



ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE

QUÉBEC

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# Homelessness in Québec

Self-assigned mandate

Consultation document

JULY 2008

SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE



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# SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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The Social Affairs Committee is one of the 11 standing parliamentary committees of the National Assembly of Québec. Under its power of initiative, the Committee may consider any matter of public interest that falls within its policy field, which covers social and community services, income security, health, family and the status of women.

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# A WORD FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

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Homelessness: the word itself brings to mind those most in need, who live on the fringes of society where the meaning of “social exclusion” becomes very real. In a society as rich as ours that has a state-provided social security net for all its members, the sight of homeless people on the streets is a troubling one. We, the members of the Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, representing all three political parties, are concerned by the plight of the homeless in Québec and wish to participate actively in a much needed public debate on the subject. Accordingly, on April 29, 2008, we unanimously adopted a self-assigned mandate to examine the problem of homelessness in Québec.

As part of this mandate, a special consultation will be held in the fall of 2008 during which we will hear various bodies, including community organizations that serve the homeless. We wish to meet with a number of these organizations to see for ourselves what kind of services they offer and what kind of measures are in place to prevent and remedy homelessness. Because this mandate is for them, we want more than anything to hear individuals who are or have been homeless in order to give this often voiceless portion of the population an opportunity to meet their elected representatives and talk about the realities of their own lives.

All Quebecers will be welcome to take part in the debate via an online consultation to be held through the National Assembly website in conjunction with the public hearings. In a rare departure from the usual process, some hearings will be held elsewhere than the Parliament Building, in Montréal, Gatineau and Trois-Rivières—a decision fuelled by our ongoing concern to bring Parliament closer to the people. These hearings will also give us an opportunity to get a first-hand look at the situation in those cities.

Though initially limited to urban Montréal, homelessness has now spread to a number of Québec’s regions. And those who work with the homeless have come to the unsettling conclusion that the phenomenon is growing, diversifying and becoming increasingly complex. It is up to all of us—parliamentarians, stakeholders and citizens—to find solutions to prevent and root out a phenomenon that stems from more than poverty alone.

We thank all of those who will take the time to participate in the Committee proceedings so that homelessness will be and will remain at the heart of our society’s concerns.

*Geoffrey Kelley*

Member for Jacques-Cartier and  
Chair of the Social Affairs Committee



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# INTRODUCTION

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While homelessness is not new in Québec, no up-to-date data is available to provide a documented picture of the problem. Those in the field, however, say homelessness has changed over the years. It has expanded in the large urban centres and reached smaller communities, so that it now affects a wider range of people who are worse off than ever.

One thing, however, is certain: public debate on homelessness can be postponed no longer. The complex problems associated with it must come under close scrutiny so that solutions can be proposed and implemented with a view to eliminating its chronic form and preventing its development.

Homelessness presents a dual challenge to society, that of fostering social inclusion and encouraging the exercise of citizenship. It raises the whole question of society's responsibility to give all its citizens the right to live in humanly acceptable conditions. To paraphrase Reva Gerstein,<sup>1</sup> the true measure of our civilization rests not on the beauty of our cities but on how we care for our society's most vulnerable members.

As we shall see, to help our fellow citizens out of homelessness, we must make further efforts and find new ways of doing things. It is in this vein that this document was prepared—to inform reflection on the phenomenon. It first briefly defines what is meant by homelessness and presents the available data on homelessness in Québec. It goes on to describe the homeless population and touches on explanatory factors and associated problems. It next provides a portrait of the situation in Montréal and in other regions. It then outlines the types of intervention and services offered by the main actors, and concludes with a discussion of possible avenues and solutions to consider.

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1. Reva Gerstein is the chair and founder of the Gerstein Centre, which provides crisis intervention to adults living in the City of Toronto who experience mental health problems.



# 1. DEFINITION AND SCOPE

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Homelessness has been the subject of a fair amount of research in recent decades, including studies conducted by the UQAM Collectif de recherche sur l'itinérance, la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (CRI), which have laid important milestones for understanding the phenomenon and uncovering possible solutions.<sup>2</sup> More recently, the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS), in collaboration with its institutional and community partners, has carried out research with a view to creating a policy framework for homelessness in Québec.

