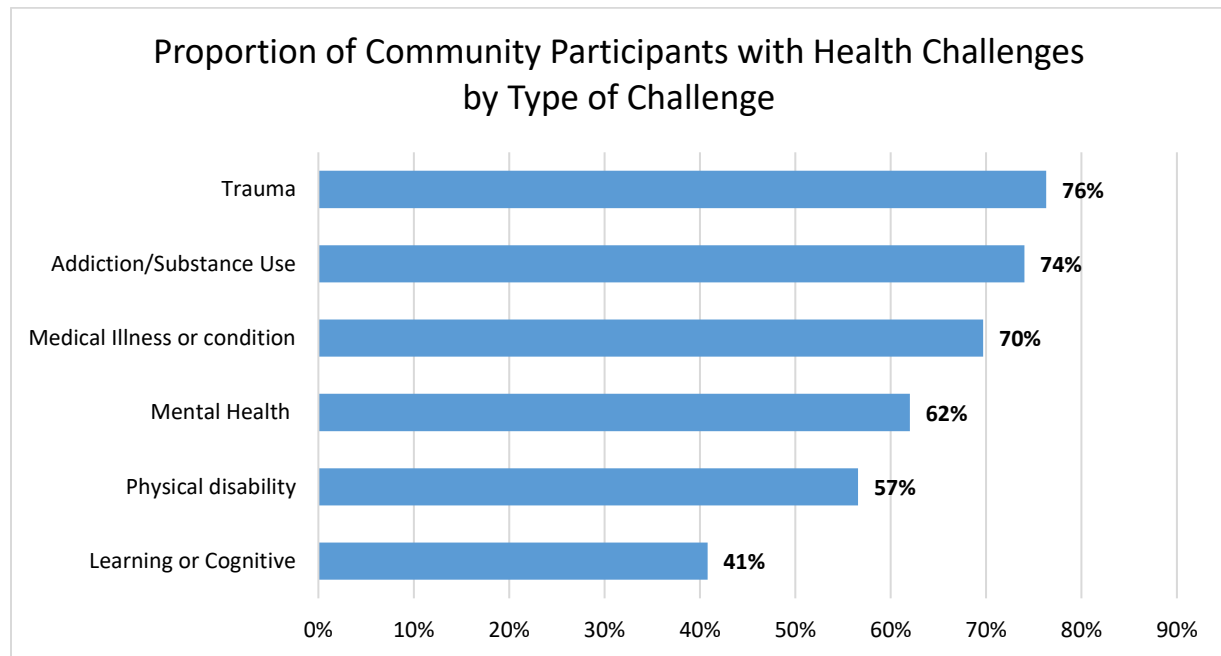
Fifty-one percent (51%) of participants who had stayed outside had completed at least high school or GED, however, their educational attainment is significantly less than those who are housed at 74%.



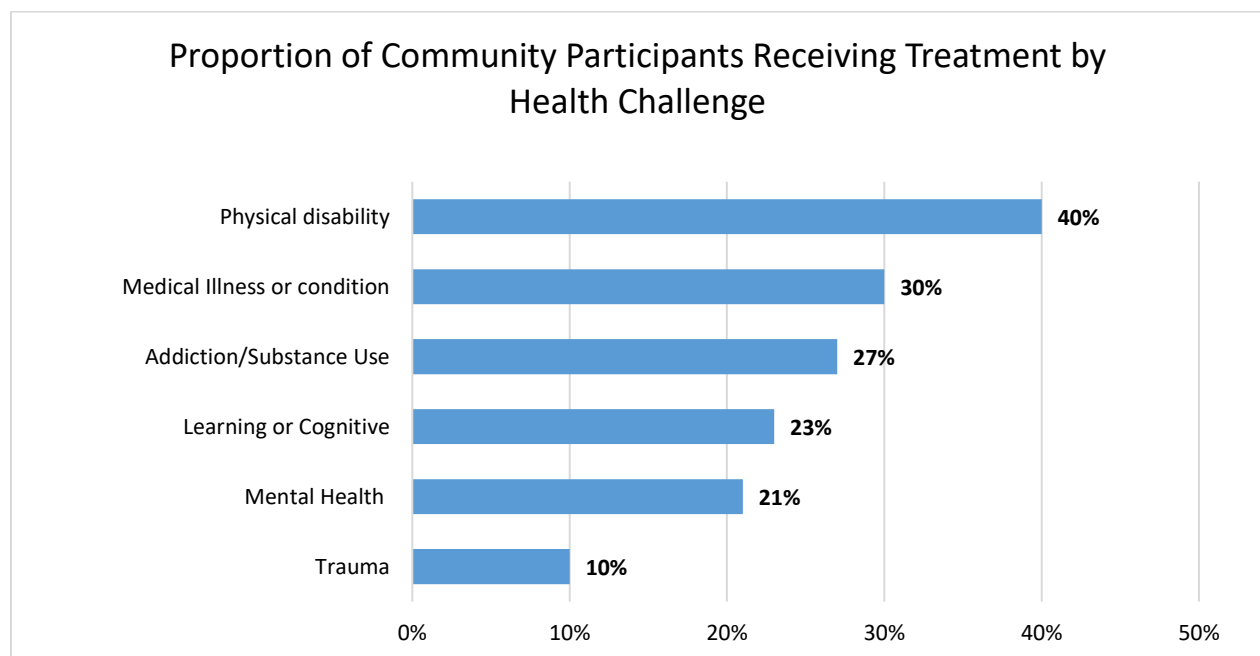
# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Health

Seventy-six (76) participants answered the survey questions related to their health. Regarding their self-assessment of health, 20% considered themselves to be 'very unhealthy', and 38% reported being 'somewhat unhealthy'. The following table shows the number of participants with health challenges, (orange bar) and the number who had received treatment or support in dealing with those challenges. Participants were also asked about which type of health challenges they face, and whether or not they had received any treatment or support. The proportions of those with health challenges was high, ranging from 41% with learning or cognitive challenges to 76% trauma challenges.

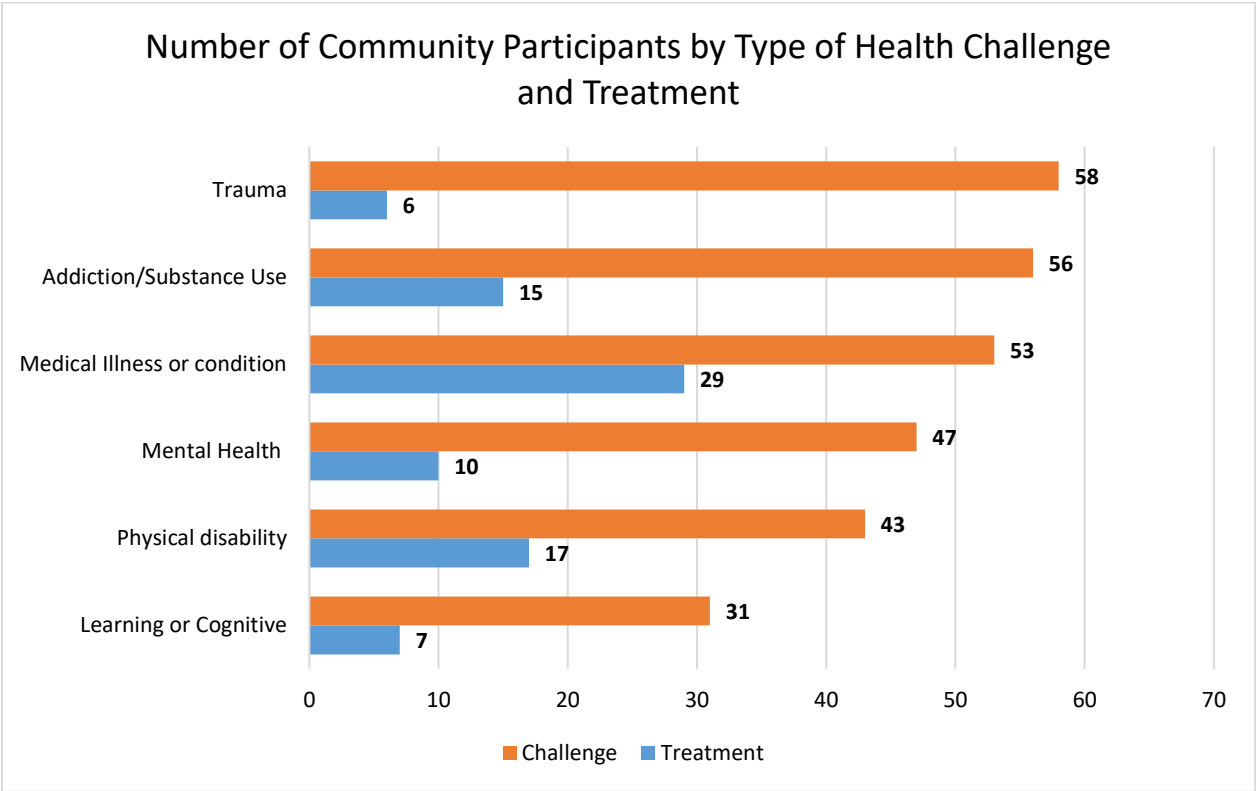


The following table shows the proportion of participants receiving treatment or support by specific health challenge. The highest support is 40% for physical disabilities and the lowest is for trauma at 10%.



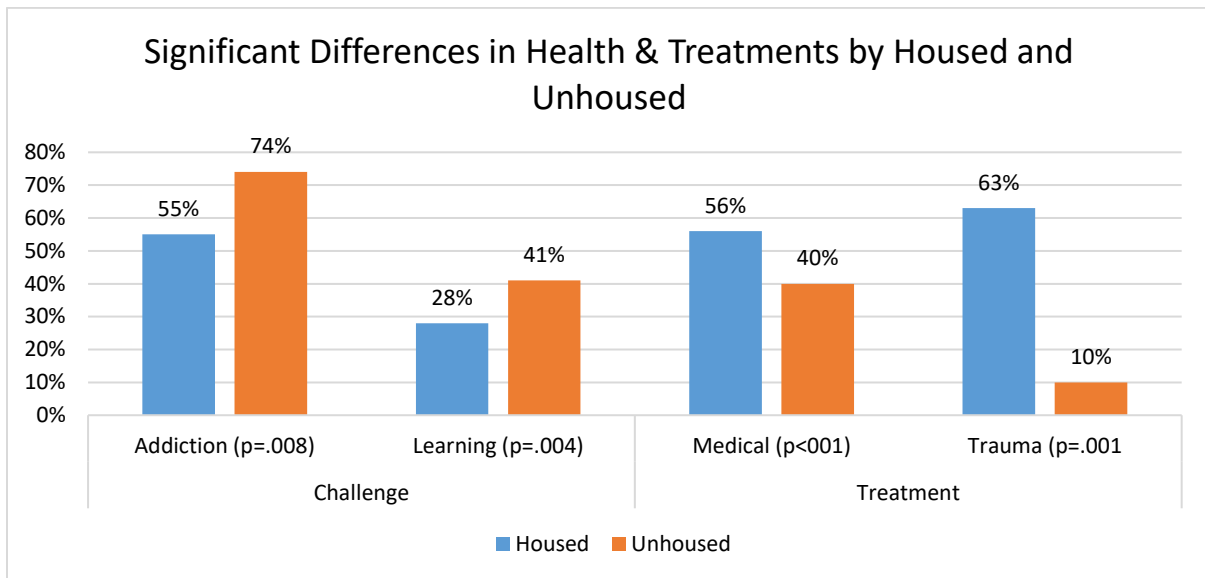
# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

The following table shows the same health data that is listed above in proportions but is presented in numbers.

