

THE STATE OF  
**HOMELESSNESS**  
*in*  
**CANADA**  
**2013**



the  
homeless hub



Canadian Alliance to  
End Homelessness

# The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013

Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver

Homeless Hub Paper #4



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Research Network



Layout & design by:  
Steph Vasko

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# Executive summary

The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2013 is the first extensive Canadian report card on homelessness.

This report examines what we know about homelessness, the historical, social and economic context in which it has emerged, demographic features of the problem, and potential solutions. The State of Homelessness provides a starting point to inform the development of a consistent, evidence-based approach towards ending homelessness.

Our goal in developing this report was to both assess the breadth of the problem and to develop a methodology for national measurement. We believe that homelessness is not a given and that not just reducing, but ending, the crisis is *achievable*.

The information for the State of Homelessness in Canada report has been compiled by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (Homeless Hub)

*We believe that homelessness is not a given and that not just reducing, but ending, the crisis is achievable.*

and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness from the best available research to date. Because we lack strong data on homelessness in Canada, our estimates of the scale of the problem are just that: an estimate, but they represent an important starting point. As the first national report card on homelessness, the evaluation of the response to

homelessness by Canada's homeless sector provides an important means of benchmarking progress toward ending homelessness.

## Defining homelessness

In 2012, a new Canadian Definition of Homelessness was released by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network:

*“Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.” (CHRN, 2012: 1)*

The accompanying **typology** identifies a range of housing and shelter circumstances:

- 1) **UNSHELTERED** - living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation
- 2) **EMERGENCY SHELTERED** - staying in overnight emergency shelters designed for people who are homeless
- 3) **PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED** – people who are homeless whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, including interim (or transitional) housing, people living temporarily with others (couch surfing), or living in institutional contexts (hospital, prison) without permanent housing arrangements.
- 4) **AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS** - people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

The pathways into and out of homelessness are neither linear, nor uniform. Individuals and families who wind up homeless may not share much in common with each other, aside from the fact that they are extremely vulnerable and lack adequate housing, income and the necessary supports to ensure they stay housed. The causes of homelessness reflect an intricate interplay between structural factors (poverty, lack of affordable housing), systems failures (people being discharged from mental health facilities, corrections or child protection services into homelessness) and individual circumstances (family conflict and violence, mental health and addictions). Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of these factors.

While it may be true that due to personal crises, individuals will continue to fall into homelessness, there is no reason why people should remain homeless for years, or even months on end. The problem of homelessness is not one of individual crises, however, but instead refers to: “the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing” (CHRN, 2012:1).

We do know that the homelessness crisis was created through drastically reduced investments in affordable and social housing in the 1990s, shifts in income supports and the declining spending power of almost half of the population since that time. Currently many Canadians are at risk of homelessness because of the high cost (and unavailability) of housing, inadequate incomes and family violence. The good news is that if we understand the causes of homelessness, we can do something about it.

# Major findings

## How many Canadians are homeless?

Estimating the number of homeless persons in Canada has been a source of debate for years. Until recently, there has never been a concerted, coordinated or consistent effort to enumerate homelessness in Canada. This means that in the past we have relied on ball-park estimates, based on unreliable and incomplete data. This is now changing.

### At least 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness in a given year

We estimate at least 200,000 Canadians access homeless emergency services or sleep outside in a given year. The actual number is potentially much higher, given that many people who become homeless live with friends or relatives, and do not come into contact with emergency shelters.

Recent data from a March 2013 Ipsos Reid poll suggests that as many as 1.3 million Canadians have experienced homelessness or extremely insecure housing at some point during the past five years.

### At least 30,000 are homeless on a given night

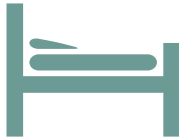
The number of Canadians who experience homelessness on any given night in Canada is estimated to be approximately 30,000 individuals. This is the best estimate of homelessness developed in Canada to date, and includes people who are:

- I. **UNSHELTERED** (outside in cars, parks, on the street) – 2,880
- II. **STAYING IN EMERGENCY HOMELESSNESS SHELTERS** – 14,400
- III. **STAYING IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS** – 7,350
- IV. **PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED** (homeless but in hospitals, prison or interim housing) – 4,464

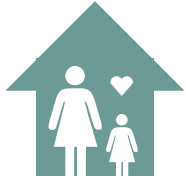
**30,000** PEOPLE  
ARE HOMELESS ON A GIVEN NIGHT



**2,880**  
UNSHELTERED



**14,400**  
STAYING IN  
EMERGENCY SHELTERS



**7,350**  
STAYING IN VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS



**4,464**  
TEMPORARY INSTITUTIONAL  
ACCOMMODATION

## As many as 50,000 Canadians may be 'hidden homeless' on any given night

Often referred to as couch surfing, this includes people who are temporarily staying with friends, relatives or others because they have nowhere else to live and no immediate prospect of permanent housing. There is no reliable data on the hidden homelessness in Canada at the national level and very little at the community level. One Canadian study in Vancouver (Eberle, et al., 2009) estimated 3.5 people were considered to be hidden homeless for every one who was homeless. While the methodology of this study is sound, it was conducted in only one city, and the differences between cities, their infrastructure to support homelessness and their homeless population are quite profound. Applied nationally with a more conservative 3:1 ratio, as many as 50,000 people could be estimated to be hidden homeless on any given night in Canada.

### Warning signs

As we attempt to determine the scope of homelessness in Canada it's important to pay attention to warning signs in national statistics that point to a larger segment of the Canadian population struggling with poverty, high housing cost and poor nutrition that may indicate homelessness risk:

- The reduction in rental housing combined with stagnating or declining incomes, benefit reductions, and economic changes meant that since the 1980s, more and more Canadians were spending a larger percentage of their income on housing. It is estimated that there are roughly 380,600 households living in severe housing need (living in poverty and spending more than 50% of their income on rental housing).
- 10% of Canadian households live below the Low Income Cut-off (LICO). In some cities, the percentage is even higher, such as Vancouver (16.9%) and Toronto (13.2%), both of which also have the highest housing costs in the country.
- 10% of Canadian families fall below the Market Basket Measure (MBM) poverty threshold, meaning they do not have enough money to meet even the most basic needs.
- 8.2% of Canadian households are experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity.
- Between 1980 and 2005 the average earnings among the least wealthy Canadians fell by 20%, even as the country went through a period of sustained economic and employment growth.

Homelessness is a problem larger than the number of people counted on the streets or in shelters.

# WARNING ! SIGNS

A larger segment of the Canadian population struggling with poverty, high housing cost and poor nutrition may indicate homelessness risk:



10%

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10%  
OF HOUSEHOLDS  
LIVE BELOW THE  
LOW INCOME  
CUT-OFF (LICO).

380,600 LIVE IN SEVERE  
HOUSEHOLDS HOUSING NEED

## Who is homeless in Canada?

While homelessness can affect any number of people, we do know that some groups of people are more likely to be homeless than others. Single adult males, between the ages of 25 and 55, account for almost half of the homeless population in Canada (47.5%), according to a Government of Canada study.



At the same time, it is also important to note that other sub-populations face unique risks and/or face special circumstances. Because the specific experiences of being homeless will differ for each group, strategies to address homelessness must be tailored to these differing needs. Key sub-populations include:

**YOUTH** – Youth make up about 20% of the homelessness population, though the prevalence rate is the same for adult men. The causes and consequences of homelessness for young people are distinct from those which afflict adults, meaning we require tailored responses.

**ABORIGINAL PEOPLE** – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are overrepresented amongst homeless populations in most communities in Canada. This necessitates the inclusion of their historical, experiential and cultural differences, as well as experiences with colonization and racism, in consideration of Aboriginal homelessness. Aboriginal peoples must be part of any solutions to homelessness. *Aboriginal peoples must be part of any solutions to homelessness.*

**WOMEN AND FAMILIES** – Violence and poverty are the main causes of homelessness for women and families. There is some evidence that family homelessness is a growing problem in Canada.

## Chronic homelessness

For the vast majority of people who become homeless, the experience is rather short. In Canada, though the median length of stay in emergency shelter is approximately 50 days, most people are homeless for less than a month (29% stay only one night), and manage to leave homelessness on their own, usually with little support. For these people homelessness is a one-time only event. People who are chronically homeless (long-term) or episodically homeless (moving in and out of homelessness), form a smaller percentage of the overall homeless population, but at the same time use more than half the emergency shelter space in Canada and are most often the highest users of public systems.

Based on our estimate of the total number of homeless people who use shelters on an annual basis (200,000), we can project the following numbers of chronic, episodic and transitionally homeless persons in Canada:

**CHRONIC HOMELESS:** 4,000 to 8,000  
**EPISODIC HOMELESS:** 6,000 to 22,000  
**TRANSITIONALLY HOMELESS:** 176,000 to 188,000



# HOMELESSNESS COSTS THE CANADIAN ECONOMY \$7 BILLION ANNUALLY

THIS INCLUDES NOT ONLY  
THE COST OF EMERGENCY  
SHELTERS, BUT SOCIAL  
SERVICES, HEALTH CARE  
AND CORRECTIONS.

## Homelessness costs the Canadian economy \$7 billion per year

In 2007, the Sheldon Chumir Foundation estimated that the emergency response to homelessness costs taxpayers from \$4.5-\$6 billion annually. This figure includes not only the cost of emergency shelters, but social services, health care and corrections. **Our updated figure for the annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy is \$7.05 billion dollars.**

Homelessness is expensive because we cycle people through expensive public systems and increasingly costly and uncoordinated emergency services systems. By shifting focus to permanent solutions, we have the opportunity to reduce the long term cost of homelessness and make more efficient and effective use of public resources.

## Progress pointing to a solution

Communities across Canada have been struggling to address the problem of homelessness for several decades. The Government of Canada, as well as many provincial, territorial, regional, municipal and Aboriginal governments, have invested in creating effective solutions. A key question is whether we are making any progress? Is it making a difference?

Unfortunately, the data which does exist doesn't point to major progress being made on a national level. A recent Government of Canada study indicates that between 2005 and 2009, there was little change in the number of individuals who use shelters on an annual basis.

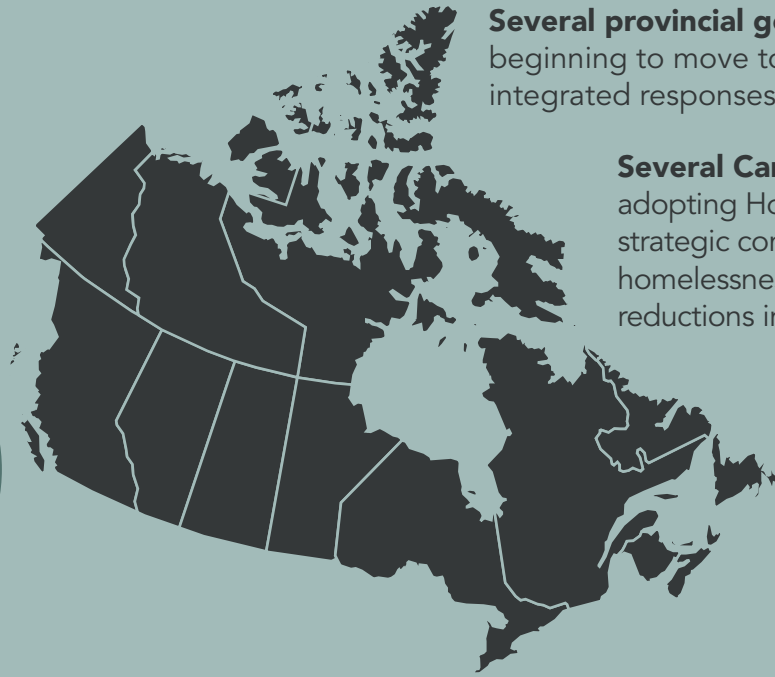
*A recent Government of Canada study indicates that between 2005 and 2009, there was little change in the number of individuals who use shelters on an annual basis.*

There are some positive signs of progress, however.