To fully understand the problem of homelessness, one must first define it. According to the CRI researchers, there is no consensus on the definition of homelessness and its description is more a sociological construct than an administrative designation. The group of partners working on the MSSS policy framework defines a homeless person as someone who does not have a fixed address or access to stable, safe, salubrious housing, has a very low income, is discriminated against where access to services is concerned, has physical or mental health problems, substance abuse or domestic violence problems, is socially disorganized and does not belong to a stable membership group.<sup>3</sup>

Homelessness is becoming more diverse in its manifestations. Three types are generally recognized:

- ✓ **"situational homelessness"** describes the state of people who are temporarily homeless but generally have a dwelling;
- ✓ **"cyclical homelessness"** is used with reference to people who go back and forth between living on the street and having a dwelling;
- ✓ **"chronic homelessness"**, the most visible type, applies to those who have been without stable housing for an extended period of time.

The scope of homelessness in Québec is hard to measure. The last attempt to quantify the phenomenon dates back to 1998-1999.<sup>4</sup> This data showed that 12,666 of the 28,314 individuals who had used a resource for the homeless in Montréal had been without a fixed address in the previous year. For Québec City, the figure was 3,589 out of 11,295.

The problem is most severe by far in Montréal, where resources and services for the homeless, though better organized than elsewhere in the province, remain insufficient to meet the demand. In its 2006-2007 annual report, the Old Brewery Mission noted an increase of 1,037 clients over the previous year; another Montréal shelter took in some 60 additional persons per month compared to the previous year.<sup>5</sup>

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2. The findings and possible solutions set out in this document are largely based on the CRI studies.

3. The definition formulated by the Comité des sans-abri de la ville de Montréal in 1987, cited by the Comité interministériel sur l'itinérance in 1993, included a reference to a 60-day period of homelessness.

4. L. Fournier, ed., *Enquête auprès de la clientèle des ressources pour personnes itinérantes des régions de Montréal-Centre et de Québec, 1998-1999*, 2 vols. (Sainte-Foy: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2001).

5. Based on the information provided by the shelter.

Recent studies have shown that homelessness is increasing and spreading to more and more regions.<sup>6</sup> This is the case, among others, for the Québec City, Montérégie, Laurentides, Lanaudière and Laval regions.

Researchers, decision makers and field workers acknowledge that the problem is getting worse: homeless people are increasingly young and come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and the phenomenon generally is becoming ever more complex.

**Questions to ponder:**

1. Is the lack of reliable statistics on homelessness in Québec likely to hinder effective public action?
2. The last study that attempted to measure homelessness in Québec was conducted in 1998-1999. Do you believe a new study of the same type is necessary, with specific criteria for each region?
3. Should such a study be conducted, could you participate in the data collection segment? If not, what would prevent you from participating?
4. Do you believe the Government should take measures to eliminate chronic homelessness? If not, why not? If so, do you have any suggestions as to what measures it should take?

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6. D. Laberge, ed., *L'errance urbaine*, Collection la santé et le bien-être (Sainte-Foy : Éditions MultiMondes, 2000); S. Roy, R. Hurtubise and M. Rozier, *Itinérance en Montérégie: comprendre le phénomène et identifier les besoins*, Les cahiers du CRI (Montréal: UQAM, Groupe de recherche sur l'itinérance, la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale, 2003); P. Carle and L. Bélanger-Dion, *Rapport de recherche sur la population itinérante et sans domicile fixe des Laurentides* (Saint-Jérôme: CLSC-CHSLD des Trois-Vallées, 2003); L. Tassé, *Exclusion sociale, itinérance et errance dans la région de Lanaudière : ces enfants et ces adultes, des périlleux voyageements* (Saint-Charles Borromée: Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Lanaudière, Direction de santé publique et d'évaluation, Service de surveillance, recherche et évaluation, October 2003); J.-P. Fortin, *L'itinérance à Laval: état de situation 2000* (Laval: Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Laval, 2000).

## 2. THE HOMELESS POPULATION

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**Men** still account for the largest group within the homeless population. While the image of an old drunk lying on a park bench still has a basis in reality, homelessness has broadened and diversified. It now affects women, young people and Aboriginals. And even if homeless people often turn to shelters and similar organizations in the downtown core of our cities, some still seek refuge in public places such as parks, malls and out-of-the-way spots.