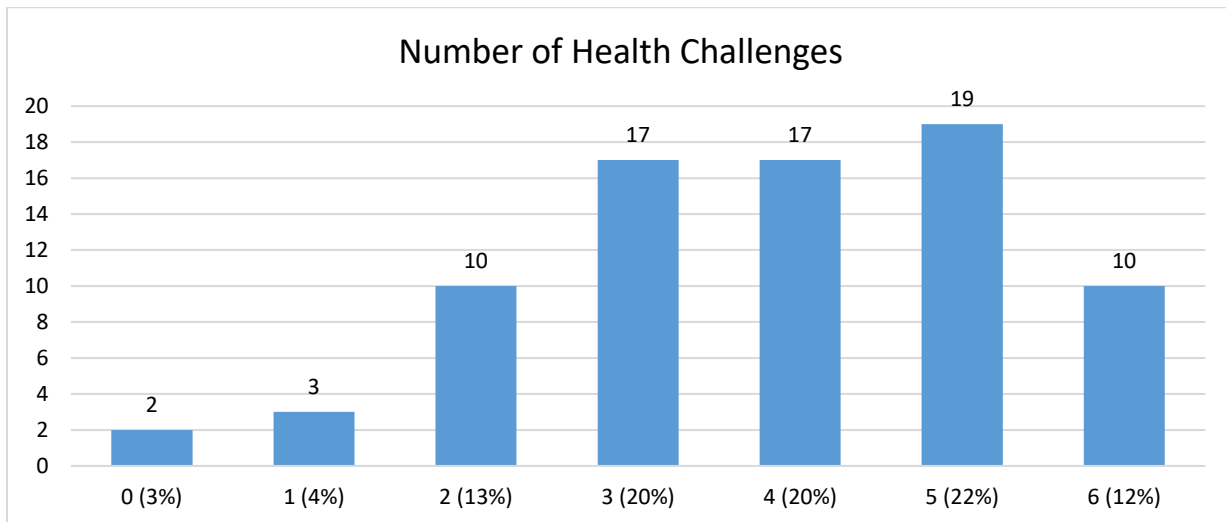


Significant differences between those who stay outside and those who are housed appear in four areas. Regarding health challenges participants who stay outside are more likely to experience addiction and or substance use at 74% compared with their housed counterparts at 55%. Those staying outside are also more likely to have learning or cognitive disabilities at 41% compared with 28% for the housed. Regarding treatment, significant differences are found in treatment for medical conditions or illness at 40% for those staying outside and 56% for the housed. Only 10% of participants who stay outside received treatment for trauma compared with 63% of those who are housed. Given the difficulties that people who live outside experience, there challenges of daily survival are exacerbated by health conditions and lack of treatment.

## Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton



Six health challenges were measured. Only two participants reported having no health challenges, with an average number of 4.04 health challenges. This average is significantly more than for those who are housed at 3.38.



Agency staff talked about how bans are related to mental health issues and how it is often not possible to access help when it is needed. They gave an example of having to wait 5 hours for an assessment for someone with a suicide plan.

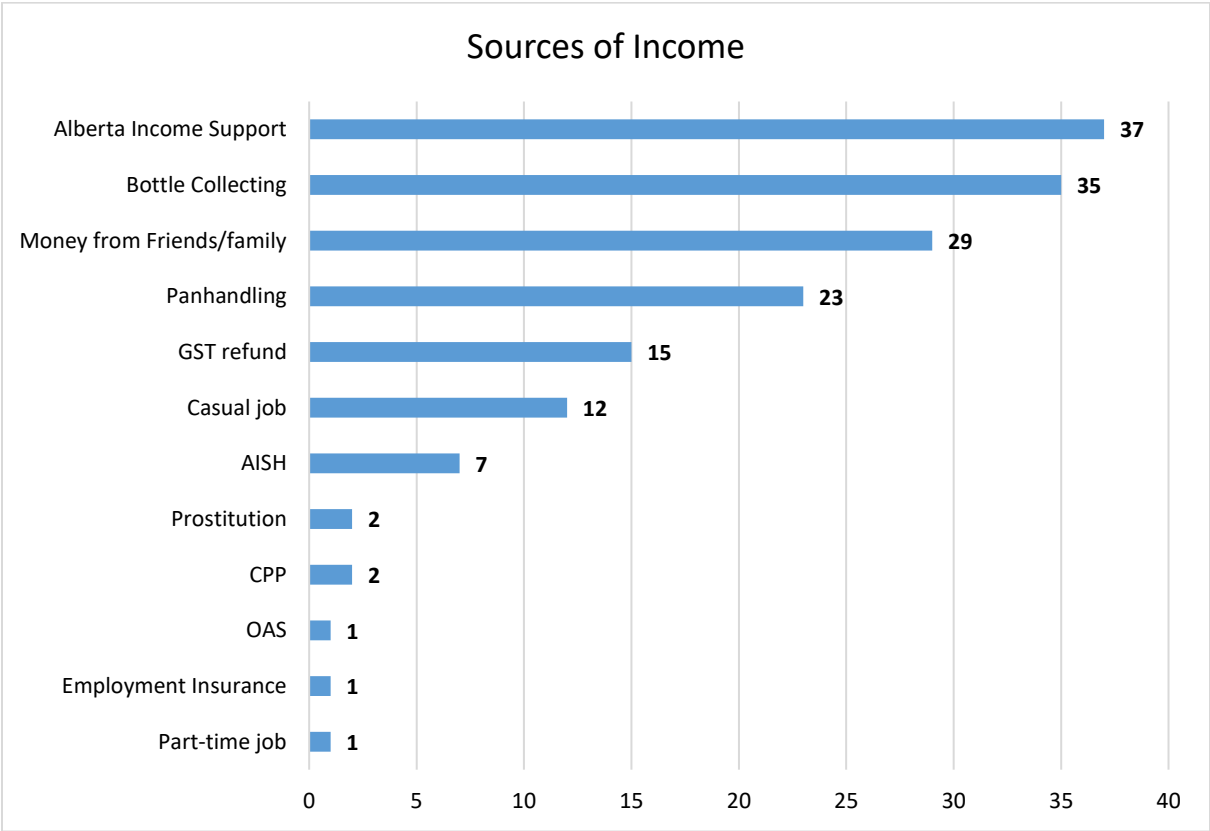
*Agency staff don't have the resources and hit many barriers when trying to connect clients to mental health resources in the community. It can be really hard when we want to do right by somebody when they don't have the ability to maintain their behaviour in a safe way for everybody else.*



# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Income

Participants were asked about their income from all sources. Their responses, presented below, show multiple sources, almost none of which are steady or sufficient to cover basic necessities.



## Staying Outside

Participants who had stayed outside in the prior 12 months were asked to provide more detail about all the places they had stayed overnight during that time. While many respondents used multiple types of accommodation, eight people stayed outside for the full 12 months. Of those Indigenous participants who reported gender, four were male and 3 were female. Their ages ranged from 23 to 54 years and none of them were in attached relationships. Six out of eight (75%) of these respondents did not stay in shelters because of the lack of privacy and not feeling safe at shelters.

On the other end of the spectrum, considering those who stayed the most places in the past 12 months, 15 people stayed at 5 or 6 places. In this group, 73% (n=11) were Indigenous, and slightly more than half were females (57%; n=8). Only one of the eight people who stayed outside for the whole year was in an attached relationship. The age range for this group was 30 to 55 years. The following list shows a breakdown of the places participants stayed in the past 12 months. Females who stayed outside were twice as likely to have lived in their own rented or owned space in the past 12 months (45% females vs. 22% males).

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Places Stayed– Past 12 Months

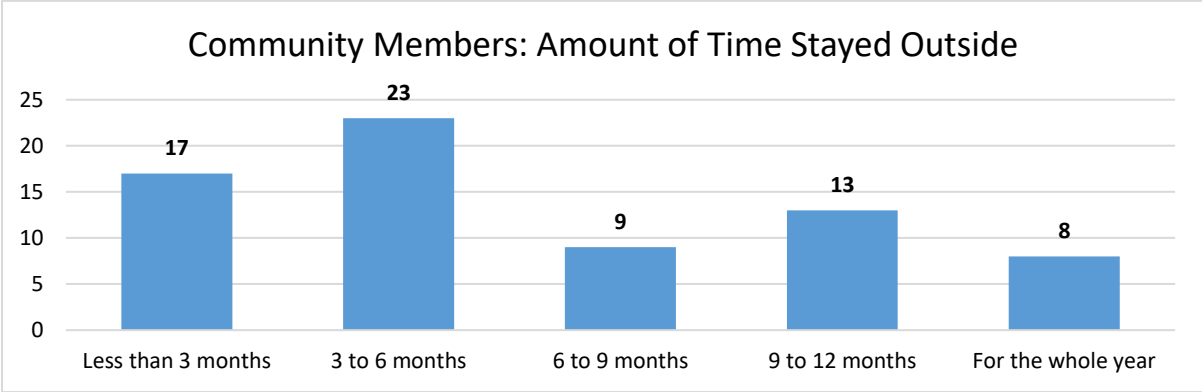
- 8 people stayed outside only for the past 12 months
- 17 people stayed in 2 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
  - 8 (outside, couch)
  - 6 (outside, shelter)
  - 1 (outside, PSH/Harm<sup>4</sup>)
  - 1 (outside, short term)
  - 1 (outside, rent)
- 28 people stayed in 3 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
  - 18 (outside, couch, shelter)
  - 4 (outside, shelter, rent)
  - 5 (outside, shelter, short term)
  - 1 (outside, couch, rent)
- 18 people stayed in 4 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
  - 7 (outside, couch, shelter, rent)
  - 3 (outside, couch, shelter, short term)
  - 4 (outside, couch, shelter, PSH/Harm)
  - 2 (outside, couch, short term/ rent)
  - 1 (outside, couch, PSH/Harm, rent)
  - 1 (outside, short term, rent, family)
- 12 people stayed in 5 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
  - 5 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, rent)
  - 3 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, PSH/Harm)
  - 1 (outside, couch, shelter, PSH/Harm/ rent)
  - 1 (outside, shelter, short term, PSH/Harm/rent)
  - 1 (outside, couch, shelter, PSH/Harm, hospital)
  - 1 (outside, couch, shelter short term, family)
- 3 people stayed in 6 types of dwellings in the past 12 months
  - 1 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, PSH/Harm, rent)
  - 01 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, PSH/Harm, jail)
  - 1 (outside, couch, shelter, short term, rent, hospital)

Participants were also asked about the portion of the past 12 months that they had stayed outside. The majority who offered a timeframe for staying outside (57%; n=40), had been outside for less than half of the year.

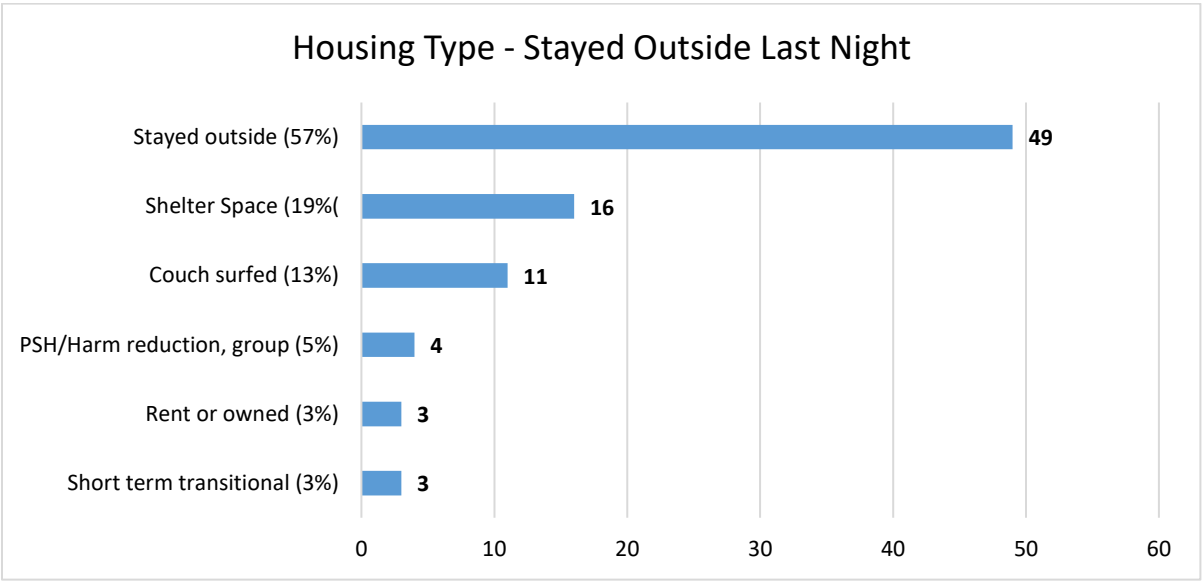
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<sup>4</sup> PSH/Harm: Permanent Supportive Housing or housing related to harm reduction programs

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton



Forty-nine (49) persons (57%) who stayed outside in the past 12 months also stayed outside the night preceding data collection.

