

## More housing is needed for homeless in Northwest Territories

By Nick Falvo

By definition, a person needs housing to cease being homeless. And until the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) provides appropriate housing for those who need it, homelessness there won't go away.

My recent report, *Homelessness in Yellowknife: An Emerging Social Challenge*, looks at Yellowknife as a case study, but makes policy recommendations for the entire territory. Done in partnership with the Centre for Northern Families, it underlines several disturbing trends.

First, the NWT's shelters are overcrowded. At Yellowknife's emergency men's shelter, men are forced to sleep only one foot apart from one another. This occurs at the very same shelter that just a few years ago experienced a tuberculosis outbreak. The outbreak resulted in 14 active cases and cost the the NWT's health care system roughly half-a-million dollars to respond to.

Second, the NWT's shelters are understaffed. At Yellowknife's men's shelter, just one staff person works the overnight shift alongside as many as 50 residents. What would happen if there were a fire in the middle of the night? How would one staff person help move 50 people — many of whom

are intoxicated — outside to safety in a matter of minutes?

Third, most homeless people in Yellowknife are not eligible for public housing. Such units are prioritized for persons who are either physically disabled or over the age of 60. As a result, when a vacancy occurs for a bachelor or one-bedroom unit, a homeless person without dependents who does not meet one of the above criteria has never — and will never — access a unit under the current system.

Granted, the recently-developed Bailey House transitional housing program in Yellowknife is effective at housing some, but it is ineffective at housing others. Its strict rules around being "clean and sober" are unrealistic for a substantial number of homeless persons; and, largely for this reason, there were 10 evictions in its first year of operation alone. Considering it has just 32 units, that's a staggering statistic.

Fortunately, my report finds that there are indeed solutions that work

in the NWT. One such solution is "supported housing," where formerly-homeless persons live in independent apartments with some staff assistance. A case in point is the Independent Living Support model run by the YWCA.

The report's findings suggest that such supported housing options not only result in quality of life improvements, but are also far more cost-effective than alternatives. For example, keeping a person in supported housing typically costs less than one-quarter the cost of keeping that same person in prison, a detention centre, or a hospital.

Most of the report's policy recommendations are directed at the GNWT's

**"The Northwest Territories' shelters are overcrowded and understaffed, and most homeless people in Yellowknife are not eligible for public housing."**


Minister Responsible for Homelessness. One key recommendation concerns already-existing shelters. The report recommends that the GNWT consult with local

stakeholders to develop standards for all emergency shelters in the territory. Such standards would prevent people from sleeping in unhealthy conditions. They would also call for adequate staffing. It is recommended that such standards be put in place and that the GNWT provide the necessary implementation funding.

Another recommendation concerns housing options. The report recommends that the GNWT make more supported housing options available to the homeless. There is currently a long waiting list for the YWCA's Independent Living Support units. There shouldn't be.

The solutions to homelessness are no more complex than any other public policy issue. They require time, sufficient funding, and attention to what has worked.

They also require an honest look at what *hasn't* worked.

(Nick Falvo is a Ph.D Candidate at Carleton University's School of Public Policy and Administration. His recent report on homelessness can be found at [www.homelesshub.ca/yellowknife](http://www.homelesshub.ca/yellowknife)). 

### Anti-wind disinformation campaign is contradicted

A report recently released by Sierra Club Canada factually disproves the anti-wind-power propaganda being disseminated by Wind Concerns Ontario.

The report reviews the latest medical and scientific research into the health and environmental impacts of wind turbines, and concludes there is no scientific justification for placing a moratorium on turbines in Ontario, as the Wind Concerns group demands.

"The municipalities that called for such a moratorium did so at the urging of residents who were frightened and misled about alleged negative health effects," said John Bennett, executive director of Sierra Club Canada.

"We looked at this issue very closely and the reality is there is no evidence to support the claims against wind turbines," he added. "Noise, infra-sound, and 'shadow flicker' have no impact on people's health. Rural Ontarians are being sold a bill of goods when it comes to wind energy. There is no place for disinformation in public dialogue, and politicians panning to take advantage of it in the coming provincial election should be ashamed."

Sierra Club Canada remains strongly supportive of wind turbines, but stresses the importance of locating them away from residences and known migratory bird flyways.