Research shows that the percentage of **women** among the homeless is growing. Women's pathways into homelessness are different from men's in certain aspects such as domestic violence. According to the 1998-1999 study, women represented 28% of Montréal's homeless and 37% of Québec City's homeless.

The percentage of homeless **minors and young adults** is also growing. Their homelessness is often transitional and due to such factors as domestic violence, repeated placements, family breakdowns, neglect and substance abuse. A study released in 2004<sup>7</sup> found that "street youth are a hard-to-reach population. They are often excluded from residence- or school-based surveys due to their unstable living conditions and their limited interaction with the education system. They are economically and socially marginalized because of their age, homeless status and lack of education and job skills."<sup>8</sup> In 2007, a survey of 4,728 street youth in Canada conducted by the Public Health Agency of Canada<sup>9</sup> reported a ratio of about 2 males to 1 female in all survey years. Thirty percent of the street youth surveyed were Aboriginal.

The proportion of **Aboriginals** in Québec who have left their home communities is estimated at 37%. Of these, the percentage experiencing adjustment difficulties is unknown. Val-d'Or, recognized as a model of Aboriginal integration, is one of the main hubs for Aboriginals. Montréal is home to most of those living in an urban centre.<sup>10</sup>

Montréal's draft 2007-2012 intersectoral homelessness action plan states that more and more Aboriginals are living on the street in Montréal and that thought must be given to finding the approaches that work best in light of past experiences with this population.

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7. E. Roy et al., "Mortality in a Cohort of Street Youth in Montreal," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 292, no. 5 (August 2004): pp. 569-574.

8. Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, *Who Are Canada's Street Youth? A Socio-demographic Snapshot from E-SYS*, E-SYS Quick Facts (Ottawa, 2006), p. 1, [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sti-its-surv-epi/qf-fr/pdf/sd\\_e.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sti-its-surv-epi/qf-fr/pdf/sd_e.pdf).

9. Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, *Canadian Street Youth and Substance Use: Findings from Enhanced Surveillance of Canadian Street Youth, 1999-2003* (Ottawa, 2007), p. 4, [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sti-its-surv-epi/report07/pdf/csy07\\_e.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sti-its-surv-epi/report07/pdf/csy07_e.pdf).

10. Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec, *Portrait de la littératie dans le Mouvement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec* (Wendake, 2008), p. 26.

**Questions to ponder:**

5. What segments of the population are most affected by homelessness in your region?
6. Do you feel the services offered meet the needs of the homeless in your region?

### 3. EXPLANATORY FACTORS AND PROBLEMS

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Homelessness has many faces. Studies on the subject, including those conducted by the CRI, agree that there are multiple factors behind the phenomenon. Three major explanatory factors have been observed, and four types of problems are associated with these factors.<sup>11</sup>

- 1. Structural factors:** Structural factors such as impoverishment, the housing shortage and low income make people vulnerable and at risk. Despite the Government's efforts, there is not enough social housing to meet current needs. Funding for community assistance services is insufficient and sometimes a long time coming, which may put certain projects in jeopardy. Also, the promoters of social housing projects every so often come up against what is known as the "not-in-my-backyard" syndrome.
- 2. Individual factors:** Relationship problems, family conflict, divorce, violence, sexual abuse, repeated placements in residential centres or shelters, when combined with other factors, can make a person vulnerable to the point of putting him or her on the path to the street. This is particularly true for individuals who are isolated and no longer have ties with their family or community. According to certain studies,<sup>12</sup> between 50% and 75% of street youth have had dealings with the youth protection system, the Direction de la protection de la jeunesse (DPJ).
- 3. Institutional factors:** Deinstitutionalization, non-institutionalization, court-related problems, criminalization and family breakdown or blending are examples of institutional factors. The wave of psychiatric hospital closures in the 1990s played a role in shaping the profile of street people in the major cities and in Montréal in particular. More recently, we have seen an increase in homeless people's dealings with the court system. The homeless are getting more fines for offences in public places and are sent to jail more often and for longer periods of time. That the homeless share the same space with other city dwellers is the cause of considerable tension that threatens to upset the urban balance.

Four types of problems are associated with these factors:

- 1. Physical health:** Homeless people often have physical health problems related to their lifestyle, including problems due to their always being on the move, their exposure to extreme weather and a lack of adequate hygiene.

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11. S. Roy and C. Grimard, *L'itinérance : une question complexe. Survol de la littérature scientifique* (Montréal: Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal, September 2006).

