



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth Homelessness & COVID-19



How the Youth-Serving Sector
is Coping with the Crisis

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| Thank You

We want to express our sincerest appreciation for the work frontline workers continue to do to ensure services to young people who find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness are not disrupted during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

We would like to extend our deep thanks to the COH and AWH team members who assisted in the production and design of this document: Sarah Anne Charlebois and Chris Durand.

| Additional Information

Want to know more? Access the full report [here](#).

Introduction



“Remind communities that the needs of youth experiencing homelessness are different than adults and they too need a plan in place for them instead of being lumped in with the older population.” - Survey Respondent

The COVID-19 crisis is disproportionately affecting people that are precariously housed, homeless, and/or lack access to hygiene and space for physical distancing. For young people, access to stable housing and supports to cope during and after the crisis are essential. Meeting basic needs, navigating the housing and income support systems, staying connected to education/training, and receiving mental health supports are ongoing priorities for youth that are made all the more vital and difficult during this national state of emergency in Canada.

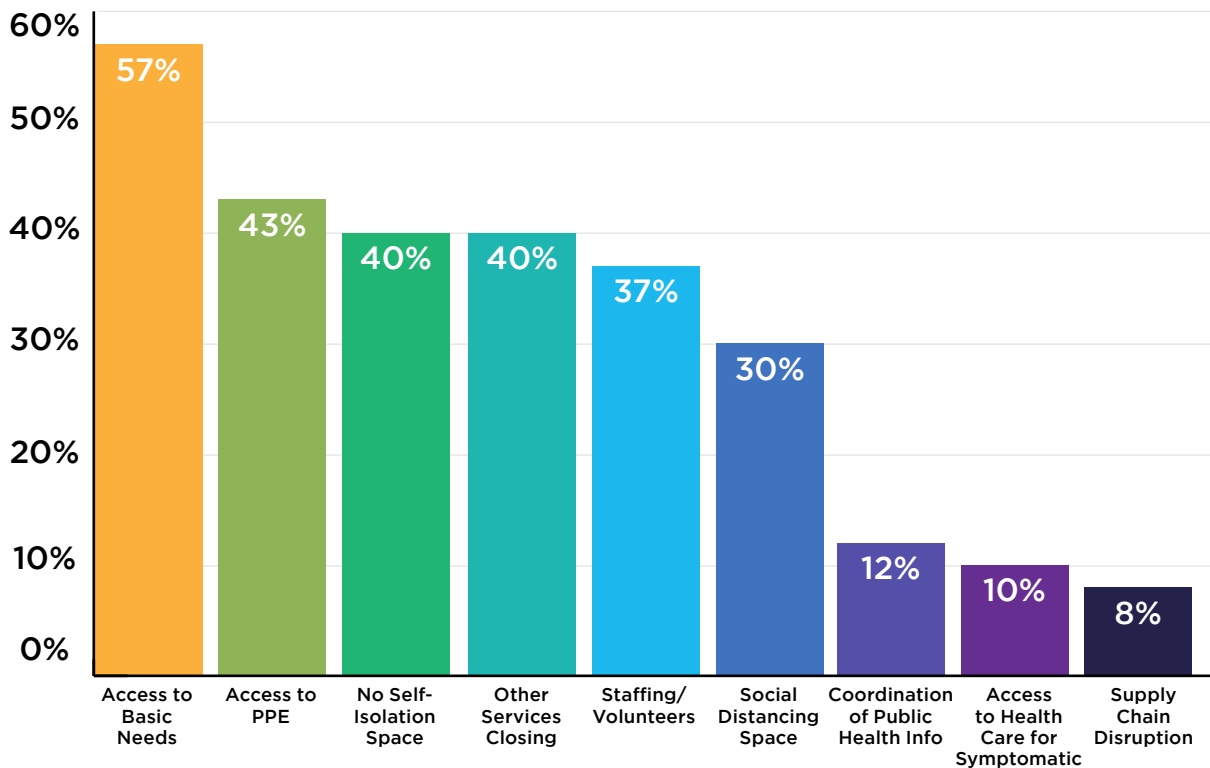
To ensure that the immediate response of governments and communities takes into consideration the unique needs of young people, A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness conducted a survey for youth-serving organizations addressing the needs of youth at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. The purpose of the survey was to identify some of the emerging challenges and needs facing the sector, as well as positive steps being taken to ensure young people are able to receive the housing and support they need.

60 direct service and advocacy organizations from each of Canada’s 10 provinces participated, with rural, urban and Indigenous-led organizations represented among the respondents. Of the 60 participating organizations, 44 provide housing to young people. Two-thirds (66.7%) of the organizations stated that they were connected to the broader homelessness sector community response to COVID-19.

Availability of and Access to Youth Appropriate Services and Supports

Of the respondents working with unhoused and provisionally accommodated youth, 57% noted meeting basic needs, including food and shelter, as one of the largest challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. 10% of respondents also identified difficulty accessing health care for symptomatic youth.

