

# Comparing Housing Possibilities within a diverse homeless population

## What you need to know

For the purposes of this research, “homelessness” is defined as a situation in which an individual has no housing of his or her own and is staying in a temporary form of shelter. However, in Canada, a more broad definition including those living with others and on the street, estimates that between 150,000 and 300,000 people will experience homelessness within a year. Lack of investment by the federal government in the creation of affordable housing and reductions in social assistance are two of the main reasons for this increase in homelessness since the 1990s. Since then, the homeless population has also become more diverse. No longer represented only by single men, this population includes women, families and youth.



## What is this research about?

This research studies housing stability success of a sample of homeless individuals in Ottawa, in an effort to highlight the diversity that exists within the homeless population. It identifies the various health-related problems suffered by distinct groups of homeless individuals and examines the impact these problems have on exiting homelessness and achieving housing stability. It also attributes the rise in the Canadian homeless population to a lack of government assistance and minimal construction of affordable housing.

### ARTICLE SOURCE

Aubry, T., Klodawsky, F., & Coulombe, D. (2011). Comparing the Housing Trajectories of Different Clusters Within a Diverse Homeless Population. *American Journal of Community Psychology*.

### VISIT

[www.homelesshub.ca](http://www.homelesshub.ca)  
for more information

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## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research can be used to **inform social policy** with the goal of creating housing programs that address the diversity within the homeless population, as well as increase income support supplements and rent subsidies to help individuals overcome economic barriers that contribute to their housing instability.

It can also be used to highlight the need for creating additional affordable housing units in Canada.

## What did the researchers do?

**The researchers interviewed 329 single individuals who had experienced multiple episodes of homelessness throughout their lives.**

The participants were selected according to age and sex in an attempt to equally represent adult men and women, and male and female youth. Emergency shelters and youth drop-in centres were used to access the participants. After two years, follow-up interviews were

conducted with 197 individuals from the original sample, in order to collect data on their housing history, identify the different groups within the sample, and determine which group had experienced the most difficulty achieving housing stability.

## What did the researchers find?

**B**ased on their interview questions, the researchers found four distinct groups within the homeless population: **higher functioning** individuals, individuals with **substance abuse issues**, individuals with **mental health and substance abuse issues**, and those with **complex physical and mental health problems**.

The researchers found the largest subgroup to be free of health difficulties and appeared to be homeless largely as a result of economic reasons combined with some kind of breakdown in their housing situation.

Of the four groups, the one that experienced the **most difficulty maintaining housing** was the

group with **substance abuse issues**.

The group of higher functioning individuals, the group with mental health and substance abuse issues, and the group with complex physical and mental issues achieved similar success in housing stability. The researchers attributed this success to the increased development of services for people with severe and persistent mental illness in Ontario.

Overall, the researchers found that exiting homelessness presented the same kind of challenges for each group regardless of level of functioning or health-related issues. This suggests that homelessness is first and foremost a problem of poverty rather than health.

### ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

**Dr. Tim Aubry** is a Professor in the School of Psychology and Director and Senior Researcher at the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services at the University of Ottawa. He is also the holder of the Faculty of Social Sciences Research Chair in community mental health and homelessness. His research interests include community mental health, homelessness, mental health services and program evaluation.