12. J. Powers et al., "Maltreatment Among Runaway and Homeless Youth," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 14, no. 1 (1990), pp. 87–98; M. Kennedy, "Homeless and Runaway Youth Mental Health Issues: No Access to the System," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 12, no. 7 (1991), pp. 576–579; P. Shane, "A Sample of Homeless and Runaway Youth in New Jersey and Their Health Status," *Journal of Health and Social Policy* 2, no. 4, pp. 73–82; M. Robert, R. Pausé and L. Fournier, "Factors Associated with Homelessness of Adolescents Under Supervision of the Youth Protection System," *Journal of Adolescence* 28 (2005), pp. 215–230.



2. **Mental health:** It is estimated that 30% to 40% of the homeless have mental health problems and 10% suffer from severe and persistent mental illness.<sup>13</sup>
3. **Alcohol and drug addiction:** Substance abuse is closely intertwined with homelessness. It may be the reason why a person ended up on the street, a consequence of life on the street or an aggravating factor. The 1998-1999 study revealed that 46% of street people have an alcohol or drug problem.<sup>14</sup> Field workers note that, increasingly, pathological gambling is also driving people to the street.
4. **Court-related problems:** The increasing number of public space offences that are legislated, combined with panhandling, prostitution and drug-selling offences, is an aggravating factor resulting in more homeless people being brought before the courts.

These explanatory factors and associated problems provide a glimpse of the complex challenges field workers face every day in dealing with individuals that have no fixed address, very often no health insurance card, and no money. And yet the key to finding the most appropriate solutions lies in our capacity to take the whole array of problems into account.

**Questions to ponder:**

7. Can you provide examples of measures taken in or outside Québec that have had a positive impact on homelessness?
8. Given that between 50% and 75% of street youth have had dealings with the youth protection system, what form of assistance should be available to youth who have turned 18 and are no longer under DPJ supervision in order to keep them off the street?

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13. J. Frankish, S. Hwang and D. Quantz, "Homelessness and Health in Canada: Research Lessons and Priorities," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 96 (March–April 2005), pp. S23–S29; S. W. Hwang and J. R. Dunn, "Homeless People," ed. S. Galea and D. Vlahov, *Handbook of Urban Health: Populations, Methods and Practice* (New York City: Springer, 2005), pp. 19–41; W. Breaky, "Mental Illness and Health," in *Encyclopedia of Homelessness*, ed. D. Levinson (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004), pp. 383–387; M. Burt et al., *Helping America's Homeless* (Washington: Urban Institute Press, 2001); Canada, Health Canada, *The Mentally Ill and the Criminal Justice System: Innovative Community-Based Programs 1995*, report prepared by Carol Milstone (Ottawa, 1995).

14. Fournier, *Enquête auprès de la clientèle*.

## 4. SITUATION IN MONTRÉAL AND ELSEWHERE

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Though the seriousness of the problem varies widely from region to region, homelessness exhibits common features no matter where it is found.

**Montréal** is characterized by a high concentration of chronic homelessness. Resources for the homeless are more abundant but subject to greater pressure and so system costs are higher. Homelessness now extends beyond the downtown core and has reached certain outlying neighbourhoods.

Also, Montréal attracts homeless people from other regions. During the summer season especially, youth come to the big city, looking for new experiences. In 2003, Céline Bellot, a researcher at the International Centre for Comparative Criminology of the Université de Montréal, noted in her study on street youth that it was important to monitor this summer vagrancy to prevent its becoming chronic.<sup>15</sup>

Homelessness can also be observed in **Québec City**. The homelessness community action plan for the Capitale-Nationale region released in September 2007 reported that most of the organizations in the region had identified their clientele as situationally or cyclically homeless, and that a significant number of people were chronically homeless.

Homelessness also affects other towns and cities in Québec and services are already in place to respond to various problems. Eleven regions—Montréal, Québec, Laval, Lanaudière, Outaouais, Montérégie, Laurentides, Estrie, Trois-Rivières and Drummondville, Chaudière-Appalaches and Saguenay—have received funding under the federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCOI)/Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS)<sup>16</sup> implemented in Québec in 2001.

