

THE STATE OF
HOMELESSNESS
in
CANADA
2016



**Canadian
Observatory on
Homelessness**
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**Canadian Alliance to
End Homelessness**

The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016

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COH Research Paper #12



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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



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



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.



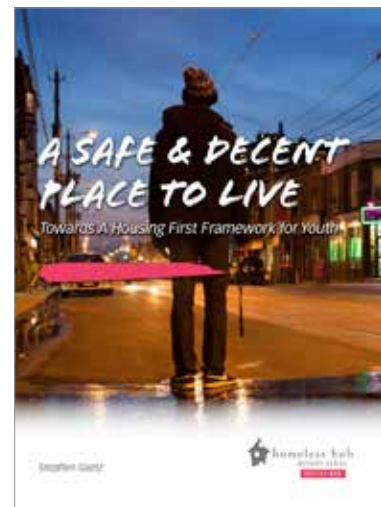
The campaign typically kicks off with a Registry Week – a community-wide effort to identify by name every person experiencing homelessness within the community, assess and document their specific needs, and prioritize them for housing based on their vulnerability. Campaign communities then set ambitious 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.

TYPOLOGY 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.

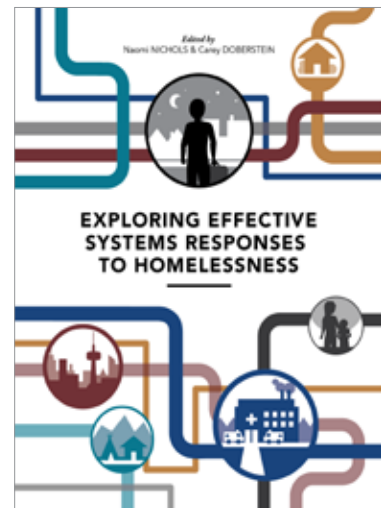


When we examine the jurisdictions in Canada and the United States that have been most effective in addressing homelessness, we see some common practices that have successfully reduced homelessness. These shared practices lay critical groundwork for a shift to prevention. Successful communities appear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

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.

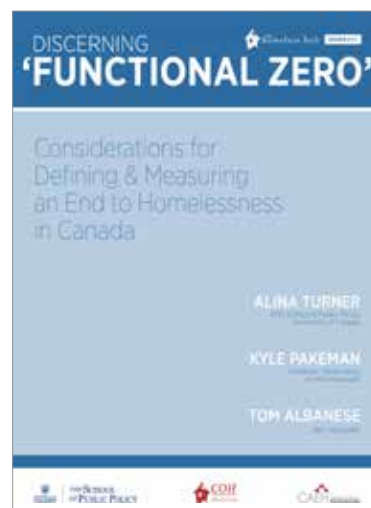
Enhanced collaboration between the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, municipalities, and Indigenous governments opens the door for a more focused and systemic response to homelessness in Canada.

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

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 13th 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 2005-2014.¹ 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**

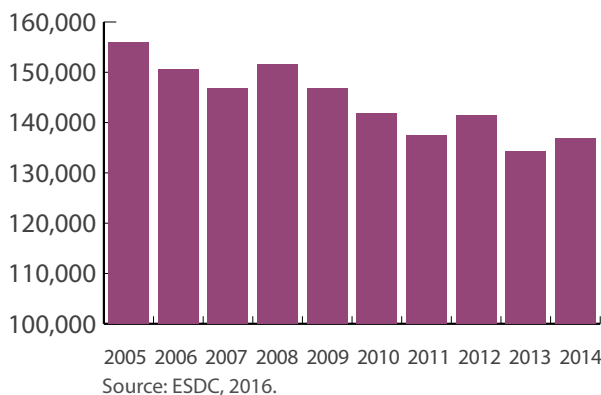
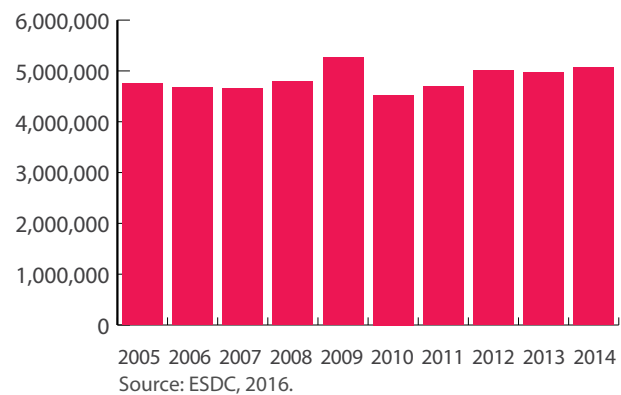


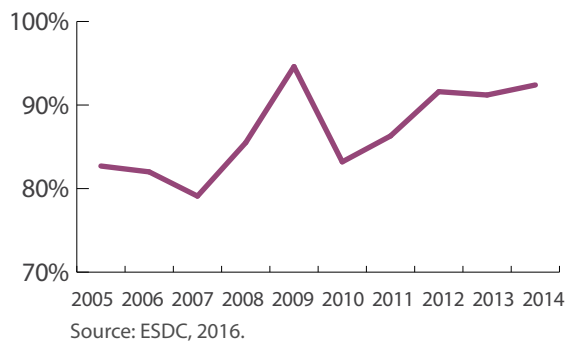
FIGURE 2 **Estimated number of annual bed nights used**



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.

