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REPORT #4



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness in Yellowknife

An Emerging Social Challenge

Nick Falvo



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Abstract

There is a considerable amount of visible homelessness in Yellowknife (NWT), yet very little third-party analysis of the situation. This report begins by briefly discussing who is homeless in Yellowknife and then outlines program responses, including emergency shelters and various models of housing. An overview will then be provided of major funding initiatives from the federal and territorial governments, as well as various forms of homelessness assistance provided by the City of Yellowknife. The report concludes by making policy recommendations with respect to the need for increased accountability, shelter standards, more housing options for the homeless, and a public health response to alcohol and drug use.

Keywords

Homeless, housing, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

Executive Summary

Throughout North America, unemployment is believed to be a major cause of homelessness (Burt et al., 2001: 8). In the Northwest Territories (NWT), an Aboriginal person—e.g. a person who is Dene, Inuit or Métis— is four times more likely than a non-Aboriginal person to be unemployed (Abele, 2009: 55). And in Yellowknife, almost all visibly homeless persons are either Dene, Inuit or Métis (Abele, Falvo and Haché, 2010: 4). Visible homelessness in Yellowknife exists on a considerable scale. The limited data that does exist suggests that Yellowknife has more homelessness per capita than is generally the case in other Canadian municipalities.

Yellowknife's emergency shelters are crowded and understaffed. In 2007-2008, a tuberculosis (TB) outbreak hit the men's emergency shelter. Fourteen cases of active TB have been associated with the outbreak, and all cases occurred with men who had stayed at the shelter (Coriveau, 2008: 1). The public health care costs attributed to this outbreak have been significant, yet men continue to sleep approximately one foot apart from one another at the shelter. Both the men's shelter and the women's shelter have just one staff person each working overnight, presenting a potentially dangerous scenario to both residents and staff.

This policy report begins by briefly looking at who makes up Yellowknife's homeless population. It then provides an overview

of Yellowknife's major program responses to homelessness, including its emergency shelters, the daytime drop-in, "transitional" housing options, Supported Independent Living Homes, Independent Living Support options and the lack of public housing available for the homeless. It then outlines major funding initiatives from both the federal and territorial governments before discussing the City of Yellowknife's role in responding to homelessness.

The report's final section discusses policy considerations. First, it recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Minister Responsible for Homelessness increase accountability by creating a homelessness secretariat. Second, it encourages all funders to keep members of the Yellowknife Homelessness Coalition abreast of all planned funding initiatives relating to homelessness in Yellowknife. Third, it recommends that the GNWT Minister Responsible for Homelessness establish a working group to develop shelter standards and provide sufficient funding so that they can be implemented. Fourth, it urges both the GNWT Minister of Health and Social Services and the GNWT Minister Responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWT HC) to create more affordable housing for the homeless. Finally, it recommends that the GNWT Minister of Health and Social Services strike a task force on substance use, with a focus on improving health outcomes of homeless persons.



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Downtown Yellowknife