The reference materials used to draft the 2007-2009 regional concerted action plans to combat homelessness prepared as part of the HPS provide a snapshot of homelessness in the regions. For example:

- ✓ The number of homeless in the **Outaouais** region is growing, according to field workers, and now includes not only individuals with multiple problems, but also families, young people, women and seniors. The housing shortage and high rent are considered the main causes. [*Translation*] "As Ottawa and Gatineau are across from each other on either side of the Ontario-Québec border, people are moving to the Outaouais on the Québec side, where rent is cheaper though rising and this population shift is compounding the housing problem." Entraide familiale de l'Outaouais, a family assistance organization that mainly distributes furniture and clothing, has doubled its activities since 2001 to meet the needs of low-income households.

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15. C. Bellot, "Les jeunes de la rue: disparition ou retour des enjeux de classe?", *Lien social et politique*—RIAC 49 (Spring 2003), pp. 173–182.

16. See Chapter 5 for more details about these federal programs.

- ✓ In **Trois-Rivières**, homelessness is described as [*Translation*] “growing, becoming more complex and diversifying. The problem has persisted over the years, but effective measures can prevent its development”. The Centre Le Havre, a 24/7 emergency shelter, has seen its client base increase considerably over the last five years, with women consistently accounting for 20%.
- ✓ In **Drummondville**, historically, [*Translation*] “our client base has consisted mainly of homeless adult males but today we are seeing more and more women, young people, seniors and families. These people are among the hidden homeless, in emergency shelters or at risk of homelessness. Part of our clientele is also on the street”.
- ✓ In **Sherbrooke**, [*Translation*] “field workers in the various sectors are better able to recognize homelessness among those who use their services [...] The homeless exhibit three concurrent characteristics: major problems in maintaining stable housing, problems obtaining or using appropriate services, which translates into their moving from one service to the next, and living conditions marked by poverty, physical or mental health problems, violence, substance abuse, etc.”

In short, a number of regions are affected by hidden homelessness, where people fall back on their own resourcefulness, cope on a day-to-day basis, use emergency resources as needed or turn to a family member or friend for help to compensate for their housing instability and the lack of resources. In certain regions, the distance between towns and cities isolates the homeless and so contributes to their invisibility.

**Question to ponder:**

9. Do you believe homelessness is growing in your region? If so, what is the basis for your belief?

## 5. MAIN ACTORS AND SERVICES OFFERED

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The last 30 plus years have seen a wide variety of community and institutional services emerge in Québec to provide assistance to the homeless.

However, 1987, proclaimed International Year of Shelter for the Homeless by the United Nations, was a turning point. In Québec, new partners mobilized and the first stepping stones toward intersectoral action were laid. That same year, the Société d'habitation du Québec (the Québec housing corporation or SHQ), together with the municipalities, developed a social housing plan for the homeless that featured built-in community support. Montréal adopted a homelessness policy and created a homeless committee.

The federal and provincial governments and the municipalities all have a role to play in combatting homelessness.

- In Canada, social services are under provincial jurisdiction. In Québec, the onus is therefore chiefly on the provincial government, which has the means at its disposal to provide health and social services, income security, access to housing and solutions to the court-related problems of the homeless.
- The federal government's channel for action is through its spending power.
- The municipalities play a key role in their areas of jurisdiction, which include housing, public security and social development.

### **Government and municipal action**

#### ➤ **The federal government**

In 1999, the federal government examined the situation of the homeless in Canada's major cities. A Canada-Québec agreement was then signed in 2001 to put in place various projects to provide services, housing facilities and support in Québec's regions.

Federal funding for the projects was provided through the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCOI) which, on April 1, 2007, was continued as the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) with substantially the same priorities. This initiative, co-managed by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) and the National Secretariat on Homelessness, involves a number of institutional and community actors as well as the regions of Québec that are most affected by homelessness. Over \$150 million has been granted to date to fund various projects, in keeping with the priorities set by all the partners in the regions concerned.

Two other federal initiatives have been instrumental in improving conditions for the homeless. The first of these is the Affordable Housing Initiative, funds from which are used

under Québec's social and community housing program, Accès-Logis, to provide rooms, studios and apartments for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

The other is the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), which provides a portion of the funding for Renovation Québec, a program run by the SHQ that, among other things, provides financial assistance for the rehabilitation or renovation of private rooming houses and for community housing projects for the homeless.

All three federal programs—the HPS, the Affordable Housing Initiative and the RRAP—expire in March 2009.