- In March of this year, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) was renewed by the Government of Canada for five years with a financial commitment of \$119 million. The HPS encourages a housing-first approach, which recognizes that housing stability is necessary for the success of other interventions such as education and training, life skills development, management of mental health challenges – or treatment of substance abuse.
- The success of the At Home/Chez Soi pilot of Housing First programs in five Canadian cities points the way to how we can effectively contribute to an end to homelessness through the adoption and adaptation of Housing First by communities across the country.

# PROGRESS POINTING TO A SOLUTION

Success of the  
At Home/Chez Soi  
pilot of Housing  
First programs in  
5 Canadian cities



Several provincial governments are beginning to move towards strategic & integrated responses to homelessness.

Several Canadian cities, through adopting Housing First as part of their strategic community plans to end homelessness, have seen considerable reductions in their homeless populations.

Homelessness  
Partnering  
Strategy (HPS)  
renewed for  
5 years.

- Several provincial governments, including New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia are beginning to move towards strategic and integrated responses to homelessness. The Government of Alberta leads the way with their plan to end homelessness which has resulted in province-wide reductions in homelessness. Further, Alberta has established the Alberta Interagency Council on Homelessness, to lead provincial planning, coordination and service integration.
- Many Canadian cities have made progress in ending homelessness, using strategic community plans, investing in affordable housing and emphasizing Housing First. Several cities in Alberta have seen considerable reductions in their homeless populations through these efforts, including Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Vancouver has seen a 66% reduction in street homelessness on their way to a goal of ending street homelessness by 2015.

These developments show that important progress is being made and demonstrate some of critical ingredients necessary to reduce homelessness including: a deliberate focus on ending homelessness, political leadership, targeted investments in affordable housing, shifting to Housing First and, importantly, taking action.

## Recommendations

1. **Communities should develop and implement clear plans to end homelessness, supported by all levels of government.**
2. **All levels of government must work to increase the supply of affordable housing.**
3. **Communities – and all levels of government - should embrace Housing First.**
4. **Eliminating chronic and episodic homelessness should be prioritized.**
5. **Ending Aboriginal Homelessness should be prioritized as both a distinct category of action and part of the overall strategy to end homelessness.**
6. **Introduce more comprehensive data collection, performance monitoring, analysis and research.**
  - 6.1 The Government of Canada should institute a national Point in Time Count of Homelessness.
  - 6.2 Funders should support communities to conduct effective and reliable program evaluations.
  - 6.3 The Government of Canada should mandate implementation of Homelessness Information Management Systems.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the report

The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2013 is the first extensive Canadian report card on homelessness. This report examines what we know about homelessness, the historical, social and economic context in which it has emerged, demographic features of the problem, and potential solutions. The State of Homelessness provides a starting point to inform the development of a consistent, evidence-based approach towards ending homelessness.

Our goal in developing this report was to both assess the breadth of the problem and to develop a methodology for national measurement. The need for baseline measurement is important in our efforts to address homelessness. We cannot demonstrate progress if we don't know where we started. The State of Homelessness in Canada attempts to fill this void, through presenting what we know about homelessness in Canada drawing from the best available data. We do this with a full understanding of the limitations of existing research and data. The lack of consistency across the country makes it difficult to compare statistics, effectiveness of interventions and programs and to truly determine how many Canadians experience homelessness. While these methodological problems exist, we do feel that we can provide very informed estimate based in the best research on numbers that is available at this time. Based on our extensive research, our estimates provide a relatively accurate snapshot of homelessness in Canada and can be used as a starting point for decision-makers to allocate resources, develop plans to end homelessness and deliver services within the homeless sector. As an ongoing exercise, the accuracy will improve providing effective data for governments, researchers and community organizations working to end homelessness.

We believe that homelessness is not a given and that not just reducing, but ending, the crisis is achievable. While we don't want to prescribe a "one-size-fits-all" methodology given the importance of determining diverse local needs, we feel that street counts and other statistical analysis must be underpinned by uniform definitions of homelessness. Improved consistency of definitions, techniques, tools and analysis at the local level will further clarify requirements at the national level.

*We believe that homelessness is not a given and that not just reducing, but ending, the crisis is achievable.*

## 1.2 Structure of the report

The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2013 provides a brief summary of the causative factors and typology of homelessness based on the Canadian Definition of Homeless (CHRN, 2012). It defines the *problem* of homelessness in Canada in order to help create a common understanding of the issue for readers. We also explore the issue of those at-risk of becoming homeless to draw attention to the grave danger we are in if we don't address the issue and move towards solutions.

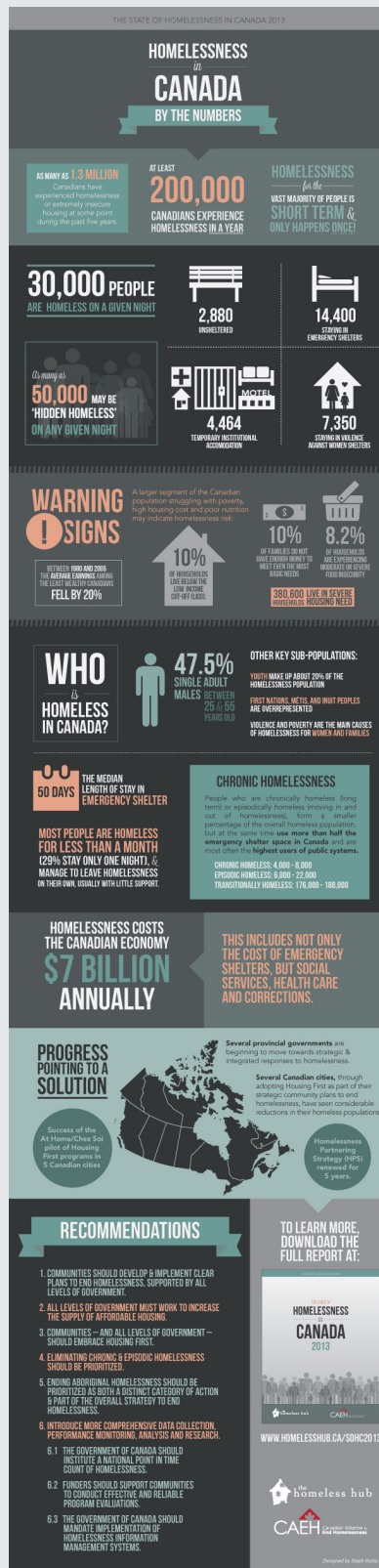
The next section examines our findings by looking at the number and type of homeless people in Canada. This includes an exploration of the demographics and geography of the country's homeless population. We explore the methodology of the various types of counting that has occurred and look at the implications for accuracy.

We move on to tracking the response to homelessness across Canada including the various government and community initiatives, and the successes of some municipalities in creating significant change.

Finally, we end with recommendations for changes in order for Canada to both improve its understanding of homelessness and take serious steps towards eradicating it.

It is our hope that by creating a national baseline, Canadians will be able to see the extent of the problem and measure progress towards the solution.

*People who are homeless are not a distinct and separate population. In fact the line between being homeless and not being homeless is quite fluid.*



VIEW THIS INFOGRAPHIC AT  
www.homelesshub.ca/SOHC2013

## 2 The context

The meaning of homelessness is seemingly straightforward. However, people who become homeless do not form a homogeneous group and the term can describe a range of individuals and families who experience vastly different circumstances and challenges. The Canadian Definition of Homelessness (CHRN, 2012) reflects these differences: it includes a typology which distinguishes between unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated and those at-risk of homelessness which is crucial to unifying the discussion. But more precise language is only the first step in making sense of the issue. To tackle homelessness we must understand how structural factors, systems failures and individual and relational factors interact to create the problem. Through this distinction it becomes clear that although homelessness affects individuals, it is created and reinforced by much larger societal factors, such as the growing income gap and a major lack of affordable housing. An analysis of housing affordability reveals a precarious housing situation for many Canadians. Fortunately, these problems can be solved, but only with a nationally consistent understanding of what homelessness is and a strategy that addresses the causes of homelessness across all levels.

*The lack of clarity around homelessness gets in the way of effective solutions.*

### 2.1 What is homelessness?

Most Canadians probably agree that people living outdoors or in emergency shelters are in fact, 'homeless'. However, when we move beyond that group to consider those who are temporarily homeless, couch surfing, or living in transitional housing, there is less agreement. The lack of clarity around homelessness gets in the way of effective solutions. A common definition provides communities and all levels of government with a common language for understanding homelessness, and a means of identifying strategies and interventions, and measuring outcomes and progress. In response to this lack of clarity, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network established the Canadian Definition of Homelessness. According to this definition:

*"Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual / household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing." (CHRN, 2012: 1)*

The definition also includes a **typology** that identifies a range of housing and shelter circumstances:

- 1) **UNSHeltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation, including: a) people living in public or private spaces without consent or contract, and b) people living in places not intended for permanent human habitation.
- 2) **EMERGENCY SHELTERED**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence, and those fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires or floods, for example.

- 3) **PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure. This includes people: a) staying in interim or transitional housing; b) living temporarily with others (couch surfing), c) accessing short term, temporary accommodation (motels, for instance); d) living in institutional contexts (hospital, prison) without permanent housing arrangements.
- 4) **AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards. It should be noted that for many people homelessness is not a static state but rather a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency. We include 'at risk' of homelessness not because we want to count this population, but because understanding risk factors facilitates prevention.

## 2.2 The CAUSES of homelessness

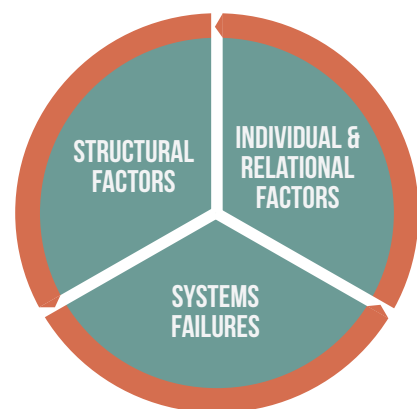
People who are homeless are not a distinct and separate population. In fact the line between being homeless and *not* being homeless is quite fluid. In general, the pathways into and out of homelessness are neither linear nor uniform. Individuals and families who wind up homeless may not share much in common with each other, aside from the fact that they are extremely vulnerable, and lack adequate housing and income and the necessary supports to ensure they stay housed. The causes of homelessness reflect an intricate interplay between structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances. **Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of a number of factors, rather than a single cause.**

**Structural factors** are economic and societal issues that affect opportunities and social environments for individuals. Key factors can include the lack of adequate income, access to affordable housing and health supports and/or the experience of discrimination. Shifts in the economy both nationally and locally can create challenges for people to earn an adequate income, pay for food and for housing. Arguably, the most impactful factor is the lack of affordable housing nationwide however; discrimination can impede access to employment, housing, justice and helpful services. Racial and sexual minorities are at greater risk of such discrimination.

**Systems failures** occur when other systems of care and support fail, requiring vulnerable people to turn to the homelessness sector, when other mainstream services could have prevented this need. Examples of systems failures include difficult transitions from child welfare, inadequate discharge planning for people leaving hospitals, corrections and mental health and addictions facilities and a lack of support for immigrants and refugees.

**Individual and relational factors** apply to the personal circumstances of a homeless person, and may include: *traumatic events* (e.g. house fire or job loss), personal crisis (e.g. family break-up or domestic violence), mental health and addictions challenges (including brain injury and fetal alcohol syndrome), which can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness and physical health problems or disabilities. Relational problems can include family violence and abuse, addictions, and mental health problems of other family members and extreme poverty. Family violence, estimated to affect 2 million Canadians, (Statistics Canada, 2011) can force individuals and families to leave home suddenly, without proper supports in place. This is particularly an issue for youth and women, especially those with children.