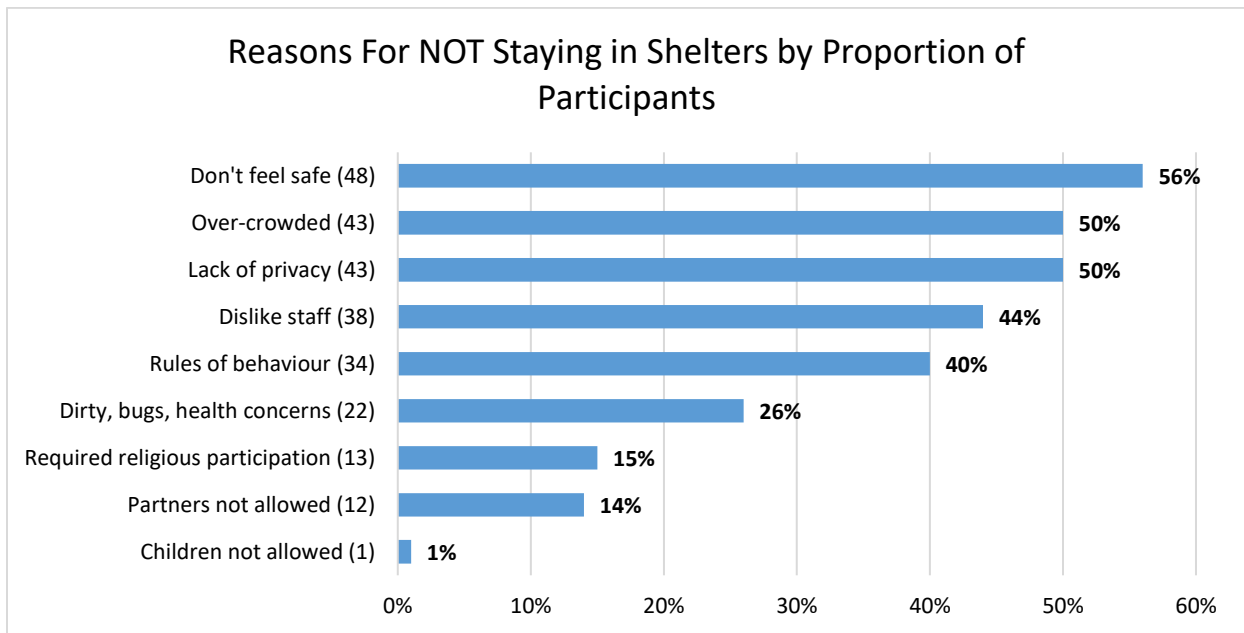


### Decisions about Staying in Shelters

In the survey, participants were asked whether staying outside was a choice. Two in three (67%) said that they did not prefer to stay outside. The remaining 33% preferred staying outside.

The principal reasons that participants do not stay in shelters is that they did not feel safe, and that shelters are overcrowded. Note that with the final two reasons shown on the table below, the low numbers reflect that very few participants had a partner or children with them. There were no significant differences in reasons for not staying in shelters by gender or Indigenous versus non-Indigenous participants. Females were more likely than males to say that the reason they did not stay in shelters was because they could not stay with their partners.

## Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton



Outreach and agency workers discussed their clients' experiences of trying to seek shelter space as a negative experience that makes some unhoused stay outside.

*They're sick of it so they just say 'forget it'. They're being robbed, people are screaming and yelling, the smells, the urine, the poop, and everything else that goes on in there. The bugs, the way they are spoken to by the staff, the other community members that are having mental health issues or psychosis. They don't get sleep in there. The mat program they had was terrible. The Humane Society is a lot more kind with the animals.*

*They are often treated badly (at shelters). Sometimes their things are 'lost' when stored at agencies. They are continuously told to move. They often don't get what they want or need.*

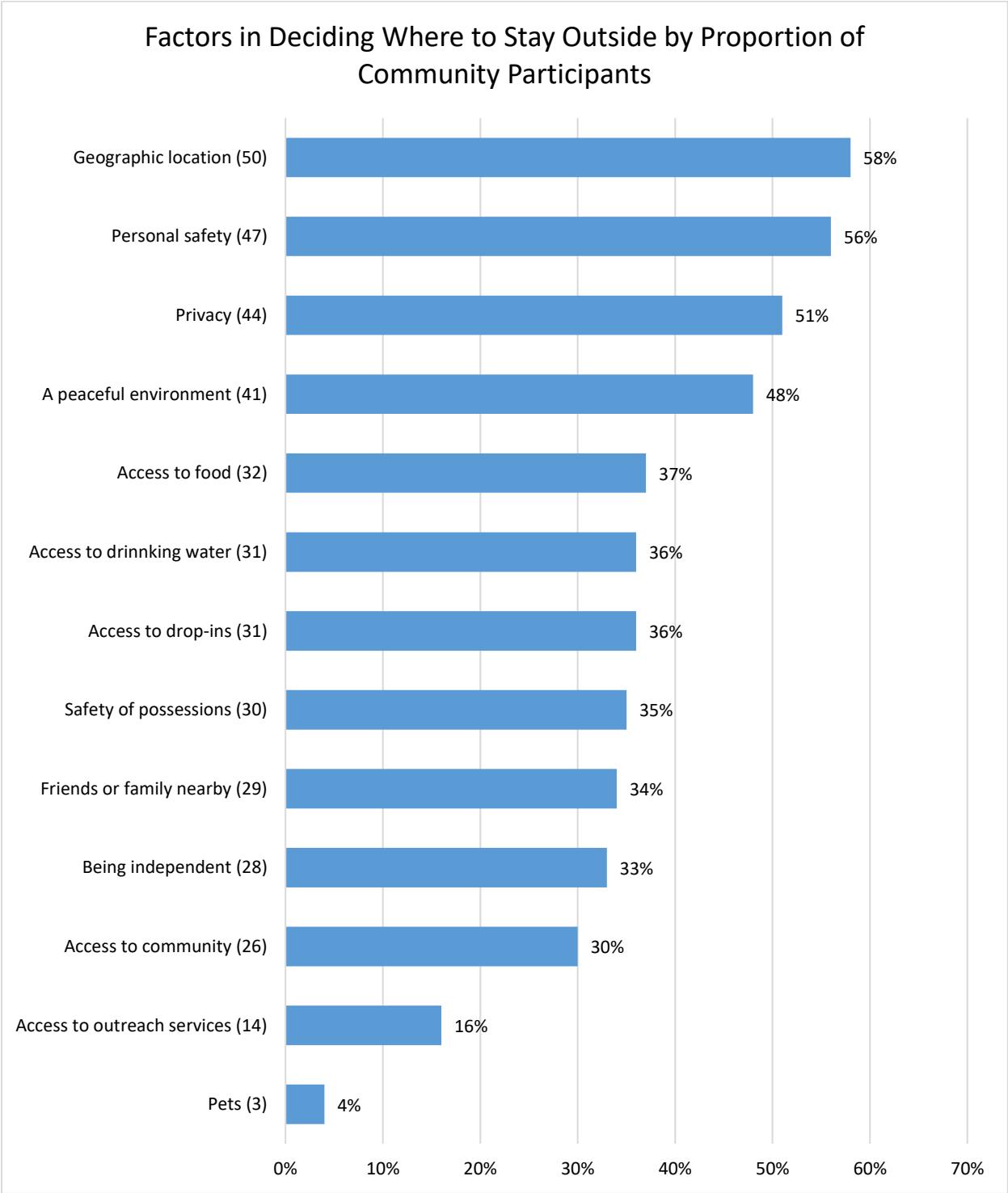
Community participants noted reasons that they do not feel safe in shelters: *I don't know who is around if I fall asleep; Outside line-ups are dangerous – Staff stays inside; Too much yelling and screaming.* Others cited their need for privacy: *My addiction and PTSD make it hard to stay; People weird me out at shelters. You are surrounded by people but outside you get your space.* Although friends or family nearby was not cited by many, this theme arose in conversations. Attachment goes beyond partners and spouses: *I want to stay with my family outside; I worry about my Mom and stay outside so I can be with her.*

### Choosing Outside Spaces

Community members were asked which factors they considered when deciding where to stay outside. The most common consideration cited by more than half of respondents, was geographic location. With no transportation, most must walk to access services, *(I) couldn't make it to the location and had no transportation.*

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

Significant differences related to gender were found in two areas. Males were more likely to cite being independent as a factor in their decision about where to stay outside at 41% compared with 16% for females. Males were also more likely to say that access to food was important at 45% compared with 19% for females. Regarding Indigenous or non-Indigenous status, Indigenous community members were significantly more likely to say that having a peaceful environment outside was a factor in their choice at 68% compared with 40% for non-Indigenous. There is more than 95% surety that the above-named differences are not due to chance.



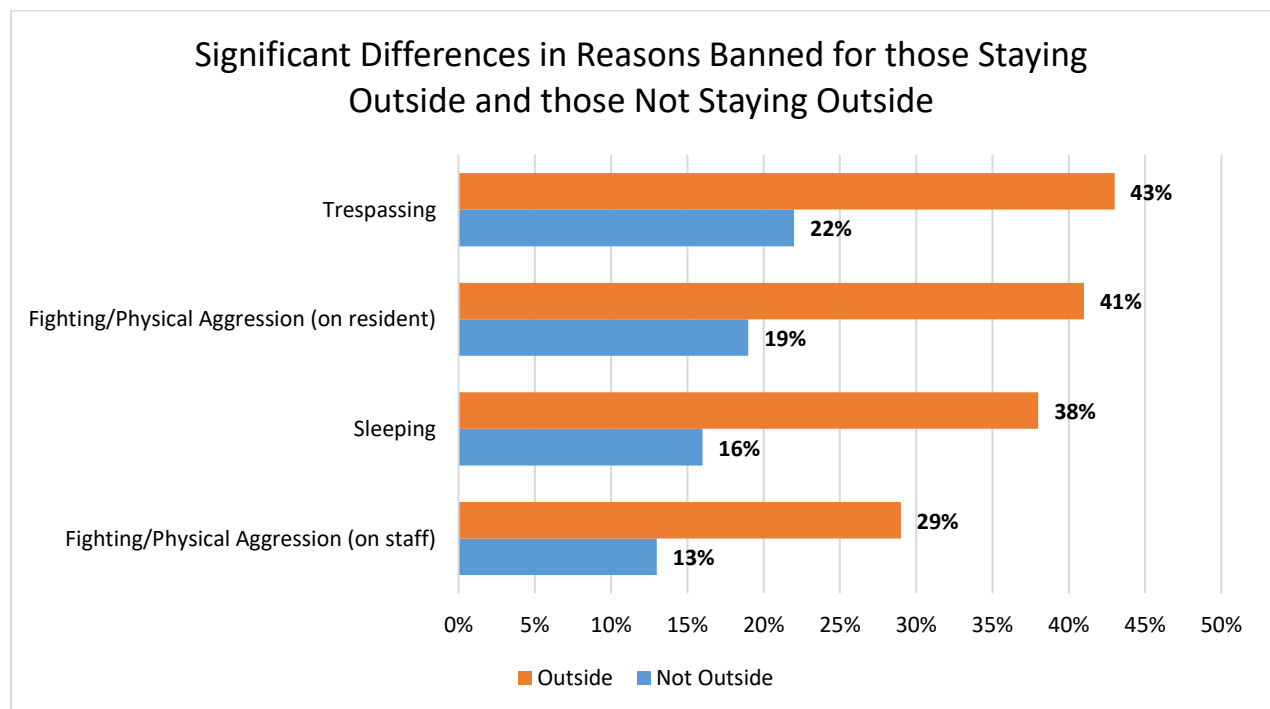
# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Banning: Significant Differences Between Those Who Stayed Outside and Those Who Did Not

An analysis was done to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the banning experiences of individuals who had lived outside in the past 12 months and those who had not. This section contains only the data and outcomes for the questions where such a difference was found. Significant differences are reported only where there is 95% or greater surety that these differences are not due to chance. The following table suggests that housing people would result in reduced banning.