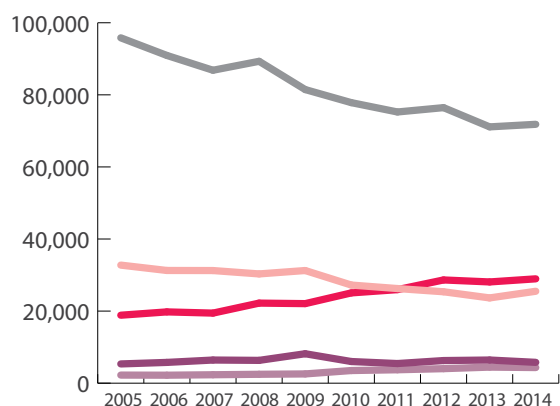
FIGURE 3 **National shelter occupancy rate**



Who is homeless?

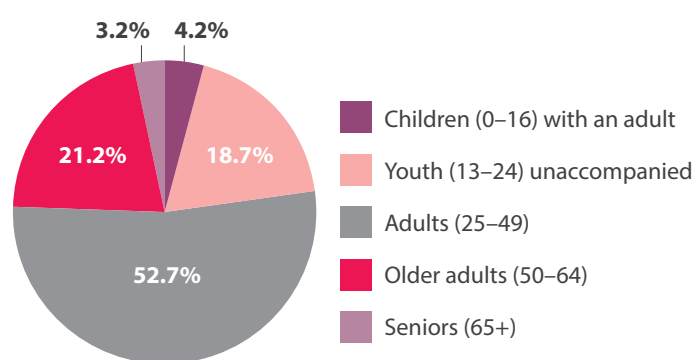
- Adults (25-49), at 52%, make up the largest age group of people who are homeless.
- Youth unaccompanied by adults (13-24), make up 18.7% of the homeless population, a decline of 2.4 percentage points since 2005.
- Women make up 27.3% of the homeless population, a figure that has not changed over the 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, 2016.² The Government of Canada is due to release the results of the consultation on November 22nd 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.

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 rights³ 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.

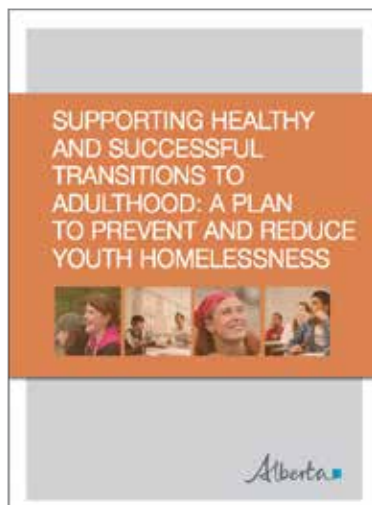


[Edmonton's Community Strategy to End Homelessness](#)

- [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.

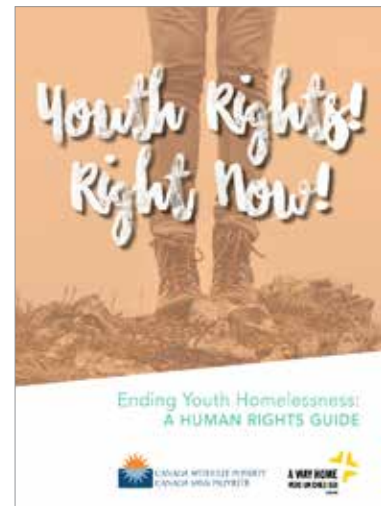
GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

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.

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).

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).

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
MAKE UP 4.3%
OF CANADIAN POPULATION



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"> Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers Represent each of Canada’s Indigenous Peoples From North and South 	February – August 2016
Phase 2	Consultation with Elders Council and 50 Regional Advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assembly of First Nations National Elders Council Regional Advisors from each of Canada’s Indigenous Peoples 	August 2016 – January 2017
Phase 3	Open National Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual Town Halls with interested stakeholders 	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
Total	7,962	14,530	22,592	43,788

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 unit⁴.

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

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

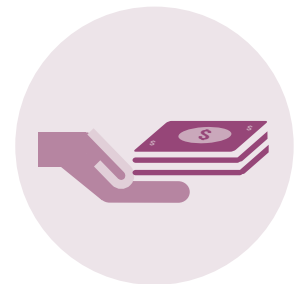
- Pre-mortgage payment program \$150 million a year;
- IAH \$600 million a year;
- Transitional support resources \$250 000 a year (five years);
- CHFA \$100 million (start up).

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.⁵ 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)	
TOTAL: \$871.08 million (625,000 recipients)	TOTAL: \$247.92 million (211,000 recipients)

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.

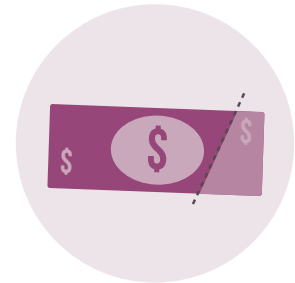
RECOMMENDATION

- \$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
TOTAL	\$3,187.9	\$2,655.6
10 Year Projection – 2017-2026		\$22,592

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)⁶

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		
TOTAL	\$349	\$3,821

6. 10 year projections adjusted for inflation

Recommendation II – Addressing the Affordable Housing Supply		
	2017-2018	10 years
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
TOTAL	\$3,272	\$35,826
Additional federal commitments for expiring CMHC social housing agreements⁷	\$1,202	\$7,962



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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