FIGURE 1 Causes of Homelessness



## 2.3 Homelessness as a *problem*

It is important to distinguish the individual and personal experiences of those who lose their housing, from homelessness as a broader societal *problem*.

*The **problem** of homelessness and housing exclusion refers to the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing. The goal of ending homelessness is to ensure housing stability, which means people have a fixed address and housing that is appropriate (affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and suitable in size), and includes required services as needed (supportive), in addition to income and supports. (CHRN, 2012: 1)*

This distinction is important because while individuals and families will undoubtedly continue to experience crises that result in their becoming homeless, the problem of homelessness is something that we, as a society, can address. Canada has long been home to people experiencing poverty, and homeless people have always needed charitable services such as emergency shelters and soup kitchens. Yet, homelessness as a social ‘problem’ has emerged only in the last two decades. Changes in our economy and housing market, as well as significant shifts in policies addressing poverty, have contributed to the homelessness crisis across the country.

### Declining income

In the three decades prior to the economic downturn of 2008, wage gaps widened and household income inequality increased in a large majority of OECD countries, and in 2011 the income gap in Canada was above average (OECD, 2011). Between 1980 and 2005, the incomes of the top 20% wealthiest

*The past several decades have seen declining purchasing power for low income Canadians.*

Canadians increased by 16% while the average earnings among the least wealthy fell by 20%, even as the country went through a period of sustained economic and employment

growth (Statistics Canada, 2008). This rise in inequality was due in large part to “wage suppression, benefit reduction, growth of part time work and the deindustrialization of the Canadian economy” (Gaetz, 2010). The end result is a decline in purchasing power of low income people; they are less and less able to pay for basic necessities such as housing, food and transportation.

*“The income gap is growing. The middle has disappeared. We’ve doubled the number of people at the top and hugely increased the number of people at the bottom. That’s no good way to build a society.”*

David Hulchanski

### Reductions in benefits for low income Canadians

Infrastructure support for low income Canadians, including health, post-secondary education and social welfare services has significantly reduced. Federal benefits (including Family Allowance, Old Age Security and Employment Insurance Benefits), reached 6.3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1993 but were reduced to 3.8% by 2008 (Dunlop, 2006), despite the continual rise of Canada’s GDP.

Without adequate security nets, more and more people are at increased risk of homelessness. Due to sweeping budget cuts and transfers to provinces, as well as concerns about welfare fraud reported in the media, some governments decided to make significant changes to welfare programs, often in the form of deep cuts in benefits and/or changing eligibility requirements. In 1995 for example, the Province of Ontario slashed welfare rates by 21.6% (Moscovitch, 1997) with only minor adjustments made for cost of living increases since. Today, with that initial 21.6% cut and inflation for the last 18 years, the rates are approximately 55% below rates in the 1990s.

## Affordable housing crisis

The policy shift with the most profound impact on homelessness has been the reduction in the investment in, and overall supply of, affordable housing (including private sector rental and social housing). Key here was the dismantling of Canada's national housing strategy in the mid-1990s. This began with the gradual reduction in spending on affordable and social housing (including support for co-op housing) in the 1980s, culminating in the cancellation of the program in 1993 and the transfer of responsibility for social housing to the provinces in 1996. The government's housing policy shifted from direct investment in housing to a monetary policy (low interest rates) and tax incentives to encourage private home ownership.

Michael Shapcott notes that in 1982, all levels of government funded 20,450 new social housing units. By 1995, the number dropped to approximately 1,000, with a modest increase to 4,393 by 2006 (Wellesley Institute, 2008). While the private sector has increased the overall supply of housing by building a large supply of ownership housing since that time, it has not responded to the affordable housing need through an increase of the rental housing supply. In fact, the opposite has occurred – in cities across the country, particularly in gentrifying neighbourhoods, many rental properties (including apartments and rooming houses) have been demolished or converted to unaffordable condominiums.

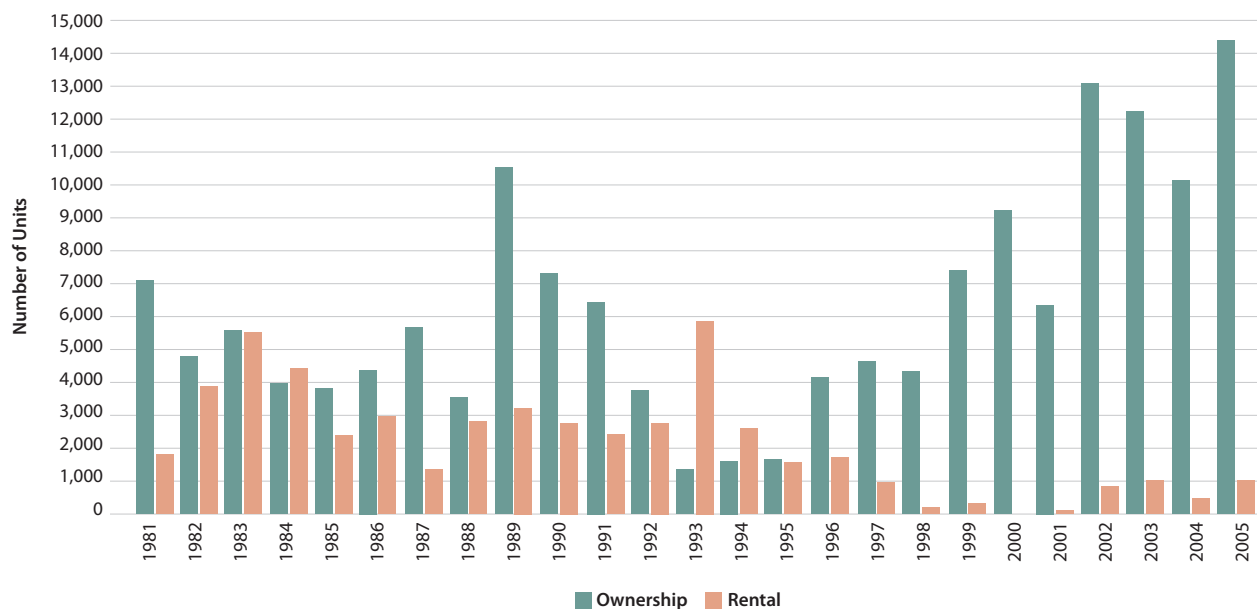
The reduction in rental housing combined with stagnating or declining incomes, benefit reductions, and economic changes means that since the 1980s, more and more Canadians are spending a larger percentage of their income on housing. Since that time, all levels of government have periodically injected more direct funding to develop affordable housing and, in some cases, used tax incentives to encourage the development of rental housing. At the same time, in many communities, the use of zoning and creative strategies by private sector developers to develop innovative and accessible affordable housing projects have made a contribution to expanding housing options in Canada.

*"The word "homelessness" came into common use in developed countries in the early and mid-1980s to refer to the problem of dehousing – the fact that an increasing number of people who were once housed in these wealthy countries were no longer housed. Canada had started to experience dehousing processes"*  
Hulchanski 2009, p. 3.

*The point is that homelessness is a problem or a crisis that we created.  
And if we created it, we can end it.*



FIGURE 2 Housing Completions, Toronto, 1981-2005<sup>1</sup>



Nevertheless, all of these efforts have not reversed the trend. The very significant decline in the availability of affordable housing in Canada, combined with economic factors described above, has contributed to the creation of the homelessness problem. Since the 1990s, homelessness has become a much more visible issue in communities across the country. Not only has homelessness become a real problem in most cities, it is no longer primarily an urban issue. As cities struggled to cope with the rising number of people who needed services, many homeless people went to smaller towns and rural areas – including in Canada’s north - in an effort to survive.

## 2.4 People at risk of homelessness

Many Canadians are at risk of homelessness. Risk factors include poverty, personal crises, discrimination, a lack of affordable housing, insecurity of tenure and/or the inappropriateness of their current housing.

The combination of rising housing costs and stagnating incomes mean that many Canadians are close to the edge, paying too much of their income on housing. It is in this context that personal crises can lead individuals and families to lose their housing and become homeless.

### Housing affordability

One measure of housing affordability is the percentage of an individual or family’s income that is used to pay housing. Housing is considered affordable if people are paying 30% or less of their annual income. Those who are below median income

#### PRECARIOUS HOUSING

CMHC defines a household as being in core housing need if its housing: “falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards)” (CMHC, 2010).

- **Adequate** housing is reported by residents as not requiring any major repairs. Housing that is inadequate may have excessive mold, inadequate heating or water supply, significant damage, etc.
- **Affordable** dwelling costs less than 30% of total before-tax household income. Those in extreme core housing need pay 50% or more of their income on housing. It should be noted that the lower the household income, the more onerous this expense becomes.
- **Suitable** housing has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the resident household, according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.

*Many Canadians are close to the edge, paying too much of their income on housing.*

(living in poverty) and are paying more than 30% are in “core housing need” and at risk of becoming homeless. Further, households that are below median income and paying more than 50% of their income are considered to be in “severe housing need.”

How many Canadians are in this situation? Rising rental costs and reduced availability have put 1.5 million of 12 million Canadian households into core housing need, with 3.4 million households waiting for subsidized housing (Wellesley Institute, 2010).

Table 1 offers insight into the extent of the affordable housing crisis, with a comparison between select Canadian cities. Over 27% of Canadian households are living in core housing need, with 10.5% (roughly 380,600 households) living in severe housing need (CMHC, 2010). Access to housing is compromised by high housing costs, partially fueled by low interest rate policies and tax incentives to invest in privately owned housing, such as allowing people to use RRSPs for house down payments.

TABLE 1 Affordable Housing in Canada<sup>2</sup>

Census Metropolitan Areas	Population	Homeownership Rate	Vacancy Rate	Average Rents (Bachelor/ 1 Bed)	Core Housing Need; Renters (# of households/incidence)	Severe Housing Need; Renters (% of households)
Canada	33,476,688	68.4%	2.8%	\$655	981,750	10.5%
				\$812	27.2%	
Victoria	344,615	64.7%	2.7%	\$695	12,480	10.9%
				\$828	26.5%	
Vancouver	2,313,328	65.1%	1.8%	\$864	79,365	12.3%
				\$982	31.2%	
Calgary	1,214,839	74.1%	1.3%	\$776	22,515	8.6%
				\$958	22.4%	
Edmonton	1,159,869	69.2%	1.7%	\$743	28,750	9.4%
				\$882	24.6%	
Saskatoon	260,600	66.8%	2.6%	\$655	6,525	10.7%
				\$815	22.2%	
Regina	210,556	70.1%	1.0%	\$633	5,535	8.9%
				\$831	24.3%	
Winnipeg	730,018	67.2%	1.7%	\$527	20,915	7.6%
				\$704	23.9%	
Hamilton	721,053	71.6%	3.5%	\$569	22,105	12.4%
				\$735	31.4%	
Toronto	5,583,064	67.6%	1.7%	\$837	198,295	13.2%
				\$1,007	37.4%	
Ottawa	921,823	66.7%	2.5%	\$754	29,560	10.4%
				\$916	28.9%	
Moncton	138,644	70.1%	6.7%	\$485	3,850	10.9%
				\$619	26.7%	
Halifax	390,328	64.0%	3.0%	\$690	14,700	12.8%
				\$773	28.4%	

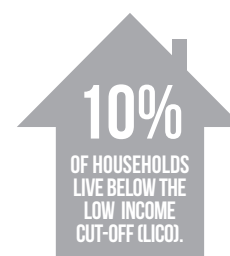
At the same time, over 30% of Canadians live in rental housing, and high rents and low vacancy rates can make housing unaffordable in many communities. In cities like Toronto and Vancouver, for instance, the average rent is over \$800/month, which is unaffordable to many individuals, particularly during this period of higher unemployment. The vacancy rate in larger Canadian cities of between 1% and 1.7% puts further pressure on housing costs.