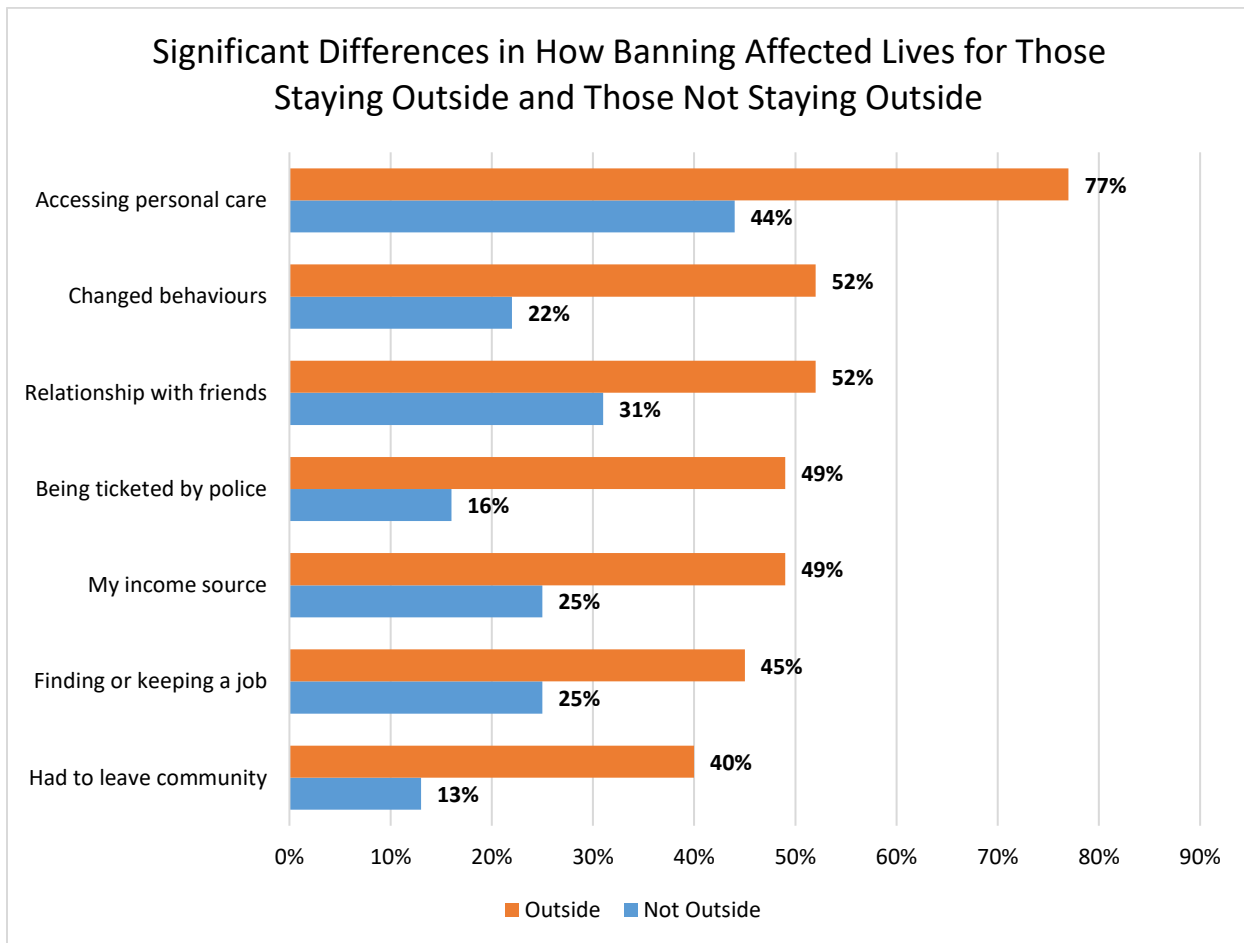
There were four reasons for which participants who had stayed outside in the past 12 months were significantly more likely to be banned than other participants. These reasons were trespassing, fighting/physical aggression against another community member, sleeping, and fighting/physical aggression against staff. There was also a significant difference in the number of places those who had stayed outside were banned from with a mean of 3.81 places for those staying outside and 2.80 for those not staying outside.

*They're being banned from all these facilities and resources but they're also being moved every day from their own land. They're banned from the grass so they've got to move, then they're banned from this and the next day they come along and they're banned from this place if they just put up their home. They're being banned from trying to just survive outside. Get up and move. And there's no heart involved when they're moving people.*



Participants were asked to consider which areas of their lives had been affected by banning. While all survey participants typically faced a range of negative effects from being banned, those who had stayed outside suffer significantly more than those who do not. These differences are statistically significant as the  $p < .05$ , meaning that we are at 95% sure that these differences are not due to chance. The following table shows the areas where these differences are the greatest.

## Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton



The proportion of participants banned from stores was significantly higher for those who live outside where a majority (53%) had been banned from stores in the past 12 months, compared with their counterparts who had not stayed outside at 31%. A contributing factor may be that those who stay outside do not have available places for self-care and hygiene or to wash their clothes. One participant talked about her efforts to look clean and tidy:

*People say “Why are homeless people SO clean, they live outside, how can that be?” I said “well we don’t want to look the part when we’re trying to change our lives around.”*

Outreach workers from both human service agencies as well as mutual aid groups talked about the effects of banning in the unhoused community.

*People are not able to look after themselves. People are literally begging for a place to stay. A man who was banned three years ago and went to jail and did his time, is still banned from the shelters. He says “I am going to die out here”.*

*Lifetime bans where people cannot get in anywhere and they are banned from everywhere. When you are adding all this mental health stuff in there and there is no solution being offered, there is no service, they are getting penalized for their behavioural issues. Where is the help for that? People are acting out for a reason.*

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Staying Outside is Not a Preference

Staying outside is difficult for community members because their struggle to meet their daily needs often takes all their time and energy leaving them unable to take steps to better their lives. Staying outside robs people of sleep, and prolonged periods of sleep further limit ones' capacity. Outside of the homeless community there may be the perception that staying outside is a choice, however, people choosing to stay outside do so because they see it as safer and a better option than staying in a shelter. In other words, while community participants want to be housed, they often would rather stay outside than go to a shelter.

Community participants were asked what could be done to make their lives better while staying outside. Many stated that they did not want to answer the question because an answer would mean that they would accept staying outside. The logical and humane solution is housing that works with the needed supports to stay housed but, given the limited number of housing opportunities, it is a reality that many people will be staying outside for some time to come.

Focus group discussions including an Outreach Worker brought attention to a very small number of individuals who are not ready to navigate the systems that would move them to housing.

*(There is) a community of military and RCMP veterans who will not come out of the River Valley. They are in the survival mode as real life is too much even with free mental health coverage.*

Many voiced their weariness with waiting and wanting to be housed but then not being able to gain housing or the supports to maintain housing. Community participants expressed feelings of hopelessness as they are moved with nowhere to go, only to be moved again in a matter of days.

*We are recyclable people.*

*Give us a place to go.*

*Offer a solution as to where to go so we are not shuffled around.*

Staff and outreach workers talked about how difficult staying outside is for community members.

*They hear the word 'no' every second person so after a while it's got to wear you out and like 'Somebody.. help me.... please! So, they get this frustration and it comes out in an unhealthy way. If someone would just take the time to sit and listen to what they have to say and they can maybe compromise. A lot of the times they just get shooed away. "We've already told you get out, just get out." I do hear a lot of community members say they feel like they're treated like second class citizens and less than other people when they are trying to stay at the shelter. And they're mad because they're already dealing with their whole lives outside, they're in survival mode constantly outside and then they come inside, and they're treated not to the best they should be.*



## Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

Staff shared stories to illustrate the frustration and desperation they witness when trying to support individuals who stay outside. An outreach worker shared a story of trying to help a client attain housing and by the fourth unsuccessful phone call this client was swearing at the outreach worker and telling her to get lost.

*When they are not getting what they want or need they can just explode. It's that "I'm trying to do the right thing and then the system is just bearing down on me" and that just caused an explosion out of nowhere... so they just don't know how to cope and deal sometimes from trauma and everything they've been through.*

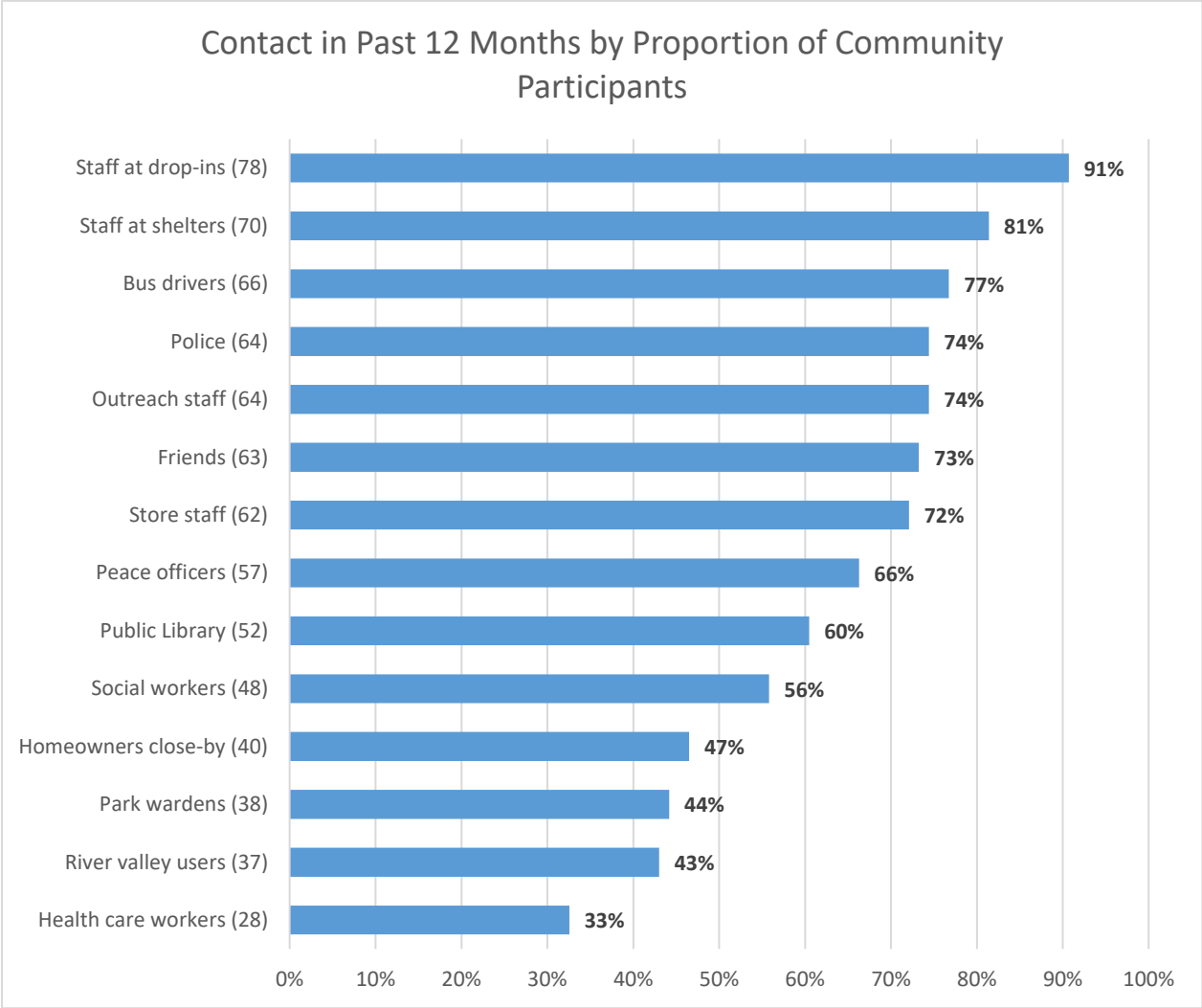
*A lot of people the only way they've gotten things is losing their sh\*t. That's their learned behaviour.*

### Community Contacts and Relationships

Community participants were asked who they had contact within the past 12 months, and then asked to assess the quality of their contacts within each category. These assessments of quality of contact were done by category, making it impossible to assess the quality of individual interactions. For example, community participants found that offering a single assessment of relationship with police officers was difficult as they often talked about having both positive and negative interactions, depending on the individual officer.