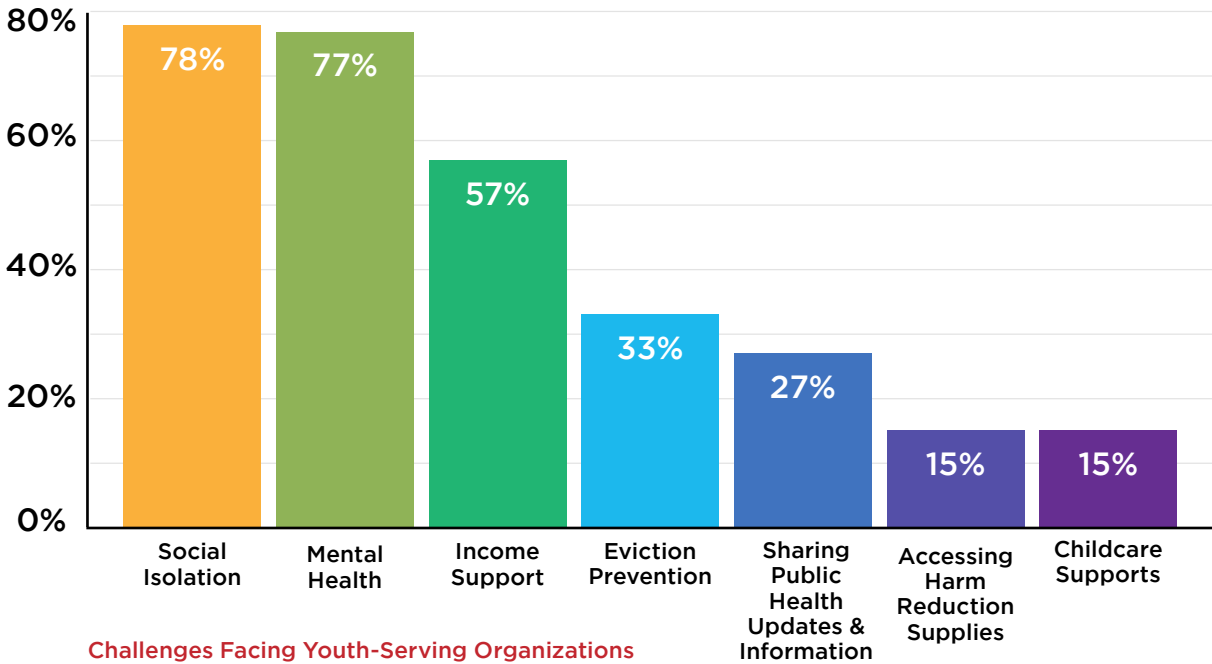
Top Challenges for Serving Youth/Families At-Risk of or Experiencing Homelessness



Challenges Facing Youth-Serving Organizations

For youth that are currently in housing, the challenges of staying stably housed are made greater by an increased need for resources around mental health support and coping with social isolation. Accessing childcare support was also a challenge facing housed youth and families during the crisis.

Top Challenges of Keeping Youth & Families Stably Housed During COVID-19



A number of supports that would typically be available for youth in crisis, such as hotel rooms, youth drop-in and shelter spaces and in-person social programs, have shut down or are not taking on new clients. Communities that did not have youth housing and/or emergency shelters before the crisis are more acutely struggling as permanent, scattered site housing options remain unaffordable. One organization noted that some youth are remaining in unsafe living arrangements during the crisis. There appears to be larger community planning efforts in response to the pandemic that youth serving organizations/services have been left out of. This has created a wedge in their ability to respond in a timely manner and suggests the need for an equity lens on these efforts to ensure vulnerable people aren't being left out of critical interventions.

Many communities are unable to communicate with and refer youth to the programs and services that are youth-specific and meet their unique needs/situations. Resources and services tailored for already marginalized 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous and racialized youth sheltering in place or without homes are especially needed. Additionally, harm reduction services and supplies are needed to manage the potential for increased risk behaviour among young people that are isolated and struggling with substance use challenges.

“You name it - for youth it is access to water, soap, hot food, bathrooms, there is nothing for them to find anymore from looking for cans, cigarette butts, drugs are scarce and we see risky behaviours. EMTs no longer respond to overdoses as they are only code red and hospitals are signaling that they are code purple (overwhelmed). Health care is already being pro-rationed, Fentanyl deaths are up. We are also seeing more girls in difficult straits with signs of violence. There is no one on the street to see them when they are working so not only are they at high risk of COVID but of increased victimization.” - Survey Respondent

The lack of transportation options has also become a barrier to youth accessing support. Physical distancing measures restrict staff’s ability to offer transportation and some organizations have had to rely on taxi services to get youth to appointments and services.

Provincial Breakdown of Agencies Facing Challenges Around Eviction Prevention