### ➤ **The Québec government**

In its 1992 Policy on Health and Well-Being, the Government ranked homelessness as one of Québec's major social problems. The National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion, announced in 2002, made social housing the anchor point for reaching people at risk. It acknowledged the growth of social problems such as violence, homelessness and alcohol and drug addiction as being the root causes of certain health problems. The *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, out of which the Strategy grew, provides for various measures to strengthen the social and economic safety net. One such measure consists in "facilitating the availability of decent and affordable housing through housing assistance measures or the development of social housing for the socially disadvantaged, including the homeless, and strengthening community support for those persons."<sup>17</sup>

The main responsibility for monitoring homelessness in Québec lies with the MSSS, though a number of other government departments and bodies are also involved. The health and social services network is an active supplier of services to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. The health and social services centres (or CSSSs, for "centres de santé et de services sociaux") in Montréal, Québec City, Sherbrooke, Gatineau and Laval all offer varying levels of services to the homeless in their respective territories. The CSSS Jeanne-Mance de Montréal, formerly the CLSC Centre-ville, was the first, in 1990, to be given a mandate to meet the needs of the homeless.

While homelessness was not among the national priorities to be pursued as part of the health and social services reform in 2003, the introduction by the MSSS of services networking, populational responsibility and services hierarchy planning enables a better assessment of the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.<sup>18</sup> These people can get help through programs that target physical health, mental health, at-risk youth and addictions.

A policy framework on homelessness in Québec should be adopted shortly, following large-scale work conducted by the main actors in the area of homelessness under the aegis of the MSSS. The aims of the policy framework will be to better understand homelessness as it

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17. *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, R.S.Q., c. L-7, s. 9, par. 5.

18. Services networking has translated into the creation of local services networks. The populational approach, now applied by the CSSS, requires that intervention be based on an analysis of the needs of the population in the territory served and of the contribution that services can make to its health and well-being. The purpose of services hierarchy planning is to provide people who need specialized services that cannot be delivered locally with access to those services through service agreements between the CSSS concerned and other partners or groups that provide the services required. The goal is to create an interface between locally delivered services and specialized services.

exists in the various regions of Québec, to set goals, to design strategic measures to prevent homelessness and intensify efforts on behalf of the homeless population, and to mobilize the networks concerned. An interministerial task force has been set up to draft a homelessness action plan.<sup>19</sup>

The SHQ has played a central role in the area of social housing. Despite the federal government's withdrawal from that sphere of activity in 1994, Québec, along with British Columbia on a more modest scale, has stayed the course, offering social housing programs intended to meet the most pressing needs. Several major projects have been completed with the help of other partners. Social housing with built-in community support has emerged strongly as a solution for homeless individuals with multiple problems.

In that respect, the protocol established in 2002 between Ville de Montréal, the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal, the SHQ and the Ministère des Affaires municipales et de la Métropole to provide funding for community support for social housing was a success. It also led to the development, in 2007, of the Government's policy framework on community support for social housing, which involved the main players in the health and social services and social and community housing networks.

Some of the employability initiatives put in place by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale in collaboration with shelters and safe houses help the homeless learn how to manage their income from social security benefits. Other initiatives help them re-enter the job market. *L'Itinéraire* and *La Quête*, the street magazines distributed in the cities of Montréal and Québec, are outgrowths of such initiatives.

Agreements between the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and community organizations to allow street youth to follow an adapted school program in settings such as Le Bon Dieu dans la Rue in Montréal and Maison Dauphine in Québec, are other examples of promising initiatives.

Lastly, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse struck a tripartite task force to examine the situation of the homeless and propose lasting solutions. The task force released its report in April 2006.<sup>20</sup> The report suggests a number of projects such as regulating policing in the Montréal subway system, creating a street intervention team, finding alternatives to prison and enhancing police training. So far, a legal aid clinic to help the homeless navigate the court system has been field-tested in Montréal.

### ➤ **The municipalities**

The 2006 annual report of the Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ) outlines certain concerns of elected municipal representatives in connection with the problem of poverty. The UMQ is continuing its work on the board of directors of the Fonds québécois d'habitation communautaire. The mission of this community housing fund is to coordinate the efforts of all

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19. The task force consists of representatives of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Ministère des Affaires municipales et des Régions, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, the Ministère de la Sécurité publique, the Ministère de la Justice, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and the Société d'habitation du Québec.