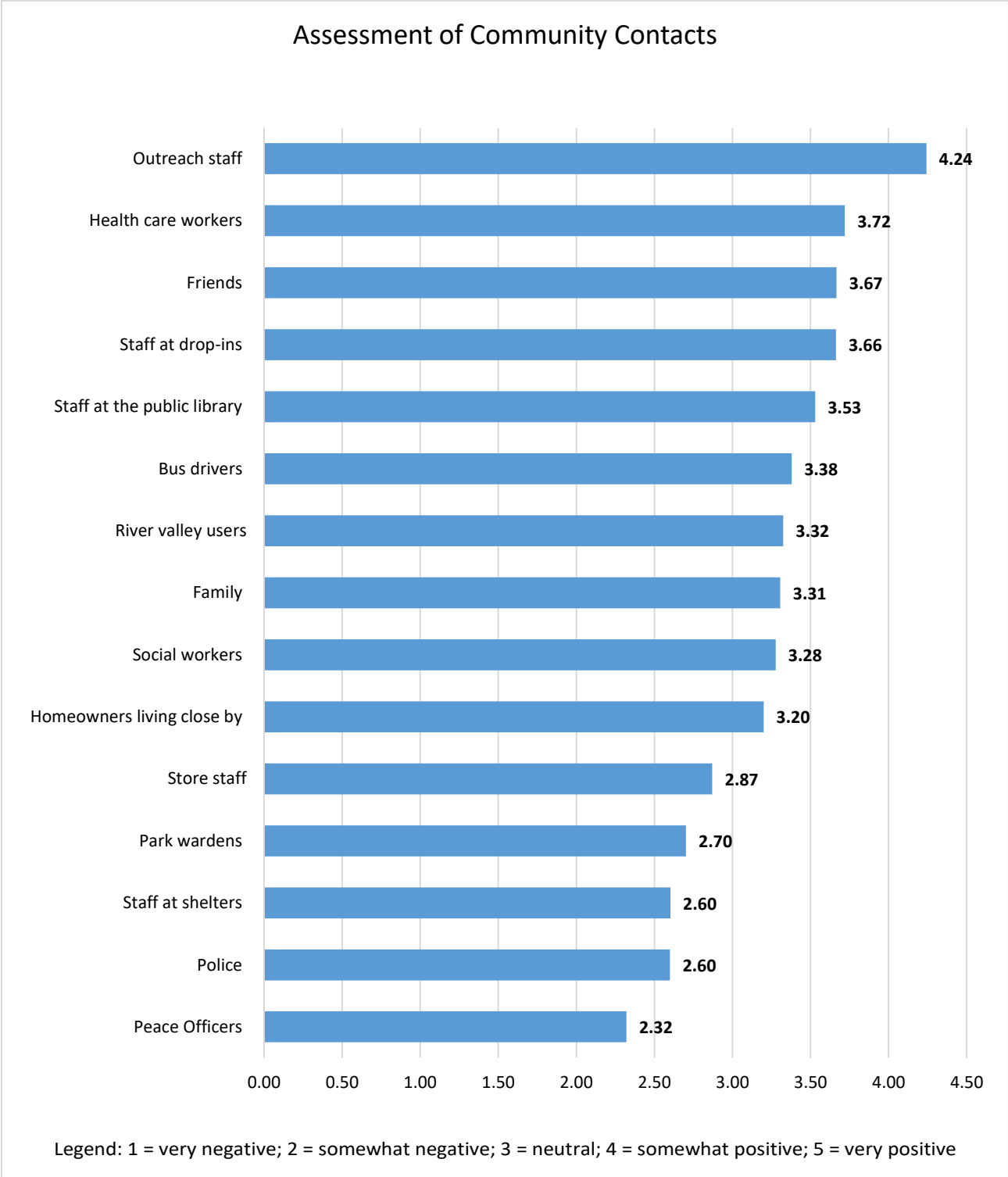
A large majority of community participants had contact with staff at drop-ins (91%; n=78) or shelters (81%; n=70). It is important to note that the least frequented categories have small numbers because not all community participants would have had a reason to make those contacts.

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

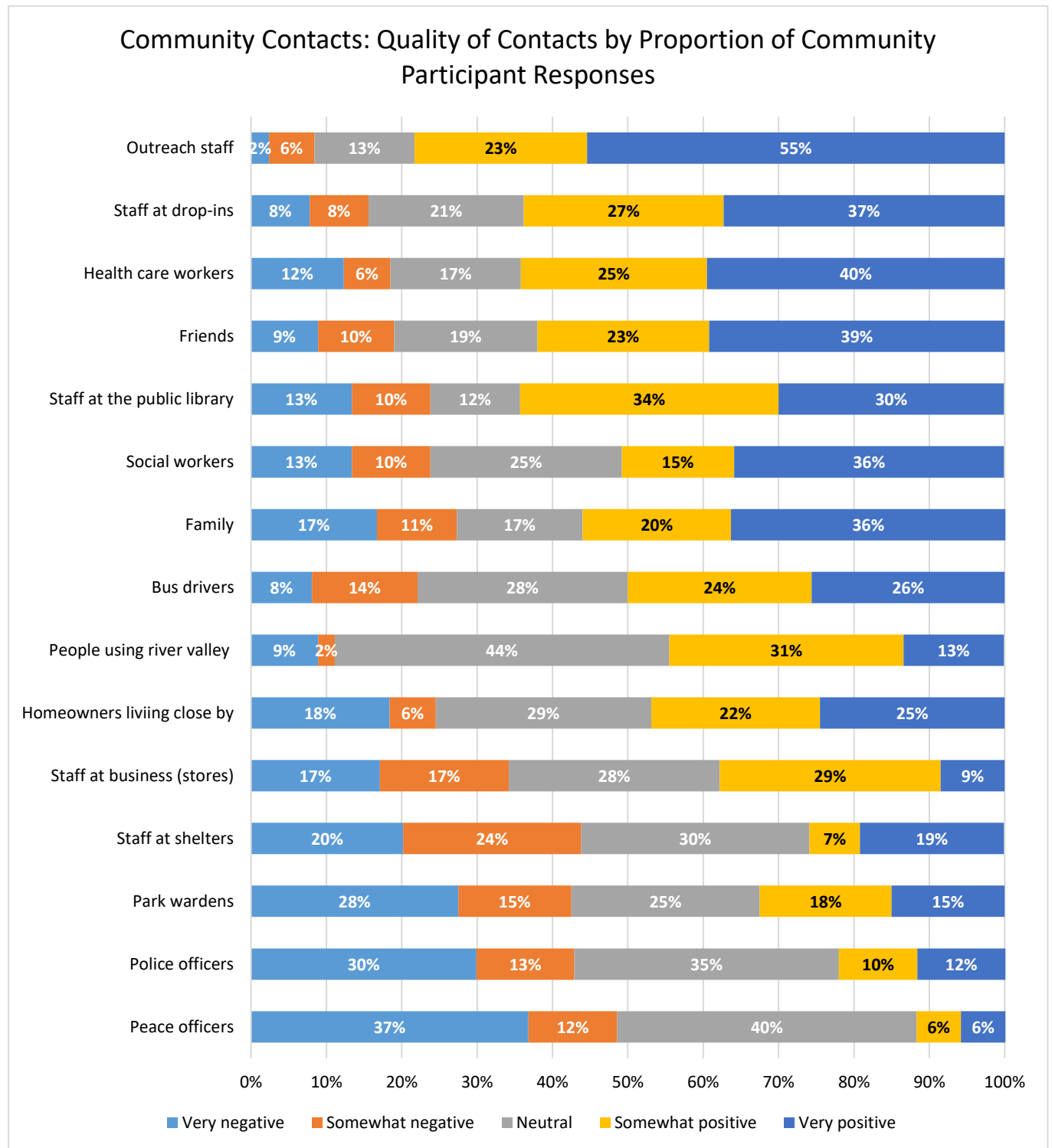


Using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means *very negative*, and 5 means *very positive*, community participants were asked to rate the quality of their contacts. Community participants ranked the quality of contact with Outreach Staff the highest at a mean score of 4.24, between *somewhat positive* and *very positive*. On the low end of the spectrum, Peace and Police Officer contacts were the most negative with mean scores of 2.32 and 2.60 respectively, between *somewhat negative* and *neutral*.

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Another way to look at the quality of contacts, that gives insight into the range of responses, is to consider the frequencies. This examination shows the nuances in the proportions in each category of assessment. For example, not only do Outreach staff have the highest average assessment rating, but only 2% scored the lowest rating.

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Outreach workers talked about the importance of relationships and the individual differences in relationships with community participants and enforcement officers.

*There's lots of emotional support people. Community is everything for our folks.*

*I've met some good police officers and peace officers. It seems they do have a heart with an authoritative background.*

*Police or other enforcement do not understand; they do not spend enough time with homeless people.*

*Let other people handle the move such as outreach or community support workers. Police are nasty.*

### Qualitative Data: Diverse Perspectives

Addressing and responding to the needs of the homeless is complex and multi-faceted. While the solution to homelessness is housing and needed supports, the reality is that the shortage of affordable housing means the focus of care is on temporal supports. The goal of all who provide services to the homeless is to help people to have a better life, however, some service providers are at liberty to focus only on the needs of the homeless while others work within the larger context, considering the broader community.

Enforcement Officers are challenged to respond to those who are homeless, while navigating conflicting priorities as they serve all Edmontonians. They must enforce City Bylaws, adhere to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations, and follow Union regulations. The recent Recovery Oriented Housing Model report places wellness for all under the umbrella of safety (Task Force, 2022, p.5).

*There can be no wellness without safety. Yet ideological debates have led to encampments taking root in communities, in which criminals are preying on vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. The knock-in effects are rising crime, social disorder, random acts of violence, traumatized staff, ruined business and destroyed lives in surrounding areas – and, troubling, people who need assistance going without it, as a result of fear and victimization.*

The Social Development Branch within the City of Edmonton partners and collaborates with community to support and enable citizen-centric approaches to create an Edmonton for All. The Branch strives to ensure that every person, regardless of gender, age, ability, or place of origin, is engaged, included, and afforded equitable opportunities to thrive in their community.

