



# Opportunities for Innovation: Indigenous Youth Coping With Homelessness During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Jennifer Dreaver and Joanna Henderson

## What is this research about?

This research project was designed to share the experiences of Indigenous youth – those experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in the Kenora district in Northwestern Ontario – whose voices have remained unheard throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a significant gap in available Indigenous youth homelessness research.

It is important to provide information surrounding the gaps, barriers, and needs of Indigenous youth, including their views on improving health and social services. Hence, there is a need to give a voice to Indigenous youth and improve the programs/services they access to better meet their needs.

## What did the researchers do?

The researchers conducted this study through interviews, supported by a youth peer research assistant, in spaces that youth frequently occupy. Through interviews, accompanied by cultural items such as traditional medicines, participants were given space to share their experiences of homelessness throughout the pandemic.

After interviews were completed, youth participants were invited to join focus groups and an Anishinaabe Symbol-based Reflection exercise. Art pieces were developed as another tool for youth participants to communicate their stories of homelessness.



## What did the researchers find?

1. This study highlights various **gaps and barriers that Indigenous youth experience**, including racism, stigma, age restrictions for homelessness services, safety issues, and a lack of culturally-safe services.
2. **Participants described numerous programs and services that they would rather benefit from:** life skills training, supportive/transitional housing (particularly for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system), cultural connections, peer support, and services that are specific to youth rather than being joined with adult services; youth needs are drastically different from adults' needs.

## More about the authors

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## How can you use this research?

Service providers, funders, and decision-makers should review this research and identify the next steps they can take to improve services for Indigenous youth at risk or experiencing homelessness. This information can be used to improve service delivery, leading to an impact that fosters more positive, welcoming, and responsive service experiences for Indigenous youth.

## About the research summary series

This research summary series was created to highlight the research findings of Making the Shift funded projects and to build stronger links between research and practice, towards improving program processes and outcomes in preventing youth homelessness.



**To view more summaries in the series**, visit [makingtheshiftinc.ca/resources](https://makingtheshiftinc.ca/resources). Making the Shift is co-led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada.