*Affordable housing is not the only solution to homelessness, but homelessness cannot be solved without an adequate supply of affordable housing.*

Affordable housing is not the only solution to homelessness, but homelessness cannot be solved without an adequate supply of affordable housing. Any strategic plan to address homelessness must prioritize affordable housing options.

## Income security

Income security further controls individuals' ability to secure housing, as low income and/or unemployment increases the risk of homelessness. In Table 2 below, some key figures related to income security in Canada are revealed. The Low Income Cut Off (LICO) is a widely recognized and standard measure of poverty used in Canada by Statistics Canada. LICO is: "an income threshold below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income (20% more) on the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family" (Statistics Canada, (n.d.) 1). In Canada, almost 10% of the population falls within this category. In some cities, the percentage is even higher, such as Vancouver (16.9%) and Toronto (13.2%), both of which also have the highest housing costs in the country.



Due to structural shifts in our economy, fewer Canadians are able to obtain well-paying full time jobs with adequate benefits. Increasingly, individuals and families are relying on low wage, part time work. In 2008, 5.2% of employed Canadians earned the minimum wage (Statistics Canada, 2009), making it difficult for them to afford housing, particularly as housing costs have increased disproportionately to wages.

TABLE 2 Income Security in Canada<sup>3</sup>

CMA	Unemployment Rate	% under LICO	Minimum Wage	Income Assistance, Single Adult	Market Basket Measure, % under threshold (2009)
<b>Canada</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>10.60%</b>
<b>Victoria</b>	5.5%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.25	\$601	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Vancouver</b>	6.8%	16.9%	\$10.25	\$601	16.50%
<b>Calgary</b>	4.9%	8.6%	\$9.75	\$583	8.20%
<b>Edmonton</b>	4.5%	10.5%	\$9.75	\$583	12.00%
<b>Saskatoon</b>	3.9%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.00	\$583	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Regina</b>	3.6%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.00	\$583	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Winnipeg</b>	6.3%	10.6%	\$10.25	\$565	8.30%
<b>Hamilton</b>	6.9%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.25	\$606	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Toronto</b>	8.0%	13.2%	\$10.25	\$606	12.30%
<b>Ottawa</b>	6.2%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.25	\$606	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Moncton</b>	6.9%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.00	\$537	<i>Not avail.</i>
<b>Halifax</b>	6.5%	<i>Not avail.</i>	\$10.30	\$538	<i>Not avail.</i>

Another approach to measuring poverty used by Statistics Canada is the Market Basket Measure (MBM). In short, the MBM is based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services, which someone with a modest and basic standard of living should be able to purchase. The MBM includes the costs of: “food, clothing, footwear, transportation, shelter and other expenses for a reference family of two adults aged 25 to 49 and two children (aged 9 and 13)” (Statistics Canada, (n.d.) 2). Over ten percent of Canadian families fall below the MBM threshold, meaning they do not have enough money to meet even the most basic needs. The more income that one must invest in housing, the less that is available to pay for food, clothing, transportation, etc.

## Hunger and nutritional vulnerability

When money is short, one of the things that often gets sacrificed is food. The report by Tarasuk and her team (Proof, 2013) highlights the severity of food insecurity in Canada today. In Canada in 2011, 12.3% of households were food insecure with 8.2% of Canadian families experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity. In Table 3, below, household food insecurity is presented for a selection of Canadian cities, demonstrating that the situation is much worse in some places than others (Proof, 2013). Households described as *moderately food insecure* report compromises in the quality and/or quantity of food consumed among adults and/or children. Those classed as *severely food insecure* report more extensive compromises, including reduced food intakes among adults and/or children because of a lack of money for food. Individuals and families that do not get enough to eat inevitably suffer from lack of basic and necessary nutrients, which can affect energy levels, mood (including depression), cognitive functioning and stress and impact on one’s ability to carry out day to day activities including work, school and self care.



TABLE 3 Prevalence of household food security & insecurity (Health Canada & revised definitions) by major census metropolitan area Canada, 2011<sup>4</sup>

Census Metropolitan Area	Total households (000s) <sup>5</sup>	Food insecure (Marginal, Moderate & Severe)		Food insecure (Moderate & Severe)	
		Number (000s)	Percent	Number (000s)	Percent
<b>St. John's</b>	83.4	7.1	8.5%	4.6	5.5%
<b>Halifax</b>	157.3	29.7	18.9%	21.0	13.3%
<b>Moncton</b>	63.4	14.1	22.3%	8.9	14.0%
<b>Saint John</b>	52.9	6.7	12.6%	4.2	7.9%
<b>Quebec</b>	318.0	27.4	8.6%	11.7	3.7%
<b>Montréal</b>	1,546.1	217.9	14.1%	136.7	8.8%
<b>Ottawa-Gatineau</b>	464.0	41.7	9.0%	29.7	6.4%
<b>Toronto</b>	2,073.4	259.4	12.5%	177.3	8.6%
<b>Hamilton</b>	283.9	21.5	7.6%	16.1	5.7%
<b>Winnipeg</b>	295.9	35.6	12.0%	18.9	6.4%
<b>Regina</b>	86.0	11.5	13.3%	8.7	10.1%
<b>Saskatoon</b>	109.1	11.4	10.5%	8.3	7.6%
<b>Calgary</b>	479.1	57.8	12.1%	42.9	9.0%
<b>Edmonton</b>	446.5	65.5	14.7%	46.4	10.4%
<b>Vancouver</b>	933.0	87.6	9.4%	52.3	5.6%
<b>Victoria</b>	137.0	21.3	15.5%	17.0	12.4%
<b>Average of all CMAs</b>		915.9	12.2%		8.1%

## 2.5 Conclusion

This section sets the stage and context for a broad understanding of homelessness, its meaning and its causes. Creating a shared definition of homelessness is an important first step to being able to end it. As a society we tend to have a mental image of a homeless person as an older, single male, usually dealing with addictions or mental health issues, while living long-term in a shelter or on the street. The reality is that homelessness for the vast majority of people is short-term and only happens once (Segaert, 2012).

Moving the conversation away from homelessness as an individual problem to the conceptualization of homelessness as a result of structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances is key to being able to address the issue head on. To develop the support and political will needed to change our current response Canadians need to understand the extent of the problem. This report is a step towards a shared understanding of the meaning and causes of homelessness, as well as the various contributing factors.

But the data in this section shows us that homelessness is a problem larger than the number of people counted on the streets or in shelters. A large segment of the Canadian population is struggling with poverty and income security (social assistance rates, low-income cut-offs and minimum wage), housing affordability (including vacancy rates, cost of housing and social housing wait lists) and food insecurity which puts them at increased risk of homelessness. A large number of families are making choices between paying rent and feeding their kids. Too many Canadians are living on the margins and are just one small disaster or missed paycheque away from homelessness.

*Moving the conversation away from homelessness as an individual problem to the conceptualization of homelessness as a result of structural factors, systems failures and individual circumstances is key to being able to address the issue head on.*

# 3 The current situation: homelessness in Canada

An effective strategic response to homelessness cannot be developed without understanding the breadth and depth of the issue. However, homelessness is difficult to measure, particularly on a national scale. In part, this is to do with the wide range of circumstances that the term homeless can describe. Limited shelter use data is available but this alone cannot account for the unsheltered or provisionally accommodated. These categories of homelessness are the most difficult to quantify but data collection is improving as more Canadian municipalities conduct ‘point in time’ counts. These counts provide a detailed look at the number homeless individuals on a given night, as well as useful demographic information. We know that the experience of homelessness is greatly affected by factors such as age, gender, ethno-racial diversity, sexual orientation and the length of time an individual is homeless. Perhaps most significantly, we now understand the importance of dealing with chronic homelessness. It is clear that most individuals and families that become homeless move in and out of that situation rather rapidly. For a much smaller percentage of the population, homelessness becomes a much more acute, damaging and long-term or repeated experience. This is the group that is in greatest need, but also which uses the most existing emergency services. As local data collection improves and a national estimation of homelessness is agreed upon, tailored responses can be sought and progress can be measured.

## 3.1 How many people are homeless in Canada?

Estimating the number of homeless persons in Canada has been a source of debate for years. The Homelessness Partnering Secretariat (HPS) has regularly used the estimate that between 150,000 and 300,000 individuals experience homelessness in Canada in a given year, with advocates often employing the higher number. However, there has never been a concerted, coordinated or consistent effort to enumerate homelessness in Canada. Until recently we have relied on ball-park estimates, based on unreliable and incomplete data.

Fortunately, things have begun to change. More communities across the country are using point in time counts to determine the number of people who are homeless on a given night, and we are also now accumulating more reliable data on shelter usage.

### Annual homelessness numbers – How many people are homeless in a given year?

Earlier this year, the HPS released “The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009” (Segaert, 2012), which for the first time gives us reliable shelter data to inform a national estimate of homelessness. This study estimates the number of annual shelter users to be around 150,000 per year, a figure that did not

*In 2009, for instance, 147,000 different and unique individuals stayed in an emergency shelter at least once, a rate of about 1 in 230 Canadians.*

change significantly over the period of study. In 2009, for instance, 147,000 different and unique individuals stayed in an emergency shelter at least once, a rate of about 1 in 230 Canadians (Segaert, 2012: iii).

While this approximation gives us a good baseline estimate of shelter users, it does not tell the whole story. As Segaert points out, the study did not include individuals in transitional housing (for individuals or families), Violence Against Women shelters and second-stage housing, immigrant/refugee shelters, halfway houses or temporary shelters (e.g. for extreme weather). Why does this matter? Below are some key characteristics of select homeless sub-populations:

**UNSHELTERED** – Also referred to as the ‘street homeless’ or ‘rough sleepers’, this population generally avoids the shelter system (except in extreme circumstances) because of rules, concerns about safety and health, ownership of pets or fear of being separated from partners (most shelters are organized to meet the needs of single individuals). A 2002 study of shelter users in Ottawa found that 61% of the street homeless use emergency shelters only as a last resort and 24% reported that they did not use shelters at all in the previous twelve months (Farrell et al., 2002:15). Many people in this group are chronically homeless.

**PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED** – Surveys of shelter use do not capture the number of people in temporary accommodation with a lack of tenure security. Often referred to as the ‘Hidden Homeless’, this includes people who are couch surfing (staying temporarily with friends), in short term transitional housing, staying in motels, or are in institutional settings (hospital, prison) but are, by definition, homeless. Many people who seek temporary accommodation never use the shelter system or emergency services. While some street counts capture some of this data, there are no reliable national statistics on the number of people who are provisionally accommodated.

#### HOW MANY HOMELESS PEOPLE ARE THERE IN CANADA ON A GIVEN DAY?

The number of Canadians who experience homelessness on any given night in Canada is estimated to be minimally 28,500 individuals. The reader should be cautioned that this is only a rough estimate (for more details on our methodology for calculating this figure, see endnotes section of the report<sup>6</sup>). Nevertheless, this is the best estimate of homelessness developed in Canada to date, and includes people who are:

##### I. Staying in Emergency

###### Homelessness Shelters (14,400).

There are approximately 15,467 permanent shelter beds, and in 2009 an average of 14,400 were occupied (Segaert, 2012:27)

##### II. Staying in Violence Against Women shelters (7,350).

In 2010, there were 9,961 beds for women and children fleeing violence and abuse. This includes not only emergency shelters, but also transitional and second stage housing. In a Point in Time count on April 15, 2010, 7,362 beds were occupied by women and children (Burczycka & Cotter, 2011).

##### III. Unsheltered (2,880).

If one draws from the data comparing homelessness in Canadian cities, one can estimate the unsheltered population. On average, for every one hundred people in the shelter system, there are 20 people who are unsheltered.