Human service agencies provide supports to those in need. They face the complexity of helping people to meet basic immediate needs such as feeding and hygiene while helping clients work towards better living situations and more stable lives. They build strong communities by addressing social and health-based inequities facing low-income and/or vulnerable neighbourhoods.

Mutual Aid groups comprise concerned members of the community who want to help the homeless, many of whom responded during the pandemic when services were overwhelmed. They often comprise people who were recently housed or have experience with homelessness. While their principal role is to check-in on people and hand out needed items such as food, water, clothing, and harm reduction supplies, they often find themselves in advocacy and monitoring roles.

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Homeless community members may live in all areas of Edmonton, but congregate more heavily in the downtown core where services are most readily available. Many transition in and out of housing, spreading some of their time over different types of temporary or transitional dwellings, or couch surf as opportunities arise. Those who live in tents or makeshift shelters are nomads, moving locations as required by others. They do not have a permanent place to go.

The common thread that serves to strengthen and support the most positive and helpful approaches, is respectful communication and relationship building. An understanding of the positions of others, whether it be community members who live in poverty or experience homelessness, or the larger Edmonton population, is necessary to build empathy and understanding so approaches for the betterment of all may be employed. Throughout this report we see examples of the importance of relationship and trust.

### Homeless People are Not All the Same

Homeless people do not constitute a homogeneous group. While they may share the condition of homelessness, the similarities tend to end there. The wide range of ages, educational attainment, and gender differences found in the earlier data, as well as diversity of backgrounds and reasons that community participants became homeless, attest to their differences. Decisions of where to stay outside are also based on individual situations, priorities, and needs. Younger community participants, especially females, were more likely to stay south of the river where services were fewer, and they felt safer. Community participants with mobility issues were more likely to locate closer to services than others. Some community participants chose to stay in isolated areas while others felt safer being in communal spaces. For some, living communally means safety, having someone look after your belongings when you are away, and working together to access needed items. For others, living alone means being able to maintain better surroundings and being away from potential violence.

*You can't let anyone know where you are actually... because they bring more people with them, and they tell other people, and more people show up. I've had the camp for a year and a half in the same spot and I've never been bothered there. Nobody has ever told me to move from it. I keep it clean and neat, and I keep it quiet there. I don't let anybody come there. I don't let people come there and start drinking, I just don't allow it. And I gave it to my dad so my Dad's going to stay there because I just got housed and I was on the list for four years.*

### Complex Health Needs

More than half of the community participants indicated that they were *very* or *somewhat unhealthy*. Given the list of health challenges they experienced, it is likely that the proportion of those in poor health is higher than reported, as their concentration on survival may make them ignore health problems. Trauma was the most reported health challenge. Second was addiction and/or substance use, which likely is an adaptation to cope with the struggle of trauma, mental health issues, poverty, and homelessness. Community participants referred to their substance use in this way. Furthermore, the complexity of multiple health challenges with few supports complicates life for the homeless.

Homeless community members were significantly less likely to receive treatment for health challenges. It is important to note that although community participants gave health care workers the second highest quality of relationship, they were the least likely to have had contact with health care workers.

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Trauma and mental health issues may keep individuals from seeking out care and/or navigating the processes to receive care, leading to those most in need being the least likely to receive help. Not having an address further exacerbated the long processes of accessing funding or care. While access to emergency mental health care was often not timely, community participants found that when they could access care, they were treated with respect and kindness.

Outreach teams were given the highest ratings in quality of contacts by community participants. They described the compassion and care utilized when linking clients to health services and advocating for those who need help. They described being stretched beyond capacity as there are not enough feet on the ground to respond to all the needs.

Agency staff discussed mental health needs of community members.

*Our biggest obstacle is the mental health piece. A lot of the times when we do see violent behaviours it is a direct result of mental health. Are they a) able to access those services? and b) willing? A high proportion of our clients have a lot of aversion to mental health and the hospital system and accessing care in that way so it can be difficult to set and assert boundaries around that when they are not ready or in a place to engage but that's directly where the behaviour is coming from.*

While Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) is not within the City's purview, it is important to note that individuals suffer due to the loss of their AISH funding. On several occasions, people shared that they had lost their AISH and were not able to navigate being reinstated. The daily struggle to stay with ones' tent or dwelling and protect ones' belongings, access hygiene, and obtain food, all while dealing with disability and/or health challenges, made it challenging for some to keep appointments for reapplication support, thus, lengthening their time without supports. For these reasons, several people using walkers or wheelchairs found themselves in very vulnerable and unsafe outdoor conditions. Once homeless, with no address, the transiency of being moved, and the difficulty in getting to agencies for application support, the journey back to AISH is exceedingly difficult.

*To be back on disability - I applied 3 times and now have been off disability for 6-7 months...This made me homeless.*

A sentiment widely heard in the larger community is that homelessness could be easily solved if everyone *Just get a job!* If it were this easy to solve homelessness, the problem would only minimally exist. While getting and maintaining a job is made more difficult while homeless, complex health needs and their underlying experiences and histories further complicate the issue.

### Needs to Make Life Outside Better

Suggestions to make life better when staying outside centered on basic needs, with the main focus on having a safe place to go where you would not have to move. Other suggestions included shelter from the elements, access to fire, toilets, showers, food, water, tents, and warmth. Further ideas included medical care, social support, housing workers, mental health support, income, and transition to housing. Some community participants talked about working with the neighbourhood to build better relationships and understanding. The importance and significance of fire for keeping warm, cooking, and as a sacred fire was noted by community participants.

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Many community participants discussed orderly camp sites as a strategy to be able to remain in their encampments longer, however without garbage bags and disposal sites, it is difficult to keep ones' space clean. Participant comments reflected a willingness to stay within certain parameters to show they respected the space they were in, and to reduce the negative interactions with City Enforcement. They also stated that the City could help them to maintain a clean and safer space by providing basic services in addition to garbage disposal such as a safe place for a fire, toilets, showers and potable water.

### Relationships of Respect

Community participants stated that better relationships would improve their situations. Overall, they felt that better communication, clear rules, and consistent service would lead to better situations.

*Take people aside and respect them. Treat them as you would like to be treated.*

*Be understanding and empathic instead of direct orders.*

*Come with compassion and a little empathy and dignity rather than "Get the F out of here".*

Some community participants felt that relationships with those in authority had improved.

*It has improved - now there is less harassment, whereas in the past my name was run daily. Now they come by only when there is a problem.*

*The officers are becoming more nice and not rude as they used to be.*

Community participants also discussed how they work to co-exist in the community. Those who stay outside rated the quality of the contacts they had with people in the neighbourhood fairly positively. They also explained that they generally try to stay away from people living in the neighbourhood and felt a need for relationship building and understanding. As one outreach worker described:

*It is often related to people around who want them to move, and conversations with neighbours would help.*

### Drug & Alcohol Consumption

Staying outside presents the dilemma of living ones' private life in public. While this situation means no private spaces or facilities for hygiene, it also means no private spaces to consume drugs or alcohol, often relied on to survive outdoor life. People who stay outside have very few to no private spaces, often leaving them in the situation of conducting activities that may not be acceptable in public spaces. Respondents talked about how humiliating it is to defecate outdoors and then to be ticketed when they had no other choice.

*If you are homeless, where can you drink without getting fines or getting picked up? Instead of handing out tickets maybe give people a list of where they can go. Maybe there's a spot they can allow people to openly drink. Vodka keeps your innards warm in the winter.*



## Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

*There should be more places like [agency name] because they let you in. They know you're drinking. So, if there's more places where people felt safe and they could actually drink... as long as you don't bring it into the building... they still talk with you, not support the alcohol but know the situation because people can't just quit drinking when they're homeless because that's the way they escape.*

EPS Officers discussed how, when the weather is very cold, they may hold people overnight so that they will not freeze when they have nowhere else to go.

*In those incidents it becomes extremely difficult, especially during the winter months when we can't just let somebody go into the frigid night if they have nowhere to go especially if they're in an intoxicated state. So, it becomes extremely difficult to try and find somewhere for them to go and that is where we end up a lot of times. It's holding people under 1152 under the Indian Liquor Act, so public intoxication. And we expose ourselves to a tremendous of risk by doing that... by holding people in our holding cells just because they're drunk in public. And that is NOT a solution at all. All that ends up happening is that we wait until they're sober and then we kick them out of the door in the morning and it's a terrible, vicious cycle. That particular piece of the conversation we need to figure out a solution to. We need to have that discussion.*

### Moving Encampments

Encampments are entities that begin, grow, change, and are dismantled or moved, only to emerge in another place if one was not fortunate enough to be housed. All who have a role in encampments from residency, supporting the residents, and those who must manage safety and enforce bylaws must deal with competing priorities while working with the community of the homeless and the housed. Bylaws and policies serve as procedural guidelines to ensure community safety and well-being. Although intended for the safety of all, they often leave the homeless negatively affected and further marginalized with few options to fulfill their basic needs.

The process of moving encampments is complex. Most difficult is the hopelessness of having nowhere to go when told to move on. The logistics of moving may make it impossible to take one's belonging with them. Respondents talked about being given little warning and not having the ability to move their belongings without help. The most prevalent issue was that people are told to move and not given any choices of places to go. Many who stay outside shared stories of constantly being displaced every 24-48 hours.

*Being moved means no one knows where we are, and we have to wait for services because we cannot be found.*

*Give someone time for preparation. You can't uproot somebody who has no next place.*

The personal possessions of homeless people are in-fact their possessions. Confiscating, destroying, or failing to return them after storing them, is understood as theft by community members. It is also important to note that if people do not have their essential items, such as identification and medications, with them at all times, they may be lost when their tents are removed.

*Don't throw our property in the garbage. Do not throw our carts away... I have no safe place to put my backpack. Do not take our tents.*

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Community participants explained that some agencies have a policy of storing personal items for a short period of time when someone receives a ban. Participants shared stories of items often being lost which is especially difficult with medications. Several participants described going back to their doctor or a pharmacy to get more medication and being flagged as drug-seeking and accused of selling their pills. Not having prescribed medications led to further problems. One community participant described how her behaviour in court was negatively influenced by not being able to take her prescribed medication. This situation made her unable to present herself well at court.

Community participants also talked about how having a disability makes moving more difficult and how they would appreciate help and consideration.

*Be less aggressive and help those who are physically disabled to find a better spot. Some people are not able to pack up fast and often the officers would end up throwing out their stuff.*

### Bylaws & Policies

A focus group discussion was held with City of Edmonton (COE) staff that are involved in the response to individuals staying outside. COE respondents described the many reasons that encampments are moved with the most common being that they meet the criteria to be classified as high risk. City staff also provided insight into the liability encampments represent as well as the applicable Bylaws that they, as agents of the city, are required to enforce.

*The reason why we move people is because there is a Parkland Bylaw 2202<sup>5</sup> and it says that while on parkland people shall not build a structure whether temporary or permanent and there are other things in the bylaw about having a fire unattended or disturbing the natural areas so ultimately the reason why people are moved is because of that bylaw. The swiftness in which they are moved depends on the level of risk that an encampment has. The criteria revolve around size and type, whether there are crime or public safety issues or environmental impacts to the area. The higher risk the encampment the quicker they will be moved.*

*The foremost reason people are moved from encampments is for violence or the perception that there could be violence. That is usually affiliated to weapons, gang members, or number of encampments... Eight structures in one location is deemed to be high risk. There are also a bunch of other reasons we could associate as high risk such as playground, blocking a roadway, attached to infrastructure such as a fence or a building, open fires. Those are the different reasons that we consider it an automatic high risk so then we can close it down immediately or within 3 days. I can't remember the last time we closed one down immediately. We're always trying to give notice and connect folks and get them looped into that group that need help. That's a very short answer to a very complex scenario.*

*As soon as you start to provide necessities like that you assume occupier's liability<sup>6</sup> which means if we provide pot-a-potties or showers or even if we give them garbage bags and things to clean up and something happens while they are sleeping on parkland. For example, if we provided a port-a-potty and then someone overdoses and there is a fatality the City assumes occupier's liability because we are essentially encouraging, people through those provision of basic needs, to stay. And so, if someone died their family could theoretically sue the City because they'll say*

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<sup>5</sup> City of Edmonton Bylaw 2202 - Parkland Bylaw (Consolidated on February 22, 2021)

<sup>6</sup> Occupiers' Liability Act, RSA 2000, c O-4. <https://www.canlii.org/en/ab/laws/stat/rsa-2000-c-o-4/latest/rsa-2000-c-o-4.html>

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*"You had this bylaw for people not to camp and then you provided port-a-potties and so you're essentially encouraging them to stay."*

### Biohazard Issues

City staff talked about how the longer an encampment is in one spot the more damage, the more risk, the more biohazard, the more clean-up work, and the more cost.