20. The Commission struck the task force in response to demands by organizations in the homelessness sector for an inquiry into alleged discrimination against the homeless in Montréal.

the actors in the housing sector in order to encourage the development and maintenance of affordable community housing. Although certain municipalities provide assistance to social and community housing organizations through their social and community development arm, data on the nature and scope of this assistance is unavailable.

Montréal's efforts to help the homeless are substantial, whether in terms of representing their interests or of social development, public spaces, housing and public security. To follow up on a recommendation of the city council's standing committee on cultural development and quality of life, which held public hearings on homelessness in April 2008,<sup>21</sup> the city is demanding urgent action by the governments to alleviate chronic homelessness in its territory and to support measures to promote the harmonious cohabitation of all city dwellers.

The implementation of the draft 2007-2012 intersectoral homelessness action plan is one of the city's priorities. To date, the city has been very active in adopting various measures. It has, for example, through its Accès-Logis program, which was created in 1997, launched an operation to deliver 5,000 social housing units, 611 of which are to go to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

## **Community organizations**

A number of community organizations are dedicated solely to the cause of the homeless. The Réseau solidarité itinérance du Québec (RSIQ), founded in 1998, promotes information sharing, consultation and concerted action on homelessness throughout Québec. The solidarity network supports and represents more than 200 community organizations that work with the homeless, the oldest being the Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM), which was created in 1974.

The SCOI/HPS programs led to the creation of homelessness partnership tables whose role is to facilitate information sharing and networking among the institutional and community resources in different regions. Since the start of these programs, a gamut of services has been developed to prevent homelessness and meet urgent needs.

Community organizations actually pioneered emergency services to meet the immediate, daily needs of the homeless. Over the years, the larger, well known shelters, such as the Old Brewery Mission, the Welcome Hall Mission and Maison du père in Montréal, and the Maison de Lauberivière in Québec City, have put together programs to help people out of homelessness. They can thus quickly refer occasional users of their services to a program in order to prevent their sliding into chronic homelessness. The Old Brewery Mission's short-term transitional program, "L'Étape", is a good example, with 700 or so men and women participating in 2007-2008.

Some community organizations have trailers or vans that drive around city streets to offer a cup of coffee and a helping hand. Other organizations are on the street looking for people in need. Specialized resources base their operations in the area with the highest concentration of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Social housing apartments with community support are being set up in various neighbourhoods.

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21. The committee made 26 recommendations to the city council.

Across Québec, community organizations are working to help street youth by providing emergency shelters, support and referral services, school programs and other forms of assistance. Shelters for women are also up and running in all the regions. Shelters such as Le Refuge des jeunes in Montréal, La Piaule in Drummondville and Squat Basse-Ville in Québec are front-line resources for at-risk youth in their regions.

Everywhere, activities focus mainly on shelter, food and clothing, support and referral services, community work and homeless rights advocacy. They are carried on in all the regions concerned, at levels of intensity that vary according to the needs and the resources available.

**Questions to ponder:**

10. What problems does the nonrecurrence of funding for homeless assistance programs pose in your region?
11. What are the most urgent funding needs?
12. How can the different levels of government measure the effectiveness of community action? What effectiveness benchmarks could be used?
13. Do you feel that the problem of homelessness is receiving sufficient attention from the municipal authorities in your region? Please explain your answer.





## 6. PERSPECTIVES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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A multiplicity and variety of resources are required to alleviate homelessness and these resources may only be provided through partnering and concerted action. Everyone must pull together in the same direction and that is why many are calling for a clear policy. A homelessness policy framework has been prepared under the aegis of the MSSS. This framework, whose adoption is much anticipated, should mobilize the networks concerned, support a series of measures to reinforce prevention, address urgent situations, intensify efforts to help people out of homelessness and back into society, and improve knowledge, research and training in the field.

Those in the field stress that their actions cannot be effective unless the Government takes a global, intersectoral approach. In 2006, the RSIQ adopted a platform of demands, entitled *Pour une politique en itinérance*, which urged several government departments and municipal branches to take action. The RSIQ called for a Québec homelessness policy that would address such issues as income, lodging, education and health. This demand is consistent with the recommendations made by Montréal's standing committee on cultural development and quality of life mentioned earlier.

