

# No Moving Back: Aboriginal Homelessness in Alberta

## What you need to know

There has been a lack of research that expresses the experience of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. This has allowed misconceptions about how people experience homelessness. One of these misconceptions is that Aboriginal Peoples travel between the urban centre and rural reservation. This research has confirmed that people who leave the reservation are not likely to move back.

## What is this research about?

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada are more likely to experience homelessness. The history of residential schools continues to affect the Aboriginal community in Calgary.

Racism and discrimination continue to make the issue worse.

PEOPLE WHO LEAVE  
THE RESERVATION ARE  
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MOVE BACK

### ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

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**Katrina Milaney** is the Acting Vice President of Strategy for the Calgary Homeless Foundation. Katrina has a Master's degree in Community Health Sciences and is currently pursuing a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies.

**David Turner** is as a Research Coordinator in the Department of Community Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Calgary and a homeless coordinator at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary.

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This report was prepared in partnership with the University of Calgary, Calgary Homelessness Foundation and Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary and funded by a grant from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).

### VISIT

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

### KEYWORDS

homelessness, Aboriginal Peoples, urban homelessness, racism, rural reservation, stereotypes, colonialism

Summary Date: April 2014

### ARTICLE SOURCE

Thurston, W.E., Milaney, K., Turner, D., Coupal, S. (2013). *Final Report: No moving back: A study of the intersection of rural and urban homelessness for Aboriginal people in Calgary, Alberta*. Prepared for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, National Housing Secretariat.

## What did the researchers do?

Researchers used four methods in the creation of this report in order to show a variety of positions on homelessness. Researchers first spoke with 12 Aboriginal people who were homeless and receiving services. Researchers then spoke with 10 service providers who worked at service organizations.

Researchers also used statistics from the Calgary Homelessness Foundation's (CHF) Housing Management Information System (HMIS). The large system allowed researchers to include 553 people who received service from April 1 to December 31, 2012.

Researchers did a literature review of journals from the last ten years on urban and rural homelessness. They used criteria to narrow down their search to 25 out of 5525 articles.

Workshops were held on June 4, 2013. These workshops included management staff at CHF funded organizations.

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## What did the researchers find?

Researchers found key themes from the qualitative research:

- **There was no 'moving back' to reserves; those who relocated to the city remained in the city.**
- **Pathways to urban homelessness involved inequity on reserves and discrimination in the city.**
- **There is no interaction between reserve services and homelessness service sector in Calgary.**
- **There is a need for more Aboriginal staffing to alleviate racism and allow transition out of homelessness.**
- **There is a greater need for shelters, food and childcare services.**

HMIS data held statistical trends. Aboriginal Peoples who were homeless were more likely to be younger than non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal Peoples who were homeless were also more likely to be female.

Despite these differences, there was no difference in the length of time people experience homelessness.

## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Managers who participated came up with recommendations for improving services. These included:

- Better planning of services.
- Creating more diversity and cultural safety in services.
- Hiring additional Aboriginal staff.
- More involvement of front line staff.

Future research is needed to determine the needs of different people within the Aboriginal community in Calgary. This research should include perspectives of:

- People leaving corrections
- Youth and families with kids
- People with disabilities
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, or two-spirited people
- Sex trade workers

Policy makers can use this information to reconsider their assumptions. This research has shown that Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness are likely to remain in the city. It is important to continue challenging 'commonly held' beliefs that are inaccurate.