*The longer an encampment is in one spot the more damage that might occur to parkland to the area that it's inhabiting. Also, the more complaints from the neighbours. They will generally increase in size that will bring more biohazard in and more occupants, more tents. It will also cost a lot more manpower, time, and resources to remove encampments as soon as they start getting bigger, so we try to prevent them before they become too big or become tent cities.*

### Community Relationships

The experiences of moving people from where they are staying outside, including the procedures used and the dynamics around the process were discussed by all who participated in this research; from those who stay outside, to those who work and volunteer supporting them, to those employed to protect and serve the communities that homeless people frequent. This topic yielded a great diversity of perspectives; both within and across these groups. COE representatives, for example, reported that they no longer issue tickets and that the slashing of tents is not a part of their practice, however, community members and mutual aid workers reported that these practices are current.

While in some cases those who provide specific services and support to the homeless feel supported by the officers and wardens who enforce city bylaws that are designed to keep the city clean, limit city liability and promote feelings of safety in the general population, there are many times when their approaches and agendas clash.

Edmonton Police Officers talked about the importance of developing relationships to have more successful interactions when moving people, realizing that when they do their job, they are often unable to offer alternatives.

*For the most part it's displacement where we're pushing people on. We realize that... and it's the ugly truth and we see just move them somewhere else and then we see the same person in the coming days and weeks.*

*The high-risk encampment teams over the last two summers now have really helped develop those relationships and they've really become the subject matter experts and dealing with the same folks every day and developing those relationships and it's all about how we treat people. The people in the high-risk encampment teams, the two of them, are hand picked because they are experienced members that understand the landscape and also understand a lot of the struggles that these folks are facing. That's what it's all about, it's developing those relationships, so we don't have to use force on someone, we don't have to physically remove them from their tent and throw their stuff in the garbage. That's the last thing we want. We realize that these people are down and out, and they need what we can do to steer them in the right direction, if possible. Some people also just choose to live this way. There are some that that's the brutal truth, is they want nothing to do with any resources and then as soon as winter hits they're going to go back to where they're from, to their community wherever that is and that happens a lot through the winter as well. So, it's a very complex issue as I'm sure you are seeing through your conversations.*

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Community participants indicated that some of their interaction with enforcement has recently improved but that approaches are different depending on who is moving you.

*I've been at camps where people have said "It's ok, take a day or two to pack your stuff and get going but I need you out by Friday" and I've seen cops tell people "You've got 6 seconds to grab your sh\*t and get out of here!"*

Mutual Aid workers discussed their experiences when providing assistance to the homeless, and their observations of police and peace officers' treatment of the homeless.

*We see people being abused regularly. When the police see us, their abusive attitude changes.*

*We had interactions with police officers and peace officers both where they do not realize we are there, and they are being abusive to people. As soon as they see a privileged person walk into their point of view their attitude changes.*

*We walk around by the LRT line, and we have had unmarked police cars sitting there harassing us because we were interacting with the unhoused. They are sitting there, staring at us or full-on interacting... We asked them to move off the sidewalk so we could get past with our wagons, and they said, "You can go around". I asked if they were asking us to walk on the street with traffic with our wagons into traffic, "Can't you back up half a meter". Their response was "Are you trying to cause trouble?"... If they are treating us like that, we know how they are treating our community members.*

Outreach workers shared how difficult it is to build relationships and connect people to services when they are constantly being moved. They ask people where they think they might be camping the next day and often end up spending a lot of time locating them.

*I go tent to tent to tent to tent and see if I can find that person that way.*

They also described how the work of connecting homeless people to resources such as Income Support or housing teams is severely compromised when something as basic as not being able to locate a person, when their income support phone call finally comes in, can easily send someone back to the bottom of the list.

*It makes our job SO much harder.*

*People constantly fall through the cracks. It is hard to help people when they are moved every few days.*

*When I ask people "how many times have you been told by the police in the past 6 months to move along?" the numbers are usually like 120. It could be higher but that is the highest number I can put into my computer.*

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Dismantling or Moving Encampments

The matter of dismantling or moving encampments is contentious and there are many discrepancies related to understanding of and reporting this phenomenon. Even the terminology is widely dissented and value laden, with some referring to *tent slashing* or *tent cutting* while others refer to more generally to *tearing down* or *dismantling*.

Community participants reported that their tents were destroyed by enforcement teams. City of Edmonton staff explained that tents are only removed after a site has been vacated and that tents may have to be cut open in order to protect the safety of workers as contents are considered bio-hazards. They asserted that tents are not cut for the purpose of making them unusable.

*Our team has been accused of slashing tents in the middle of the night so that the next day it is unusable. We have taken a knife to a tent but only in the process of cleaning it up. We're not going to squeeze in through the door. We cut it out from the outside because there's usual hazards in there. The physical act of slashing a tent I wouldn't say happens, but we do cut tents down or we'll use knives to cut down if they're strung up with strings.*

*With some regularity we have private citizens that will remove encampments or dismantle them and just throw them on the ground beside our trail system and then the expectation is our workers will come and just pick them up and they know if they do that, that will happen but that interrupts the whole clean-up process and the outreach process but that does occur.*

*The clean-up crew only works in the encampment after it's been vacated and all items remaining are considered abandoned and potentially contaminated and therefore, we remove everything. We wouldn't just slash a tent and then walk away and then come back later. We will slash it and then, I shouldn't say 'slash', we will dismantle it and haul it away as part of our process.*

*There are also some citizen groups that are a little bit p\*ssed and a little bit frustrated and they are blaming all of their problems on homeless people. So, a lot of them are taking matters into their own hands. We have had incidents where we've have been altercations between citizens and those experiencing homelessness too where we've had to respond to. That is a possibility, I'm not saying it's all that but it's also part of that conversation.*

Mutual Aid workers shared alternate experiences related to possession removals.

*Everything is thrown out when encampments are taken down. They actually cut the tents so they cannot be re-used. Slashing still takes place. Community members are taking footage with their own cameras.*

*So many people say these things are not happening, but they happen all the time. Police, transit and police officers say it is not them, but tents are going down every week, so who is it?*

# Staying Outside is Not a Preference: Homelessness in Edmonton

## Location Choices

Community participants and Peace Officers both noted differences in the levels of drugs and violence on the north versus the south side of the river with a marked concentration of these problems in the downtown core. Some community participants described how staying on the south side of the river means fewer services but also less drugs and violence. In contrast, the north side is noted for being more crowded and violent but with more services.

*A lot of times what we hear from the clients that are in the river valley is that they want to stay away from the amount of drugs and the amount of violence that is downtown. We see signs of that less out in the river Valley as opposed to the core.*

Specifically, young women and/or those with physical disabilities and mobility issues often have concerns about finding places that are safe to sleep and protecting their possessions. One young woman talked about staying on the southside for safety, but even there being reluctant to stay in a tent where she could not escape easily. Her place of safety was a spot under a bridge where she could run in several directions if threatened.

## Ticketing

Outreach workers verified that tickets are still being issued at LRT stations and that their co-workers had been ticketed for loitering while trying to help people at the LRT stations, even though they provided identification. They also provided an example of a community member whose continued sleeping outside led to a warrant.

*I just did one (a standardized assessment) for a lady that had been picked up 22 times over the winter for sleeping on the ground. It was at the point where it was now a warrant, and she did not know what to do. It's something that we experience often, especially with transit.*

City staff explained that the ETS loitering bylaw was removed, however, when people began using the LRT stations as shelter, the bylaw was amended to a more general format to say one cannot use transit spaces inappropriately.

*With ETS the loitering bylaw was removed a while ago and so people couldn't be removed from transit stations. Then, as a result of COVID and the decrease in ridership in transit stations as well as people's fear around congregate shelter, we saw more and more people using transit LRT stations as shelter. Nobody had any way to enforce against people using transit stations so they amended the bylaw again and it's more general now to say you can't use transit spaces inappropriately (the purpose of transit spaces is to go in and use transit to get to another destination). For a while there was no ability to enforce on loitering and now, we potentially could see that (the ticketing).*

Community participants talked about being ticketed without a cause and being unable to pay outstanding tickets.

*Often police ticket people only because they were called even though an offence is not evident.*

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City staff shared information about the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT)<sup>7</sup> initiative and that the High-Risk Encampment Team had not written a ticket in almost two years.

*Transit Peace Officers and Bent Arrow are working together in the Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT) so I think the city is trying to say "we know that this is not people's first choice of place to hang out" and so how can we respond and redirect people to more appropriate places with appropriate resources?*

City staff who participated in the research were not in a position to respond to questions about current practices of loitering tickets and warrants.

*Not anyone at this table can really speak to that (about certain occurrences with loitering tickets). I'm not sure if the people aren't paying the tickets if they are actually spending time in jail or not. I don't think those types of tickets go to warrant anymore.*

### Staying Housed

While attaining housing is a single accomplishment, staying housed takes long term effort and support. For those who have been homeless for some time, learning how to be housed may take additional efforts and supportive relationships. Additionally, those dealing with health and addiction issues may also need longer and more intense supports.

Landlords and support workers have a large role to play in building relationships of trust and understanding, realizing that steps to success are incremental.

*With the right individual in the role, having the right training, a building manager can provide micro-interventions (such as informal advice, reminders or guidance) that support clients' other recovery-oriented supports and help them maintain their trajectory (Taskforce, 2022, p34).*

Community participants offered suggestions as to how they could stay housed.

*Clear understanding of the expectations and communication would help to stay housed. Being housed at permanent supportive housing with harm reduction and independent living is best.*

*Better landlords who understand our situation. Having rent money alone is not enough as I have been homeless my whole life.*

*Continuation of programs - I have two more months with [agency name] then I am done.*

Community participants discussed the challenges of staying housed. They talked about running into problems with landlords. Offering accommodation to homeless friends often put housed individuals in jeopardy of eviction. Others who found it difficult to adjust to the *rules* of being housed found themselves in a cycle of housing and eviction, rendering them homeless, over and over again.

*They expect you to stay isolated in that apartment by yourself. It's not a written rule, it's what they expect.*

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<sup>7</sup> The COTT's team purpose is to build relationships and connect individuals within the transit system to community support and resources to increase safety and reduce harm.

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Whether the sentiment is balanced or not, some found themselves unable to cope with the rules around being housed and several community participants spoke about abuse at one particular housing facility.

*It's semi-prison rules and we're not criminals so why are we getting semi-prison rules?... It doesn't make sense. I mean there's no rules when you live in your residence right? You have family visit. Would you have somebody who mortgaged your house tell you can't have them spend the night? I mean that's the abuse that's happening. And it's individual people, it's not usually a group of people. It's this one lady who runs these apartments and she's very abusive.*

A mutual aid worker retold the words of a woman she encountered who felt that there was no hope of housing in her immediate future.

