

REPORT

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming 2024 Federal Budget

Submitted by:

A Way Home Canada - a national coalition reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, planning and practice.



Pre-Budget Submission - Federal Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy

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Author:

David French, Director General of Government Relations and Policy
A Way Home Canada
dfrench@awayhome.ca

Emily Kellway, Policy Intern
A Way Home Canada
ekellway@awayhome.ca

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RECOMMENDATION:

The Government of Canada invest \$150,000,000 a year for the next five years on the development and implementation of a National Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy (the Strategy).

TARGET:

The Strategy would take action to support 10,000 youth, families and caregivers.

[A Way Home Canada](#) is a national coalition reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through policy, practice and planning transformations. We work with all orders of government, communities, service providers and philanthropy to create a policy, investment and service environment that focuses on prevention (stopping young people from becoming homeless in the first place) and helping those who are homeless move into housing with supports as rapidly as possible in a safe and planned way. Our collective work is evidence-driven and solutions-focused and has received \$39,800,000 from the Government of Canada to maximize and mobilize youth homelessness prevention nationally.

RATIONALE:

The Government of Canada's commitment to supporting Canada's most marginalized and vulnerable residents has been clear since the 2015 mandate. The investment in a strategy, that is cross-government in its focus, presents a real opportunity to transform how we address youth homelessness in Canada, by moving from managing the crisis and putting young people at great risk, to an approach that focuses on the health and well-being of young people and assisting them to transition to adulthood in a safe and planned manner. There are examples of how the Government of Canada is responding to the issue of youth homelessness across several disconnected mandates. Aligning those mandates, scaling up new and innovative interventions and harmonizing funding to organizations across Canada can trend us toward being an international leader in youth homelessness prevention and amplify the impact of our efforts to prevent youth and their families from experiencing homelessness.

This means retaining current investments in Housing First and other community supports while bolstering investment in, and prioritization of, the prevention of youth homelessness. **The pan-Canadian, *Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey* helps us shape the value of this work being cross-government in its approach but also showcases that we are not doing enough as a country.** Federal levers and corresponding data points that reinforce the bridge to this work are as follows:

REACHING HOME: CANADA'S HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

- 40.1% were under the age of 16 when they first experienced homelessness;
- 76% had multiple experiences of homelessness, with 37% of these youth reporting more than five experiences of homelessness.
- The 2018 Federal (Homeless Partnering Strategy) Point-in-Time Count found that 50% of all people currently experiencing homelessness had their first experience before they were 25.¹

FEDERAL 2SLGBTQI+ ACTION PLAN

- 82.8% of transgendered and non-binary youth and 80.2% of 2SLGBTQI+ reported multiple experiences of homelessness.
- Transgender and gender non-binary youth were more likely to report child protection services involvement than cisgender youth (70.8% vs. 56.9%), and LGBTQ2S youth were more likely to report involvement with child protection services than straight youth (62.8% vs. 55.8%).
- 57.8% had involvement with child welfare. Compared to national data (Statistics Canada, 2011), youth experiencing homelessness are 193 times more likely to have had involvement with child welfare (see also Nichols et al., 2017).²

FEDERAL PATHWAY TO ADDRESS MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN, GIRLS AND 2SLGBTQIA+ PEOPLE

- 80.4% of Indigenous youth reported multiple experiences of homelessness.³

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS STRATEGY (YESS) PROGRAM

- 51% were not currently involved in either education, employment, or training; and Indigenous, racialized, newcomer and LGBTQ2S+ youth are overrepresented in homeless youth populations across Canada.

- 73.9% indicated they would like to re-engage with their education.
- 19.7% were employed (the unemployment rate amongst youth in the general Canadian public was 13.3% at the time of the survey).⁴

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA STRATEGY

- 85.4% were experiencing a mental health crisis, with 42% reporting at least one suicide attempt; 38% of young women reported a sexual assault in the previous 12 months;
- 63.1% had experienced childhood trauma and abuse.
- 77.5% indicated that a key reason they left home was an inability to get along with their parents.⁵

Communities and stakeholders recommend the following four streams for the youth strategy:

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND SYSTEMS COORDINATION

Reaching Home directives assist federally-funded communities in preventing and reducing homelessness. They focus on youth homelessness prevention and require communities to report on reductions in chronic, new inflows, and returns to homelessness. Better mechanisms and responses are needed for addressing fragmented services and systems challenges. A unified government approach is essential to implement these directives at the community level, involving the transformation of public systems such as child welfare, education, mental health, income supports, and criminal justice. Unique community dynamics must be considered in local efforts and plans.

1. Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd & Kaitlin Schwan. (2016). *Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

5. Ibid

PROGRAM AND PRACTICE MODEL ADOPTION

Strategic and priority funding for prevention programs and upstream interventions is crucial to divert youth from shelters, providing them with appropriate support and intervening well before they experience homelessness. Consideration of demographics and geographic location is essential in designing interventions and planning resource allocation to ensure tailored and effective support. Additionally, adopting evidence-based approaches is vital in driving the adoption of practice and program models for better outcomes.