##### IV. Temporary institutional

**accommodation (4,464).** Of those communities that count some portion of the provisionally accommodated, there are 31 people in this category for every 100 staying in emergency shelters.

**TURN-AWAYS** – There are no reliable statistics on the numbers of individuals who show up at emergency shelters, and are denied admittance because: a) there are no open beds, or b) they have been barred from the premises.

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS** – Typically in Canada, the infrastructure to support Violence Against Women (VAW shelters) is not integrated into or coordinated with the homelessness sector (VAW shelters were not included in the Segaert study). The VAW shelters have a different history and generally, different organizational structures.

A 2010 study of Violence Against Women shelters in Canada showed that there were 593 different operators of shelters (this includes emergency shelters, as well as transitional and second-stage housing for women fleeing violence) and that there were 64,500 admissions of women to shelters across Canada in 2009. Almost one third (31%) had been in the same shelter at some time in the past.

### Point in Time counts – Counting homelessness on a given night

Street counts are an important way of identifying the nature and extent of homelessness in a community. Often referred to as ‘point in time’ counts, these studies are snap shots that determine the number of homeless individuals on a given night. Some Canadian municipalities conduct counts and are able to assess the problem and better understand the homeless population for purposes of planning and evaluation; you cannot determine progress unless you have a clear measure of where you started. Doing point in time counts is challenging because the homeless population, of course, has no fixed address, is mobile, and in many cases is ‘hidden’ (couch surfers, for instance). There is no history of doing a coordinated, national street count in Canada, which makes extrapolating the data difficult<sup>7</sup>. In addition, the various communities that do counts use different definitions (until last year, there was no national definition of homelessness), employ different methodologies and do not consistently

### HOW MANY HOMELESS PEOPLE ARE THERE IN CANADA ON A GIVEN DAY?

*(Continued)*

**Hidden Homeless** (50,000). There is considerable debate about the number of people who are homeless but whom do not access any emergency services. The ‘hidden homeless’ refers to people who are temporarily staying with friends, relatives or others because they have no where else to live and no immediate prospect of permanent housing. This activity is sometimes referred to as ‘couch surfing’. Estimating the scale of the hidden homeless population and the conditions in which they live is extremely challenging, because the people who find themselves in this situation are difficult to access. Currently there is no reliable data on hidden homelessness in Canada at the national level and very little at the community level. For this reason we have not included a figure in our estimate of the number of people who are homeless on a given day.

The most reliable estimate of hidden homelessness comes from a single Canadian study in Vancouver (Eberle, et al., 2009) that demonstrated a ratio of 3.5 people considered to be hidden homeless for every one person who is sheltered or unsheltered. While the methodology of this study is sound, it was conducted in only one city, and the differences between cities, their infrastructure to support homelessness and their homeless population are quite profound, making a broader generalization highly problematic. We therefore cautiously estimate that there are 3 people who can be considered ‘hidden homeless’ for every one who is in an emergency shelter and/or is unsheltered.

conduct counts at the same time of year (counts can vary seasonally). This presents challenges in comparing data from one community to the next. Nevertheless, there are some important things we can learn from street counts. In Table 4 below, we look at street count data (varying years) from eleven different cities<sup>8</sup>.



*We therefore cautiously estimate that there are 3 people who can be considered 'hidden homeless' for every one who is in an emergency shelter and/or is unsheltered.*

TABLE 4 Point in time counts of homelessness in select Canadian cities<sup>9</sup>

	Year of Count	City Population	Total # Homeless	As a % of the total population	Unsheltered	Sheltered	Other	# of known published street counts	# of Emergency Shelter Beds
<b>Vancouver</b>	Mar-12	603,502	1602	0.27%	306	1296		6	1390
<b>Kelowna</b>	Apr-07	117,312	279	0.24%	150	119	10	4	80
<b>Calgary</b>	Jan-12	1,096,833	3190	0.29%	64	1715	1411	10	1606
<b>Red Deer</b>	Oct-12	90,564	279	0.31%	184	93	2	1	51
<b>Edmonton</b>	Oct-12	812,201	2174	0.27%	1070	1104		10	957
<b>Lethbridge</b>	Oct-12	83,517	99	0.12%	5	94		9	93
<b>Saskatoon</b>	May-08	222,189	260	0.12%	44	199	17	2	127
<b>Toronto</b>	Apr-09	2,615,060	5086	0.19%	400	4175	511	2	3253

The cities in this table range from the largest in Canada (including Toronto and Vancouver, but not Montreal, which does not appear to have done a count since the 1990s) to smaller centres, such as Kelowna, BC and Red Deer, Alberta. Toronto, which perhaps has the most comprehensive and advanced methodology for counting homelessness, also has the largest number of homeless persons in the country. However, it is the cities of Alberta that perhaps seem to have the most significant homelessness problem, when measured as a percentage of the total population.

Across the ten cities, there are variances in the number of people staying in emergency shelters compared with the number who are unsheltered. On average, there are four people staying in shelters for every one person sleeping rough, and the latter population makes up about 18% of the total homeless population across ten cities.

While all cities count people in emergency shelters, and most count those who are unsheltered, few are counting those who are provisionally sheltered – that is, living in interim (transitional) housing, couch surfing, or who are in hospital or prison, while homeless, for instance. What we can say though, is that in most Canadian cities, there is an average of one person who is un-housed, for every four people who are staying in emergency shelters, based on data from those cities that count both.



**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS** – A point in time count of Violence Against Women shelters was conducted on April 15 2010 across Canada. The count identified that there were 546 shelter facilities (again, this includes emergency shelters as well as transitional and second stage housing), with a total of 9,961 beds. On the day of the count, 7,362 beds were occupied by women and children, for an occupancy rate of 74%.

## 3.2 Who is homeless?

The homeless population in Canada is quite diverse, in terms of age, gender, and ethno-racial background. The Segart study (2012) identified the mean age individuals staying at shelter as being 37 years of age, and includes children, youth, adults and the elderly. Interestingly, those 65 years of age and older comprised just over 1.7 percent of shelter users, which may be explained by the expanded benefits accessible to seniors, but also by the much higher mortality rate of chronically homeless persons (Hwang, et al. 2009).

While homelessness can affect any number of people, we do know that some groups of people are more likely to be homeless than others. Single adult males between the ages of 25 and 55 account for almost half of the homeless population in Canada (47.5%), according to the Segart study. The characteristics of this group include greater incidences of mental illness, addictions and disability, including invisible disabilities such as brain injury and FASD. Because single adult males arguably form a large percentage of the chronic homeless population, suggesting that efforts targeting this population are warranted.



At the same time, it is also important to note that other sub-populations certain Canadian groups face unique risks and/or face special circumstances, including: *youth; Aboriginal people; women and families*. Because the specific experiences of being homeless will differ for each group, strategies to address homelessness must be tailored to these differing needs.

**YOUTH:** Young people aged 16-24 make up about 20% of the homeless population according to Segart, although the prevalence rates are similar to that of adult males (308/100,000 for youth vs. 318/100,000 for males

**YOUNG PEOPLE**  
— aged 16-24 —  
**MAKE UP ABOUT 20%**  
**OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION.**

between 25-55). However, the causes and consequences of homelessness for young people are distinct from those which afflict adults. Unlike the majority of adults, homeless youth come from homes where they were in the care of other adults. They typically come from homes characterized by family conflict of some kind (including in some cases physical, sexual and emotional abuse), disruptions to school and family life, neglect and poverty. Many are in the throws of adolescent development, and lack life experience and the skills and supports to live independently, including the ability to secure employment and housing. Homeless youth are also more vulnerable

to crimes and exploitation. All of these factors increase the challenges in supporting this group, since the needs of a 16-year-old are very different from those of someone older.

Segart identifies that in 2009, 20% of the total homeless population were between 16 and 25 (or approximately 30,000 annually) and a further 1% (1,500) were under the age of 16 and unaccompanied by adults (Segart, 2012:16). The figure of 2/3 male (63%) versus 1/3 female (36.9%) is consistent with other research on youth homelessness in Canada (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004).

In many studies of youth homelessness, young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual are over-represented, making up 25-40% of the youth homeless population, compared to only 5-10% of the general population (Josephson & Wright, 2000). This is important to note because the persistence of homophobia clearly plays a role in youth homelessness, with sexual minorities being over-represented in street youth populations, a result of tension between the youth and his or her family, friends and community. Homophobia by the homeless sector can further oppress this population.

**WOMEN:** While the percentage of women in the homeless emergency shelter population is lower than men (males: 73.6%, females: 26.2% (Segaert, 2012: 14)<sup>10</sup>, the unique circumstances facing women must be addressed. Women are at increased risk for hidden homelessness, living in overcrowded conditions or having sufficient money for shelter, but not for other necessities. In addition, according to the 2009 General Social Survey, 6% of women report some form of intimate partner (spousal) assault (Sinha, 2013:24). Family violence is a major cause of homelessness for women, and while some women make use of Violence Against Women shelters others wind up using homelessness shelters. A 2010 point in time count of women staying in found that abuse was the most commonly cited reason for admissions (71%) and the majority (60%) had not reported this to the police (Burcycka & Cotter, 2011:5).

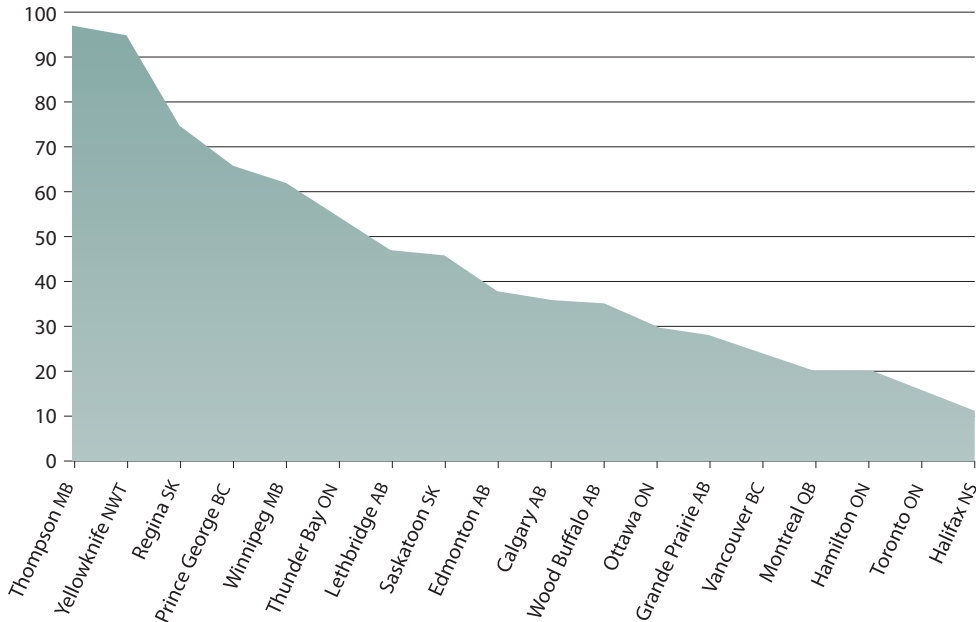
When women become homeless, they are at increased risk of violence and assault, sexual exploitation and abuse (Gaetz et al., 2010; Paridis & Mosher, 2012) which may explain the lower numbers of women in the shelter system. That is, many women will go to lengths to avoid the shelter system, including staying in dangerous and unhealthy relationships and/or making arrangements to move in with a partner (even when that situation is unsafe) rather than submit to the incredible risk of violence and exploitation on the streets.