*You have taken my sleeping bag, you have cut a hole in my tent, you have cut a hole in it and I have this little bag of clothes and my snack from this morning and I am going to go two blocks down and I am going to get harassed for being in a back alley by a woman who owns a building. It just doesn't end. There is no solution.*

### STAFFING

The challenges for staff working in drop-ins, shelters, or other agencies that support the homeless are great. This situation was exacerbated during COVID when increased regulations around infection prevention and control added to the complexity of service delivery. Jobs in these areas are generally not well paid, the turnover of staff is high, and even though there may be a structure for training, many employees are working without the tools to deal with day-to-day challenges of this front-line work. Furthermore, because these jobs typically do not pay well and are seen as entry level positions, staff may be starting their career, working on their own journey after being housed, or be newcomers to Canada.

*A lot of the drop-ins are understaffed. You would have 200+ (sometimes pushing 300) on a given day in the winter and you have 4-5 staff looking after those people you don't have time to de-escalate a community member. And if you don't nip it in the bud, it escalates other community members and if you don't deal with that you will lose control of your setting.*

*We are coming from a situation where we had 62 people and 2 staff so there wasn't time to have these sit-down conversations. It was "if you hit someone, go."*

*There's a communal sense of justice. When an incident happens in the drop-in, everyone witnesses it. People will say: "If I did that thing you'd kick me out right away."... or if we try to make exceptions for certain people. "If you don't bar them, I'll take care of it myself." There's a little bit of peer pressure because community sees how you respond to things and people will call you out if they see things as unfair.*

New staff may also include recent graduates of programs related to Social Work or Community Service. These graduates have theoretical knowledge but may have limited experience working with the populations with complex needs including trauma and mental health.

*Educate the workers more on the participants they're going to be working with, the expectations. Challenge in hiring: a lot of front-line staff is young, with little to no life experience. You can't just throw someone into a drop-in. It's a challenge to fill those roles.*



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*Hiring people that have empathy or at least trauma informed care. You can hire people with, for example, a Social Work degree so technically they have all the right things and then, when they're on the job, someone calls them a b\*tch and they want to ban them for two weeks. There seems to be some disconnect between what we are learning and what we're actually doing.*

*I've found that when we hire very religious people, I do find that they come in with biases or a saviour complex that ends up affecting these things severely.*

When staff were asked what helps them in their work, they focused on approach and relationship building.

*You don't want to feel like you are punishing people for their substance use or for their mental health.*

*I hate banning. I think most of us do. Trying to work towards that restorative piece would be really great.*

*So much of what we deal with is trying to work with people and show them that mistakes are made but it's not the end of the world. The whole idea of banning is punitive and anything that's punitive you want to be careful with because it only goes so far. You want to maintain boundaries, but you also don't want to be a jerk about it. You don't want to get rolled over, but you don't want to punish people unnecessarily.*

*It needs to be a 'we' mentality, a community and not an 'us versus them'.*

*It is a smaller space. We greet everyone by name, and we try to make it a welcoming space where they also want to invest and be part of it.*

Agency staff also described how having a good relationship with the area police, the patrols, and the beats can be beneficial in supporting community members.

*[Agency name] has our front sidewalk. We have an agreement with the beats team that if we try to keep [gang name] at bay and off our property they kind of let the drinking and using on that front space kind of slide so folks know they can drink out there and use their...*

When the community members participate in assessing what happened and choosing their consequence, it can lead to more buy-in and better compliance.

*We had a guy fighting with knives out front and he came back the next day and I gave him options for his suspension and asked: "What do you think is fair?" And we sat down and talked about it, and he actually chose a really long suspension because he understood the harm he had done to the community. He then was more strict about upholding it than we were.*

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One individual who had worked as both door security for a third-party contractor and later as staff at the same agency, shared the following experience:

*As Security you are in a uniform. I found when I switched (roles) and I could wear plain clothes just be me and wasn't just some face behind a uniform it was way easier to develop that relationship and rapport with people. Which sometimes makes it easier because you've got the relationship but sometimes it makes it harder because they've got that soft spot in your heart and asking some people to leave for the day is hard. As Security I found that I got way more push back (because) it's the uniform. Folks have a lot of trauma associated with that and your job is to be the bad guy, unfortunately.*

### Training

Community participants, agency staff, and mutual aid volunteers expressed the need for training. Training provides people with appropriate tools to build relationships that are honouring and respectful. Agency staff also talked about the need for training and their desire for training. Logistical issues of needing to fill shifts, and high staff turnover, often mean that staff do not receive sufficient or timely training. Some staff shared that training efforts were beneficial.

*Staff training and retention is a huge challenge.*

*They have put staff through Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Training. Having that model of de-escalation and that sit down afterwards.*

*We have been trying to push our staff to have those intentional conversations and reminding them that these are trauma responses, it's not personal and if you can give them space and come back to it then you are more likely to build that relationship.*

*It needs to be a 'we' mentality, a community and not an 'us versus them'. So, hiring people that have empathy or at least trauma informed care. You can hire people with, for example, a social work degree so technically they have all the right things and then, when they're on the job, someone calls them a b\*tch and they want to ban them for two weeks. There seems to be some disconnect between what we are learning and what we're actually doing.*

Community participants called for staff training in mental health, trauma, de-escalation, and respectful relationships with some expressing a desire to take training. Many talked about how difficult it is to manage their own behaviour when they are under the influence or being triggered.

Mutual Aid workers related examples of consequences when those working with community members have not received training or are not providing ethical and respectful service.

*There is such an untrained staff within the shelters too. That is a real bone of contention with me. I had a tiff with a security guard because she kicked a lady out at -35C. This lady had nothing to cover herself up with. She was huddled up on a concrete sidewalk and could not get into the building. When the security guard came out, I asked why this lady could not get into the shelter. "She swung at me." Obviously, there was no de-escalation training.*

*Three weeks ago, we saw [agency name] staff laughing at us through the window and closing the door on someone. The person was upset and punching the glass as the staff pointed and laughed at him. This is not the way to treat people in general.*

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While agencies typically have policies that govern their staff, at times they are not practiced. Staff felt the differences between policy and practice were due mostly to staff turnover, limited time for training, and a lack of policy.

*How does one person know to ban or not to ban is often mirroring somebody who's got more seniority on them and listening/observing to what they say or what they've done in the past. There is new staff orientation which only happens a couple times a year unfortunately. There is a policy booklet but for the most time it's "read it on your own time and if you have questions reach out to your supervisor".*

*I've never read the policies on banning. I know there's some handbook somewhere that's been floating around. I would say pretty much all of our drop-in staff have never seen that or read that and it's not widely used. Barring has come down mostly to judgements.*

### COMMON AND DIVERGENT PATHS

#### Ending Homelessness

All participants in this research; from community members who struggle with homelessness, to mutual aid workers, to agency staff, and City of Edmonton staff agreed that the best solution to homelessness is permanent housing that provides needed wrap-around services to keep people housed. This common goal can only be achieved through coordinated supports.

*Outcome-focused outreach will require the use of inter-disciplinary teams with the right mix of skill sets and appropriate training. It will require those teams to be formally linked with the coordinated response. Importantly, it will also require partnerships that enable police to tackle serious crime so social agencies can address the needs of vulnerable citizens (Task Force, 2022, p.17)*

The SPDAT (Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) serves to provide a system to gain an assessment of needs regarding housing (Orgcode, 2022). This tool is employed by many agencies in Edmonton when deciding who to house, with those with the highest score on the tool (the highest need) being housed first. This approach, however, may stretch the capacity of services. An outreach worker suggested an alternate approach.

*Out of the people I've met, if you take a pool of everybody that's experiencing homelessness in Edmonton, I would say about 75% of them are probably not hard to house. And to maintain housing they just need that hand up. Get into a place, can I afford my rent, now can you guys leave me alone? That could be done... We could solve homelessness in a span of time... and then when you're not dealing with that other 75% you could have all these awesome workers working with people that are high acuity.*

Those who work with the homeless acknowledged the systemic barriers in moving from homelessness to being housed. One COE staff explained:

*Lower risk encampments will be focused for a housing focused response in which housing workers and outreach will allow people to stay longer in order to connect them with appropriate housing. But technically our maximum amount of time that someone can stay in an encampment in one place is less than the average amount of time it takes to house someone out of an encampment... thus the dilemma.*

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## FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES

The following opportunities are borne out of the data and focus groups.

### Indigenous-Designed and Led Transition Encampment

A city-sanctioned and supported prototype for an Indigenous designed and led outdoor space as a first step in the journey towards being housed. This camp would provide a safe space where one could rest and begin to consider next steps. It would be beneficial for both the individual experiencing homelessness as well as outreach staff trying to locate them. Provide safe spaces for tents or structures, a source of heat, potable water, toilets and showers, and a sheltered gathering space. This space would also include a sacred fire and the support of community leaders such as Elders, Aunties, Uncles. This effort would require staff to run the camp, policing and security, and housing, health, and social workers. The goal of living in this space would be to prepare for housing with an expectation of being housed within 2-3 weeks.

### A Place to go When Moving Encampments

While the above suggested prototype encampments are designed as a first step in the journey to being housed, there will be many who do not have a place to go. If there is no suggested alternative of a new place to set up, every effort should be made not to move encampments. The two conflicting concerns of the homeless are having autonomy and being warm. While shelters provide warmth, being outdoors allows for autonomy. Perhaps set up a site<sup>8</sup> where people could set up tents or have partitioned spaces, they could call their own. This idea is somewhat like the shelter pods but in a warm place.

### Working Together

Mutual Aid groups provide services away from drop-ins and shelters where they serve hard to reach community members. They often have both broad and in-depth knowledge of the community, with many also having lived experience with homelessness. These service providers are integral to helping the homeless but often feel that they are outsiders who are not valued or respected by enforcement teams. All those who work with the homeless should find common ground in their common task of helping the homeless. Relationship building that brings together human service agencies, City of Edmonton staff, and Mutual Aid groups to identify common goals and seek opportunities to work in harmony would go far to benefit the community of those who stay outside.

### Conversation Circles and Events

#### Bridging Events

Offer community events to bring together housed and unhoused community members to build relationships and understanding. Share research findings in an infographic with community members in neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of tension between the housed and unhoused. The intent would be twofold; unhoused community members would see an outcome of their participation and other community members would receive credible information about those who stay outside.

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<sup>8</sup> For example the Coliseum.

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### Learning Events that also Bridge

A cross-discipline workshop to work on problem-solving and visioning. This event could be an opportunity to bring together people with lived experience, mutual aid groups, service agencies, and City employees. This activity could be instrumental in building relationships, understanding the perspectives of others, and finding ways to mutually respect and support each other.

### Building Strengths & Bonds

Monthly circle conversations to be co-hosted by those with lived experience and service agency staff. This idea came out of the focus groups held during this research project where community participants asked for further conversations and the opportunity to share their own experiences. This would also be a good place to share agency concerns and involve community participants in working towards solutions.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The learnings from this project added the voices of community members with recent homeless experience to the literature already available on these issues in Edmonton. Going forward, the focus should be on providing services and housing people with a research component that includes comprehensive measurements to assess the success of these initiatives.

The following are suggestions for research that could provide further insights into the lives of the homeless, the work of those who support them, and community responses:

- Effects of using contracted security firms versus agency staff for entry to shelters and drop-ins
- Connections of homeless persons to their families, relatives and home communities
- A cost analysis of the suggested city sanctioned camps versus informal encampments
- Forms of Social Capital that are helpful in maintaining housing
- Specific needs of homeless women
- Specific needs of homeless people with physical disability(ies)
- The uniformity of bans across types of services
- Evaluation of the use of community data sharing apps

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## APPENDICES LIST

The following documents are available for download off the M.A.P.S. website at:

<https://mapsab.ca/community-based-research/>

A1 – Literature review

A2 – Questionnaire

A3 – Focus Group Questions

A4 – Information letter

A5 – Frequencies and Descriptives

A6 – After care sheet

A7 – Left Outside: The Experience of Being Banned in Edmonton

A8 – CNBR Results Infographic

A9 – Banned: Falling Through the Safety Net project map

A10 – Everyday in the Life of Homeless Edmontonians journey map