

# Guide for Grassroots Individuals and Groups Considering Community-Based Participatory Research on Women's Homelessness

## What is community-based, participatory research and how can it be useful?

Many excluded and marginalized groups—including Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis), people who are homeless, low-income people, drug users, people in prison, sex workers, and women survivors of violence—have had research “done on” us for a long time. Researchers from the government or universities come into our communities and take away information that they use to write reports or make policies about us, based on their own interpretation of what they have seen and heard. Often the reports and policies that have come out of this type of research treat us as “the problem,” and the “solutions” they propose are not appropriate or helpful.

Community-based participatory research (also known as CBPR) is an approach that challenges this way of doing research.

- CBPR begins in communities.
- It is grounded in lived experience and informed by people's questions and needs.
- Community members\* are directly involved in CBPR and have control of the process of the research.
- People with lived experience are active and equal members of CBPR research teams.
- In CBPR teams, all forms of expertise are honoured, all voices are heard, and all skills are recognized.
- CBPR is based in relationships of reciprocity, trust, respect and collaboration. Building these relationships takes time.
- Participation in CBPR empowers people, enhances self-confidence and self-esteem, and breaks social isolation.
- CBPR teaches professional researchers how to work respectfully with communities.
- CBPR uses non-invasive methods for gathering information or “data.” It uses open questions, clear language, and methods organic to the community, not based in scientific observation.
- Action is central to CBPR, and projects incorporate action plans from the beginning.
- The community retains ownership of its information and ideas, and shares control of CBPR projects, which it is free to use in the service of action for change.

This guide was produced by the Women, Homelessness, and Community-Based Participatory Research project. It is based on the experiences and recommendations of a group of women experiencing poverty and homelessness, who have been involved with community-based participatory research. Other guides, and the full project report, can be found at [www.homelesshub.ca/Library/View.aspx?id=55138](http://www.homelesshub.ca/Library/View.aspx?id=55138). This project was funded by Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and Homelessness Partnering Strategy of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.



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\* In this guide we use the terms “community members,” “grassroots,” “with lived experience,” “first voice,” and “facing homelessness” interchangeably to describe individuals and communities involved in CBPR.

CBPR projects can provide many benefits to communities and groups. CBPR can answer questions, support advocacy, and initiate actions to address community problems. Also, working together on a research project can bring a group or community together, help people develop new skills, and may even provide access to research funding for wages and activities.

## When considering a CBPR project

Here are some questions that community members can ask when assessing whether, and how, to become involved in research, or to evaluate research projects you are currently involved in:

### Questions to ask professional researchers who approach you / your community to be involved in research

- There is lots of research on homelessness - why are you doing another study?
- What does research already show about this issue?
- What will be done with our information?
- What will come back to us from this project?
- What role will we play?
- How much direction are you willing to take from community members & organizations?
- What is your stake, what are you in it for, what are you gaining?
- What is your experience with advocacy?
- What support will there be after the project to make change?

### Questions to think about when planning CBPR projects

- Who is the research for?
- What is the project purpose?
- Who is funding the research?
- Where is the research going to go?
- What action is the research leading towards?
- What are the alternatives to research?

### Questions to think about when assessing CBPR projects

- Are people with lived experience at the table whenever decisions are being made?
- Can we challenge the authority and existing barriers in the project effectively, or are we punished and face consequences?
- How flexible and transparent is the professional researcher willing to be?
- Are we gaining the skills, networks, and resources we need to use the research on our own behalf?

## Where to learn more

- The Ontario Women's Health Network worked with women facing homelessness to develop a research method called "Inclusion Research." You can download their Inclusion Research Handbook and Guide to Focus Groups here: <http://www.owhn.on.ca/inclusionhandbook.htm> or call them at 1-877-860-4545 to get a copy.
- Your Rights in Research: A Guide for Women provides information for women who are street-involved and who are considering participating in research. You can call BC Centre of Excellence in Women's Health at 1-888-300-3088 ext. 2633 or download it at <http://www.bccewh.bc.ca/publications-resources/documents/YourRightsinResearchAGuideforWomen.pdf>