**ABORIGINAL:** Aboriginal peoples (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples) are overrepresented amongst the homeless population in virtually all urban centres in Canada. The experience of colonialism (resulting in intergenerational trauma), poverty, as well as extreme racism in many Canadian cities creates more limited opportunities and greater risk of homelessness. In thinking about how to respond to Aboriginal homelessness, it is therefore necessary to consider the specific historical, experiential and cultural differences, as well as colonization and racism: "The urban Aboriginal homeless experience differs from that of mainstream Canadians due to a convoluted policy environment predicated on assumptions of cultural inferiority and forced societal participation" (Belanger et al., 2012:15). It is also important to consider the extreme poverty, lack of opportunities and inadequate housing on many reserves as a driver of migration to cities. Even further, Canada's colonial history, including the federal Indian Act, which identified who "qualifies" as an Aboriginal person and therefore has access to various benefits, the history of residential schools (which took Aboriginal children away from their families, communities and culture and tragically exposed many to abuse) and ongoing discrimination, racism and systemic oppression continue to affect Aboriginal access to services, programs and support. We find that while Aboriginal people make up 6% of the general population, they are considerably over-represented amongst the homeless population. As a recent study by Belanger et al. (2012) attests, this over-representation dramatically increases as one moves west and north in Canada:



**FAMILY VIOLENCE**  
*- is a major cause of -*  
**HOMELESSNESS**  
**FOR WOMEN**

TABLE 5 Urban Aboriginal Homeless as Percentage of Overall Homeless Population, Select Canadian Cities<sup>11</sup>



It should be noted however, that in many major urban centres, including Toronto, Ottawa, Halifax and Vancouver, the percentage of the homeless population that is Aboriginal appears lower; this is misleading because the overall percentage of Aboriginal people who are part of the urban population is also considerably lower. So, in Toronto for instance, Aboriginal people make up 16% of the homeless population, but as a percentage of the total Aboriginal population in the city, they make up 17.3%, which is the third highest ratio for all cities included in this study.

**FAMILIES:** Homeless families are diverse in structure, with some including two parents, and many headed by a single parent (usually female). Family homelessness is largely underpinned by structural factors, including inadequate income, lack of affordable housing and family violence. Following the withdrawal of government housing programs and decreased supports, more families are turning to emergency shelters.

A significant finding from the Segaert study was that the sharpest increase in shelter use has been amongst families (in most cases headed by women) and therefore children. For instance the number of children staying in shelters increased by over 50% between 2005 (6,205) and 2009 (9,459). Segaert identifies that the average length of shelter stay for families was 50.2 days, an increase of 50% over five years, and more than triple the average stay for the total population of people who experienced homelessness (Segaert, 2012:19). This means that while families accounted for just 4% of all shelter stays, they used 14% of total bed nights. This puts incredible pressure on the family shelter system, which has not had the capacity to deal with this increase. It is worth noting, once again, that these figures do not include female-headed families using Violence Against Women shelters.

*While families accounted for just 4% of all shelter stays, they used 14% of total bed nights.*

### 3.3 Chronic homelessness in Canada

How long are people homeless, and does it matter? Research from the North America shows that for the vast majority of people who become homeless, the experience is rather short. In Canada, though the median length of stay in emergency shelter is approximately 50 days, most people are homeless for less than a month (24-29% stay only one night), and manage to leave homelessness on their own, usually with little support (Segaert, 2012:19). For these people homelessness is a one-time only event.

Conversely, a segment of the homeless population is chronically or episodically homeless. Chronically homeless individuals are people who have been on the streets for a long time, potentially years, and are locked into a state of homelessness due to multiple needs across health, addiction and contact with criminal justice system. Episodically homeless individuals have an ongoing pattern of homelessness throughout their lifetime. These groups are significant because combined they account for less than 15% of the homeless population, but consume more than half the resources in the homelessness system, including emergency shelter beds and day programs.

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#### Why this matters

People who are chronically homeless make up a small portion of the overall population, but have the highest needs. The longer one is homeless, the greater likelihood that preexisting and emergent health problems worsen (including mental health and addictions) and there is greater risk of criminal victimization, sexual exploitation and trauma. There is also a much greater likelihood of involvement in the justice system. All of this makes life much more challenging for people who experience chronic homelessness.

#### WHAT IS CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS?

In the 1990s, Kuhn and Culhane wrote a seminal article on patterns of shelter stays in the United States. They came up with a typology that included three patterns of shelter stay amongst homeless adults:

**Transitional:** Individuals and families who generally enter the shelter system for a short stay (less than a month) and usually for one stay only. They tend to be younger and are less likely to have complex issues relating to mental health, addictions and other medical problems. The original study by Kuhn and Culhane found that the transitionally homeless make up about 81% of the total homeless population, with an average length of stay of just over 42 days. In Canada, the transitionally homeless make up 88-94% of the population (Aubry et al., 2013)

**Episodic:** This includes individuals who move into and out of homelessness several times over a three year period (and some of the moves may be into corrections or hospital). This population is also younger, but has more complex health issues than transitionally homeless. The Kuhn and Culhane study found this population represented around 9% of the homeless population, had around 5 different periods of homelessness over three years, and logged a total of 264 shelter stays, for an average length of 54.4 days. In Canada, the percentages are similar (3-11%).

**Chronic:** Those who are chronically homeless are typically long term shelter users, and 'absolutely homeless' individuals who live on the streets, the vast majority having serious mental health or addictions issues, and / or a physical disability. Making up 9.8% of the homeless population, this group had on average 2.3 stays in shelters, but generally for a long period of time, ranging from 317 to 1095 days in shelter per stay (ibid, 220). The chronic homeless population in Canada is smaller, ranging from 2-4% (Aubry et al., 2013)

Addressing chronic homelessness should be central to any strategy to end homelessness. Over a decade ago in the United States, it became clear that while the chronically homeless make up around 10% of the homeless population, they wind up using over 60% of the resources in the homelessness sector. Though the Canadian figures differ, the policy implications are the same. In the American context, this realization had a major impact on U.S. homelessness policy, and made addressing chronic homelessness a top priority of governments at the local, state and national levels.

### 3.4 Conclusion

For the first time, we have a strong evidence-based understanding of the number of people who are homeless in Canada, inside and outside of shelters. Yet, we believe these numbers likely underestimate homelessness in Canada because of the challenges of counting and lack of statistics across the country. The lack of coordinated information systems or tools to assist with recording statistics and counting homeless people, or the limited ability and resources for agencies and municipalities to conduct counts (not to mention lack of common definition or methodology) means that we have likely missed pockets of homelessness across the country.

We are able to identify trends through the use of the data that we do have. Women, youth and Aboriginal people have been identified as groups with unique needs that must be incorporated into any response. The issue of chronic homelessness shows that costs savings can be found – after initial increased investment – if we are able to address the individual and systemic issues that arise from long-term homelessness.

We also are aware that a great deal of homelessness is hidden. The inability to count those people who share with friends and family by couch-surfing, doubling or tripling up or who are otherwise underhoused and at-risk of homelessness is a definite area of concern that needs to be better understood and addressed further. This is one area where we firmly believe our numbers are more than likely quite low.

Yet, there is good news too. A significant percentage of people spend only one night in a homeless shelter

#### CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

Can we estimate the level of chronic homelessness in Canada? A recent study of shelter users in Toronto, Ottawa and Guelph by Aubry, et al. (2013) helps to identify the level of chronic homelessness in Canada. They found that approximately 88-94% of the homeless population can be considered transitionally homeless, and 3-11% are episodically homeless. Interestingly, the number of chronically homeless in Canada, as a percentage of the homeless population is between 2-4%, and is considerably lower than is the case in the United States (10%).

Based on our estimate of the total number of homeless people who use shelters on an annual basis (200,000), and drawing on the research of Aubry et al. (2013), we can project the following numbers of chronic, episodic and transitionally homeless persons in Canada:

**Chronic homeless:** 4,000 to 8,000  
**Episodic homeless:** 6,000 to 22,000  
**Transitionally homeless:** 176,000 to 188,000

A key point needs to be made here, however. Though the number of people who have lengthy stays in the shelter system is relatively small (less than 20%) the chronically homeless are also at the same time the highest users of homeless services.

“In the case of Toronto and Ottawa, individuals in these two clusters occupied over half of the shelter beds during the four-year period of the study even though they represented only between 12 per cent and 13 per cent of the shelter population.” (Aubry et al., 2013:10).

and are able to reestablish their lives and solve their recovery themselves. A focus on early intervention and supports that help prevent homelessness can assist towards eliminating the needs for these individuals to enter the homelessness spectrum.

But these statistics are a starting point. They are an initial step towards beginning to the conversation that needs to happen in communities – large and small – to determine the next steps towards ending homelessness.

## 4 Responding to homelessness – how are we doing?

Communities across Canada have been struggling to address the problem of homelessness for several decades. The Government of Canada, as well as many provincial, territorial, regional, municipal and Aboriginal governments have invested in creating effective solutions. A key question is whether we are making any progress? Is it making a difference?

This is a challenging question because, as we have argued throughout this report, we lack sufficient national data to provide a solid baseline against which to measure progress. Many, if not most, communities do not do regular street counts, and few communities or agencies rigorously evaluate their outcomes and efforts.

That data which does exist unfortunately doesn't point to major progress being made in responding to homelessness. The shelter use study by Segaert indicates that between 2005 and 2009, there was little change in the number of individuals who use shelters

on an annual basis. At an average of 150,000 individuals a year, there is no evidence that our efforts to address homelessness in Canada have resulted in an overall reduction of the problem (Segaert, 2012:12). While the annual shelter use remained relatively stable over a five year period, the average length of stay increased, shown by the

annual number of shelter 'bed nights' (that is, the number of individual shelter beds filled over the course of the year) rising from 4.5 million in 2007 to 5.3 million in 2009. In terms of shelter occupancy, this means on any given night over 2,000 more people slept in homeless shelters each night in 2009 than was the case two years earlier. The proportion of those with longer shelter stays of one month or more was 16.7% in 2009, compared with 12.6% in 2005 (ibid., 20).

*Any given night over 2,000 more people slept in homeless shelters each night in 2009 than was the case two years earlier.*

*At an average of 150,000 individuals a year, there is no evidence that our efforts to address homelessness in Canada have resulted in an overall reduction of the problem.*

The key point is that over this five year period, there is very little evidence of that we made any impact on the problem of homelessness, and potentially, we allowed the problem to worsen. Unfortunately, we don't have up-to-date data for the past four years to signal any major shift, and although there are signs of progress in a number of communities (see Section 4.4), there isn't any compelling evidence of change at the national level.

All of this suggests that we can no longer justify going down the same road. Morally, ethically and financially, our response to homelessness has failed to achieve the kinds of results that are necessary for Canada to continue to prosper as a leading country internationally. Six years ago the Sheldon Chumir Foundation argued:

*"Whether it's the immorality of increasing usage of emergency shelters by children, families and seniors, or the estimated \$4.5 to \$6 billion annual cost of homelessness, most Canadians seem to agree, according to polls, that the status quo is unacceptable." (Laird, 2007)*

A solution to homelessness in Canada requires a shift in focus, from crisis management (i.e. emergency shelters and soup kitchens) to permanent solutions. We need to work to ensure that individuals and families experiencing crises have access to permanent, appropriate, safe and affordable housing with the support necessary to sustain it. All of this must come together in a coordinated, planned, cohesive strategy that is supported and implemented by all representatives of the community, including governments.

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## 4.1 Addressing the problem

There are three interrelated areas of activity that we can engage in as part of an effective response to homelessness. First, we can focus on prevention - putting in place measures that ensure people have the income and supports they need in order to reduce the chances that people will lose their housing and wind up homeless. This means targeted early intervention strategies when people are about to, or have recently, become homeless. It also means engaging in strategies to prevent people from being discharged from hospitals, prisons and child protection into homelessness.

Second, we will need emergency services, because no matter how well developed the preventive measures, there will still be crises that produce homelessness. This means that we will always need emergency shelters and day programs to help people get by in a time of crisis.