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Building capacity for prevention across sectors involves training and technical assistance, one-on-one coaching, fostering Communities of Practice, and integrating evidence-based program and practice models within a system of care approach. Equipping communities with the necessary tools for program implementation and adaptation opens opportunities for innovation and collaboration, streamlining systems, and integrating services. Communities must be carefully guided throughout the implementation and establishment of these new systems.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Concentrating our focus on enhancing where and how equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) can be placed within the ongoing strategic and practical work should underpin the three key pillars mentioned above. This work can capture the intersections between where a lack of EDI impacts program effectiveness and organizational capacity to recruit, retain and support a diverse workforce at all levels. Broad learning to enhance culturally specific or diverse service orientations creates the kinds of intersectional approaches necessary for improving outcomes for youth and families.

The Strategy at its Core

Underpinning these four strategic pillars would be the scaling of proven and effective prevention-based practice models across the 64 designated communities in Canada and within rural and remote communities. Examples of these models include:

FAMILY AND NATURAL SUPPORTS (FNS)

The FNS approach begins with the idea that relationships are the basis of a person's sense of self and well-being, which in turn provides the foundation for a person to thrive. For most young people, there is at least one adult – maybe a parent, grandparent, aunt/uncle, sibling, neighbour, teacher, or Elder – who is important and cares about them. Working with an individual's family and community can be instrumental in changing the individual's sense of community, support network, and even housing status. While it is sometimes complicated work, FNS can make all the difference in an individual's journey out of homelessness or prevention of homelessness.

HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH (HF4Y)

HF4Y is an adaptation of the adult Housing First model, but it is based on the understanding that the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are distinct from adults, and therefore the solutions must be youth-focused. HF4Y is grounded in the belief that all young people have a right to housing and that those who have experienced homelessness will do better and recover more effectively if they are first provided with housing.

RECONNECT

Reconnect is a community-based early intervention program that is designed to help young people (ages 13–24) who are at risk of or in the early stages of homelessness. The goal of Reconnect is to help young people stay connected to their family, community and school, and to strengthen connections to natural supports in order to prevent and/or reduce the risk of homelessness. It builds on the practices of Family and Natural Supports (FNS), is guided by the principles of HF4Y, and focuses upstream on providing school-based supports that keep young people in place so that they can move forward with their life in a safe and planned way.

UPSTREAM

Upstream is an equity-focused early intervention that works through the collective efforts of schools and community-based organizations to prevent youth homelessness and early school leaving. This initiative is a preventive approach that works to offer supports to youth ages 12-18 who are identified as at risk of homelessness and school disengagement through a universal screening tool called the Student Needs Assessment (SNA). This universal approach sets Upstream Canada apart from other interventions as it identifies students who do not display outward signs of risk and experience barriers to accessing help.

Innovative models both nationally and internationally continue to reveal themselves (Host Homes, HoPC, Shelter Diversion, etc.) as effective additions to this strong continuum. The development of tools, resources and supports in these areas is ongoing to provide communities with the utmost flexibility.

Youth Strategy Outcomes

By increasing and focusing on youth homelessness prevention, through a National Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy, we can:

- **Prevent youth homelessness;**
- **Sustain exits from homelessness;**
- **Increase housing stability for youth;**
- **Enhance educational participation and achievement; and**
- **Ensure stronger employment and labour market participation outcomes.**

Pathway to a National Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy

The Government of Canada would lead the development of the Strategy, with direct support and continued liaison from A Way Home Canada's policy and planning team. Emphasis on the following phases should include the following:

CAPTURING EXISTING FEDERAL LEVERS AND EXAMPLES

Detailing where there is alignment across the Federal government, why it aligns with youth homelessness prevention, and the intersections of existing plans and strategies that offer levers for mobilizing youth homelessness prevention activities within those mandates. Analysis of international examples, such as the [2022 Ireland Youth Homelessness Strategy](#), which takes a whole-of-Government approach to youth homelessness, to guide development.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Given the responsibility that exists across the [64 designated communities](#) for the delivery of Reaching Home directives, core to the consultation and engagement phase will be a focus on understanding their needs to increase uptake of youth homelessness prevention efforts and build their capacity to play a community leadership role, as well as understanding their experience with the work thus far.

GOVERNANCE

Establishing a standalone coordinating body is recommended to lead in supporting designated communities to ensure uptake and measure progress, all with a lens towards how this strategy is influencing across government. Pinpointing what/who/where a dedicated coordinating body should reside within the Federal government is foundational as the coordinating body must coordinate activities across federal ministries. Leading and coordinating in this way will support the systems-focused approach to youth homelessness prevention in communities.

GATHERING SUPPORT AND VALIDATION

When developing a strategy to address youth homelessness, it's important for partners to work together with mutual commitment and complementary objectives. By sharing resources and maximizing our reach, we can create a more effective social response to youth homelessness. This approach can render bilateral alignment in provinces and territories that require specific attention given their mandates.

Prioritizing youth homelessness prevention at the federal level goes beyond reducing chronic homelessness by 50% by the fiscal year 2027/28. Current crisis responses and piecemeal youth-focused programs expose young people to harm and hinder progress. A cross-government approach offers opportunities for aligned and harmonized responses in communities. Few Canadian communities have youth-specific systems or strategies for quick housing transitions, leaving too many young people at risk of homelessness and the many harms associated with this experience.

While preventing and ending youth homelessness isn't solely the federal government's responsibility, their role is crucial. By leveraging community resources and expertise with a guiding strategy, sustained progress is achievable. A Way Home Canada, along with national and community partners, challenges the federal government to envision a brighter future for Canada's youth.