Montréal supports the Québec government in its talks with the federal government for the renewal of specific programs for the homeless. At its February 25, 2008 sitting, the Montréal city council backed the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in seeking [*Translation*] "a predictable, sustained and long-term financial commitment for 2008-2017 by the federal government and a comprehensive, coherent action plan for housing development and homelessness prevention that affords communities the flexibility to develop solutions that meet local needs".

The fact that funding is insufficient and sometimes nonrecurrent is a major problem for community organizations that work with the homeless as their services are always vulnerable to uncertain funding. It is a serious hurdle for community organizations or non-profit organizations in the housing sector, for example, as they never know ahead of time whether they will have the funds they need for their projects. Insufficient funding also creates problems in personnel training and retention and means no respite for those on the front lines.

To combat homelessness effectively, prevention must remain at the heart of government action. The departments concerned must, within their respective purviews, consider the risks associated with homelessness so that no one in Québec will be left out on the street.

**Questions to ponder:**

- 14.** How should government action emphasize prevention? What measures in your region hold the most promise for preventing homelessness? Is there enough social housing with community support in your region?
- 15.** What would you describe as being a satisfactory result of government action to promote social reintegration?
- 16.** Do you think a government policy on homelessness is necessary? Please explain your answer.
- 17.** What should the broad lines of such a policy be?
- 18.** What sort of monitoring entity should the Government set up to ensure that the policy is pursued in a spirit of long-term, intersectoral collaboration?
- 19.** What means should be proposed to foster collaboration among workers in the various networks (health and social services, housing, justice, education, employment and income security)?
- 20.** How could the training of field workers be improved?

## CONCLUSION

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We would like, at the outcome of this consultation, to propose realistic, concrete solutions to the problem of homelessness, solutions that will have lasting effects, whether it be a matter of helping the homeless find their way back to their communities, developing social reintegration programs, facilitating access to school or the job market, providing more social housing with community support, keeping the homeless out of the court system or optimizing the resources already in place.

Accordingly, we intend to make recommendations and submit them to the appropriate authorities. Above all, we hope to find innovative avenues for action to inspire an exemplary policy on homelessness.

Homelessness still afflicts too many Quebecers and the few questions that we have put forward for reflection do not even begin to cover all its aspects. We therefore invite you to consider not only our thoughts on the subject but also any other question that may help shed light on this increasingly worrisome problem.

We intend to put the results of this reflection process to good use to support public authorities, the actors in the different networks and the public in their efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness.



## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

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1. Is the lack of reliable statistics on homelessness in Québec likely to hinder effective public action?
2. The last study that attempted to measure homelessness in Québec was conducted in 1998-1999. Do you believe a new study of the same type is necessary, with specific criteria for each region?
3. Should such a study be conducted, could you participate in the data collection segment? If not, what would prevent you from participating?
4. Do you believe the Government should take measures to eliminate chronic homelessness? If not, why not? If so, do you have any suggestions as to what measures it should take?
5. What segments of the population are most affected by homelessness in your region?
6. Do you feel the services offered meet the needs of the homeless in your region?
7. Can you provide examples of measures taken in or outside Québec that have had a positive impact on homelessness?
8. Given that between 50% and 75% of street youth have had dealings with the youth protection system, what form of assistance should be available to youth who have turned 18 and are no longer under DPJ supervision in order to keep them off the street?
9. Do you believe homelessness is growing in your region? If so, what is the basis for your belief?
10. What problems does the nonrecurrence of funding for homeless assistance programs pose in your region?
11. What are the most urgent funding needs?
12. How can the different levels of government measure the effectiveness of community action? What effectiveness benchmarks could be used?
13. Do you feel that the problem of homelessness is receiving sufficient attention from the municipal authorities in your region? Please explain your answer.
14. How should government action emphasize prevention? What measures in your region hold the most promise for preventing homelessness? Is there enough social housing with community support in your region?
15. What would you describe as being a satisfactory result of government action to promote social reintegration?

16. Do you think a government policy on homelessness is necessary? Please explain your answer.
17. What should the broad lines of such a policy be?
18. What sort of monitoring entity should the Government set up to ensure that the policy is pursued in a spirit of long-term, intersectoral collaboration?
19. What means should be proposed to foster collaboration among workers in the various networks (health and social services, housing, justice, education, employment and income security)?
20. How could the training of field workers be improved?

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