Finally, we must develop a range of housing options and strategies (with appropriate supports) to help move people out of homelessness, ideally as quickly as possible. The strongest responses to homelessness – in Europe and Australia – tend to emphasize prevention and rehousing (with supports), with emergency services designed to help people quickly transition through a crisis.

Canadian communities have responded to homelessness in many creative ways. Innovative programs and services exist across the country. However, if one were to characterize the overall Canadian response to homelessness, it would be that we generally place too much emphasis on managing the crisis rather than trying to solve it. Many jurisdictions continue to rely on a patchwork of emergency services such as shelters and day programs; these services are mostly concentrated in downtown areas that meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. This focus is in some ways not surprising, because relative to those countries that are experiencing greater success in tackling homelessness, Canada is still in the early stages. In each of those other contexts, the first response was an emergency response, followed by a more strategic and coordinated approach emphasizing prevention and rehousing.



## 4.2 The cost of the emergency response to homelessness in Canada

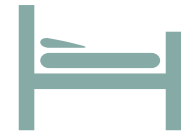
A common perception about the response to homelessness is that an emphasis on the provision of emergency services (shelters, day programs) while perhaps not ideal, is maybe the best we can do. After all, people who are homeless are being provided with shelter and are well fed, aren't they? In any event, isn't this a prudent response in these times of austerity and budget cutbacks?

There are compelling reasons to question this logic. We do know that the longer people are homeless the more that their health and mental health declines (Frankish, et al., 2005; Hwang, 2001; Hwang et al., 2009) and their risk of being a victim of a crime increases (O'Grady et al., 2011). Moreover, there is solid evidence that our emergency response doesn't provide homeless people with enough food. A study of homeless youth by Tarasuk and her team found that it doesn't matter if they get all their food from charitable services or from the proceeds of panhandling; they are likely to be malnourished (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2013). We're attempting to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless, but given the worsening health, damaged relationships and downward spiral that many people become victims of, we have to question whether this response is even minimally adequate.

Moreover, we need to consider whether a focus on emergency response is even cost effective. A recent report, "The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can we save money by doing the right thing?" (Gaetz, 2012) found that there is considerable evidence that investing in emergency services as a response to homelessness not only has a negative impact on health and well-being of people who experience it, but it is also expensive (Laird, 2007; Eberle et al., 2001; Palermo et al., 2006; Shapcott, 2007; Pomeroy, 2005; 2008). For instance, a 2001 study in British Columbia indicated that it costs \$30,000 - \$40,000 annually to support one homeless person (Eberle et al., 2001) and a 2006 study in Halifax (Palermo et al., 2006) notes that investments in social housing would generate a per person savings of 41%. In the Wellesley Institute's *Blueprint to End Homelessness* (2007), Shapcott argued that the average monthly costs of housing people while they are homeless are \$1,932 for a shelter bed, \$4,333 for provincial jail, or \$10,900 for a hospital bed. This can be compared with the average monthly cost to the City of Toronto for rent supplements (\$701) or social housing (\$199.92).

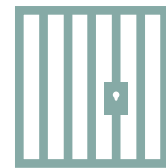
Why is emergency response so expensive? The cost of homelessness does not only accrue for our emergency shelters, soup kitchens and day programs, but also for the health care system and correction services. When we keep people in a chronic state of homelessness, their health precipitously declines (including, for many, the exacerbation or development mental health and addictions issues), and their involvement in the criminal justice system increases. So, in comparing the cost of emergency services versus providing housing and effective supports, a comprehensive estimation of the cost of homelessness becomes crucial.

### THE AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS OF HOUSING PEOPLE WHILE THEY ARE HOMELESS



\$1,932

SHELTER BED



\$4,333

PROVINCIAL JAIL



\$10,900

HOSPITAL BED

VS.



\$701

RENT SUPPLEMENTS



\$199.<sup>92</sup>

SOCIAL HOUSING

### 4.3 The tide is turning – signs of progress

Can we really end homelessness in Canada? It is certainly true that there will always be crises that lead to homelessness – eviction, personal problems, family breakdowns, natural disasters – and that we will need emergency services to respond to these needs. However, when we speak of ending homelessness, we are talking about ending a broad social problem of our own making that traps people in a state of emergency, sometimes for years on end, without access to permanent housing and with declining health. That is the problem we are trying to solve. **No one should be homeless and using emergency services for any longer than a few weeks.**

So what can we do to end homelessness? Many years of research and practice have helped identify successful approaches and practices. We know that without adequate housing, adequate income, and adequate support services, people will struggle to remain housed. We know that all levels of government – federal, provincial, regional, municipal and aboriginal – must show leadership, strategic engagement and investment if we are to address the causes of homelessness. The challenge now is to work together, across all levels of society, to coordinate and implement successful prevention and intervention programs and policies that will put an end to homelessness.

In the following section, we present some key examples of progress being made in addressing homelessness in Canada. This list is intended neither to be exhaustive nor completely comprehensive, but rather to highlight several communities whose strategic work to address homelessness is resulting in a shift from ‘managing’ homelessness to reducing or eliminating this seemingly intractable problem.

*The challenge now is to work together, across all levels of society, to coordinate and implement successful prevention and intervention programs and policies that will put an end to homelessness.*

#### THE COST OF HOMELESSNESS TO THE CANADIAN ECONOMY: \$7 BILLION ANNUALLY

In 2007, the Sheldon Chumir Foundation estimated that the emergency response to homelessness costs taxpayers from \$4.5-\$6 billion annually, based on an estimate of providing services and supports (between \$30,000 and \$40,000) to 150,000 homeless individual annually (Laird, 2007). This includes not only the cost of emergency shelters, but social services, health care and corrections.

**Our updated figure for the annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy is \$7.05 billion dollars.** In order to come up with this estimate, we drew from several sources of data. We began with our own estimate of unique individuals accessing the shelter system in a given year (200,000). Next we made a determination of the annual cost of supporting a homeless person based on preliminary data from the At Home/Chez Soi project. We consider this to be a very rough estimate, and believe that as the data sources in Canada improve, so will our ability to determine the annual cost of homelessness (see footnote for more detail<sup>12</sup>).

### Government of Canada

In 1999 the Government of Canada launched the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) which emphasized the importance of community responses to homelessness through funding for 61 ‘Designated Community’ entities, each responsible for planning, decision-making and distribution of funds locally. The stated goal of NHI was to make “strategic investments in community priorities and a planning process that encourages cooperation between governments, agencies and community-based organizations to find local solutions for homeless people and those at-risk” (Treasury Board of Canada, n.d.).

The now renamed Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) has continued to support local communities in their efforts to address homelessness. An important

contribution of HPS has been to support research on homelessness through its Homelessness Knowledge Development program, which is intended to provide a solid evidentiary base for homelessness policy and practice across the country. Research is a key component of determining promising or best practices that exist in Canada in order to replicate success.

In March of this year, HPS was renewed by the Government of Canada for five years, a financial commitment of \$119 million. While this represents a drop in annual expenditures (formerly the commitment was for \$134.5 million) the renewed commitment also signals a shift in priority. HPS is encouraging community entities embrace and implement a housing-first approach, which recognizes that housing stability is necessary for the success of other interventions such as education and training, life skills development, management of mental health challenges – or treatment of substance abuse.

A key challenge for the Government of Canada is that its investment in a national homelessness strategy has not been accompanied by a robust and ongoing investment in affordable housing, a key pillar in any effective response to homelessness. This will need to be addressed in coming years.

## Provincial and Territorial Responses

It can be argued that historically provinces and territories have not been as actively engaged in responding to homelessness as they could be. Provincial and Territorial governments across Canada have major responsibility for the delivery of a range of services that intersect with homelessness, including housing, health care, child welfare, corrections (shared with the federal government), energy, municipal affairs, and transportation, amongst others. Some provinces have developed plans to address homelessness (most notably, British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick), while most have not. Some have developed Affordable Housing Plans while again, others have not.

In 2010, the Province of **NEW BRUNSWICK** released its homelessness and housing strategy: [Hope is a Home. New Brunswick's Housing Strategy.](#) In this document, they also laid out their "Homeless Framework: A Home for Everyone!", a strategy with the goal of reducing the need for a broad emergency response through provision of adequate housing and supports to prevent homelessness and its recurrence, and through prioritizing Housing First.

The **NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR** [Poverty Reduction Strategy and Social Housing Plan](#) has been shaped by the work of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing & Homelessness Network (developed in 2009) which has supported leadership and policy development, capacity building, research and data co-ordination and knowledge transfer and awareness. Eleven Community Advisory Boards (CABs) throughout the province work collaboratively to end homelessness.

### PROVINCIAL SPOTLIGHT – ALBERTA

The Province of Alberta is a leader in developing an effective provincial response to homelessness, that includes program and service integration, prioritizing Housing First, and a planned, evidence-based response rooted in research. It has created an [Interagency Council on Homelessness](#) designed to enhance policy and service integration by bringing together key areas of provincial government services, including health, social services, housing, corrections and child protection, for instance. The provincial government has also invested in supporting communities in developing effective responses to homelessness. In 2008 it released a [Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness](#). In the recent report, [A Plan for Alberta, Ending Homelessness in 10 Years – 3 Year Progress Report](#), the province was able to report some key gains, including:

- Over 6,600 Albertans experiencing homelessness have been provided housing and supports
- 10% reduction in emergency shelter use province wide since 2008
- 16% province wide reduction in homelessness since 2008
- Over 1,600 people have graduated from Housing First programs
- Average 80 percent housing retention rate

In the **PROVINCE OF ONTARIO**, legislative change (the Housing Services Act, 2011) is paving the way for more strategic and coordinated responses to homelessness in communities across the provinces. Communities have been given more flexibility in funding for housing and homelessness, and are preparing Ten Year Plans to support integrated service delivery models designed to reduce homelessness.

The **PROVINCE OF QUEBEC** has historically provided a robust social safety net and innovative community programming, yet the problem of homelessness persists. Major progress has been made in concerting the different levels of the government to develop collaboration and common actions. Twelve cities have developed community action plans. This constant dialogue has led to the development of new solutions focusing on coordinated interventions by cross-sectoral teams (community sector and health agencies, social services and police). The provincial government is currently working with key stakeholders to develop an effective homelessness policy to address homelessness.

## Municipal and community responses

Though local responses vary, many Canadian communities are addressing homelessness with long-term solutions in mind. Cities such as Saskatoon and Winnipeg are undertaking plans to end homelessness and a number of others are publishing annual report cards on homelessness. With examples of good practice occurring across the country, we offer just a few examples below.

### VICTORIA

The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness works in partnership across sectors, including governments, non-profits and businesses with a mission to end homelessness in Victoria by 2018. The Coalition coordinates a number of programs, including a successful Housing First initiative, Streets to Homes. By 2011, this program had successfully housed 62 participants thereby reducing homelessness, increasing participant self-sufficiency and overall health and well-being (Crewson et al., 2011).

### VANCOUVER

Vancouver's Mayor and City Council have shown strong leadership to achieve their commitment to end street homelessness by 2015. Underpinned by innovative public, private and non-profit partnerships, the city is committed to building more affordable housing throughout Vancouver. In partnership with BC Housing, Vancouver Coastal Health and Street to Home Foundation, Vancouver has invested land worth \$60 million to develop 1,500 housing units at 14 sites. Half these units are now open, with priority given to the homeless living on the street and in shelters. Further, the city has demonstrated leadership across all points of the housing continuum. Since 2008, Vancouver has partnered with BC Housing to open temporary, low-barrier winter shelters which provide the homeless population with access to shelter, food, health and support services and referrals to housing. It is through these private and public partnerships that Vancouver has seen a 66% reduction in street homelessness (Mayor of Vancouver, 2013).

### COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT – LETHBRIDGE

A community of around 90,000, Lethbridge has shown that smaller communities can also have great success in addressing homelessness. After adopting a Five Year Plan, Lethbridge has successfully implemented a broad Housing First strategy that has the homelessness sector working together to support a range of targeted Housing First programs. Lethbridge has also been an innovator in addressing Aboriginal homelessness through its integrated Housing First strategy, and in working collaboratively with Lethbridge Regional Police Service to develop an approach that moves away from the 'criminalization of homelessness' response common in so many communities, to one that engages a community policing unit in working to support homeless people to access services and supports. Lethbridge has made great strides in reducing homelessness, and in the past year saw a 50% decrease in absolute street homelessness over the past year, and a 15% decrease in emergency shelter occupancy over the same period (Social Housing in Action, 2012).

## CALGARY

Calgary has been a leader in Canada in terms of developing and implementing a strategic and coordinated response to homelessness. The first city to implement a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, Calgary has also developed an integrated service deliver model (system of care), increased the supply of affordable housing, implemented Housing First as both a system philosophy and program priority, adopted the first municipal plan to end youth homelessness and been a leader in developing a homelessness research agenda. The result has been that Calgary has seen an 11.4% reduction in homelessness from 2008 to winter of 2012 (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2012). Outlined in the 10 Year Plan, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, emphasizes long-term solutions and improved system responses in order to end homelessness by 2018. Since the initiation of the Plan, data collection has improved, shelter use has stabilized, housing first programs have shown success and affordable housing stock has increased (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011).

## EDMONTON

Homeward Trust, like the Calgary Homeless Foundation, has also been an innovator in developing effective responses to homelessness. An early adopter of a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, and a strong advocate of the Housing First approach, Edmonton moved aggressively to reduce homelessness. It has shown the strongest results for a large city in Canada, with a 30% reduction in overall homelessness since 2008 (Sorensen, 2013). What has made Edmonton a particularly noteworthy example of how to strategically address homelessness has been its focus on confronting Aboriginal homelessness, and the inclusive strategy of engaging Aboriginal communities in this task. Supported by an Aboriginal Advisory Council and with strong representation on Homeward Trust's board, Aboriginal people have had a strong say in program directions, strategic responses, service delivery models and funding decisions, all designed to address the specific needs and circumstances of Aboriginal populations, and their historic experiences of colonialism.

*Edmonton has shown the strongest results for a large city in Canada, with a 30% reduction in overall homelessness since 2008 (Sorensen, 2013).*

## SASKATOON

In 2013, United Way of Saskatoon and Area published Saskatoon's Plan to End Homelessness. It marks a coordinated effort to end homelessness through consultation and partnership with key players such as the community, homeless individuals, aboriginal leaders and the business community. Based on a list of essentials set out by the CAEH (CAEH, 2012) the Plan is underpinned by a commitment to Housing First, system mapping, governance and accountability. Further, it considers the separate needs of sub-populations such as Youth, the chronically homeless and perhaps most importantly Aboriginal people. To accompany this strong strategic direction, Saskatoon conducted a point-in-time in September 2012. The data collected from this count will form a useful baseline that will allow for the progress towards ending homelessness to be measured (United Way of Saskatoon and Area, 2013).

## TORONTO

Since the first Street Needs Assessment in 2006, Toronto has seen a 51% decrease in street homelessness (City of Toronto, 2011). This success may be attributed to Toronto's outreach program, Streets to Homes. Designed around a Housing First approach, outreach workers house approximately 600 people a year, with 87% of tenants remaining housed (Falvo, 2010). Furthermore, the City of Toronto has developed a 10 Year Affordable Housing Action Plan, which seeks to reduce lengthy wait times for rent-g geared-to-income housing, increase rental housing stock and preserve or repair existing rental units (City of Toronto, 2009). Toronto is currently moving towards a strategic plan that highlights "housing stability" as the key goal, to be achieved through targeted prevention and an intensification of Housing First. Toronto has also historically been a leader in integrating innovative harm reduction strategies into community responses.

## OTTAWA

The Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa (ATEH) publishes annual report cards on homelessness. Indicators on housing affordability, shelter use and income allow for long-term evaluation and measurements of progress. The most recent report card highlights an increase in the number of newly created affordable housing units. In 2012, 139 new units were introduced with an additional 747 rental supplements and housing allowances made to individuals and families. The report also notes that the number of homeless individuals in Ottawa may be stabilizing (Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, 2012).

## 4.4 Conclusion

Canada has a long way to go in order to end the homeless crisis, but it has also made some definite steps in the right direction. We can lean on our international partners in the U.S., the UK and Australia and learn from their successes (and failures) rather than reinventing the solution. A focus on Housing First, early intervention and the development of affordable housing are all keys to being able to move away from the emergency response phase of homeless service provision.

We also have a great many promising and best practices within Canada that should be used as examples. The untold stories of successes need to be shared so they can be replicated. The Homeless Hub website contains a wealth of resources and case studies to help communities learn from one another.

Changes need to occur at all levels of government and commitments of financial resources and political will to end homelessness need to be established. Maintaining people in a state of homelessness is costly; ending homelessness is the goal we should all be seeking for financial and moral reasons.

### NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT – AT HOME/CHEZ SOI

The At Home/Chez Soi project, funded by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, is steadily advancing our knowledge about the effectiveness of Housing First, how it works in different communities and strategies for implementation with different targeted sub-populations (for instance youth, Aboriginal people and newcomers). The project, implemented in five cities, has shown strong housing outcomes and cost savings (Goering et al, 2012).

- Vancouver
- Winnipeg
- Toronto
- Montreal
- Moncton

## 5 Recommendations

This report documents the challenges we are facing in addressing homelessness in Canada. While many Canadians have perhaps become too used to the sight of homeless people in communities across the country, we need not be complacent. There is a growing body of knowledge that helps us understand the nature of the problem and points the way to effective and sustainable solutions. The recommendations below highlight some of these key directions:

### **1. Communities should develop and implement clear plans to end homelessness, supported by all levels of government.**

Ending homelessness can feel like an impossible task given the overwhelming scope of the problem and its apparent complexity. But recent research and community experience with developing and implementing plans to end homelessness in Canada, the U.S., Europe and Australia, have highlighted how homelessness can be ended. Effective community plans to end homelessness are strategic documents that enable service integration and coordination in order to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place and to help those who fall into homelessness to become rehoused – with the supports they need – as quickly as possible. The success of the plan depends on collaboration amongst a wide range of planners including governments, as well as homeless-serving organizations. The renewal of HPS, as well as changes in Ontario, for instance, will require that communities develop new community plans, and these should focus on ending homelessness rather than simply managing the problem.

There are resources available to support the development of effective community plans. The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' document, *A Plan Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in 10 Years*, is designed to help create and implement an effective plan to end homelessness in your community. It provides information on the 10 Essentials including a set of criteria that will ensure the effectiveness of your 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness.

In order for communities to be successful, all levels of government must be engaged and supportive. In countries where they are showing success, there is a recognition that all levels of government not only need to be at the table, but must be engaged in the development and implementation of strategic responses. Active, strategic and coordinated engagement by all levels of government should include an alignment of strategic priorities to levels of government with key responsibilities.

Within governments, there needs to be more effective coordination of services across ministries and departments. Homelessness is a 'fusion' policy issue, and necessarily responses must involve health, corrections and justice, housing, education and child welfare, for instance. This may seem obvious, but it is one of the biggest challenges in dealing with the issue of homelessness. Because of systems failures in other departments of

government contributing to homelessness, the sector often reproduces or builds those very services and supports internally (mental health supports, addictions, etc.), when the sustainable solution is for those very sectors to make changes to address the problems. A related issue is that too many Canadian plans to address homelessness are developed by, and for, the homelessness sector. Successful responses in the U.S., Australia and the UK demonstrate that other sectors of government must be mandated (through legislation) to address the flow of people into homelessness, and that strategic responses must necessarily include other sectors of government at the table.

This means a more robust role for provincial and territorial governments, which fund and control key functions of government that impact on homelessness including housing, health (mental health, addictions), corrections, social services (including child protection and family services), education and training. If we imagine more effective, strategic and integrated responses that shift the focus from 'managing' homelessness to an emphasis on prevention and rehousing, the provinces must not only be at the table, but also actively and strategically work to coordinate policy, funding and service delivery. While the provinces of Alberta, New Brunswick, Quebec and perhaps British Columbia have all been more visibly and directly involved in responding to homelessness, few have actually developed strategic responses.

Finally, it is important to remember that in Canada, 'All levels of government' includes Aboriginal peoples (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples). Because Aboriginal people are overrepresented amongst homeless populations across the country, Aboriginal peoples and their representative governments must be seen as part of the solution, and all other levels of government must increase their commitment to reducing poverty within these communities.

## 2. All levels of government must work to increase the supply of affordable housing

No plan to end homelessness can succeed without a commitment to expand the supply of affordable housing.

Why is affordable housing important? While solving homelessness in many cases involves more than simply providing housing, in the end it cannot be solved without an adequate supply of affordable housing. Promising practices, including prevention, rapid rehousing and Housing First, should all be priorities in any strategic plan to address homelessness. However, none are in any way possible without a range of affordable housing options.

*Canada will not see a sustained reduction in homelessness without a significant increase in the affordable housing supply.*

Ultimately, reducing homelessness is going to rely on adequate market rental, affordable rental and deep subsidy rental housing including Permanent Supportive Housing. Canada will not see a sustained reduction in homelessness without a significant increase in the affordable housing supply. The Federal government plays an important, but not exclusive, role in that housing infrastructure. We recommend that the Government of Canada work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to develop a national affordable housing strategy. That strategy should include continued direct federal investment, but may also include tax incentives for market rental housing, a low income housing tax credit program and support for alternative financing like Community Bonds.

The increased investment in affordable housing should also include an expansion of permanent supportive housing. Many individuals who become homeless have complex needs because of both visible and invisible disabilities, mental health problems and addictions. In some cases they will need permanent supportive housing if they are to avoid homelessness.



### **3. Communities – and all levels of government – should embrace Housing First**

In recent years, “Housing First” has emerged as a key response to homelessness. The basic underlying principle being that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are housed. This is as true for homeless people, and those with mental health and addiction issues, as it is for anyone. The five core principles of Housing First include:

- No housing readiness requirements
- Choice and self determination
- Individualized support services
- Harm reduction
- Social and community integration

Housing First need not only be considered a program response. It is best applied as a philosophy that underpins plans to end homelessness, as part of a broader and more strategic response that ensures that all parts of the system support the Housing First agenda and that dedicated programs deliver the service. The success of the At Home/Chez Soi project demonstrates that Housing First Works. The successful application of the model in communities across the country demonstrates how it can be done and adapted to different contexts.

There is an extensive body of research on Housing First. For a short document that explains what Housing First is, and key research on the topic, go to: [Homeless Hub: Housing First](#).

However, the most extensive literature on Housing First emanates from the At Home/Chez Soi project. Resources from this project can be found on the [Homeless Hub](#); in the coming years new resources, including a Housing First tool kit, are on the way.

### **4. Eliminating chronic and episodic homelessness should be prioritized**

Though only a small percentage of individuals experiencing homelessness will remain chronically so, this group suffers some of the worst outcomes. The chronically homeless often face higher levels of victimization, poorer health, high instances of substance abuse and mental health concerns. The longer an individual remains homeless, the more entrenched these issues become and the likelihood of effective intervention decreases. Though small in numbers, these individuals utilize a large portion of emergency services across the homeless sector but also in health, criminal justice and social services. Effective intervention for the chronically homeless requires an intensive, client-centered approach built on trust and long-term support. Though the upfront investment may be considerable, helping these individuals out of homelessness reduces the strain on costly emergency resources, and with time, proves to be cost effective. Cost savings aside, addressing the needs of the most vulnerable is the only way to end homelessness in a community.

## **5. Ending Aboriginal Homelessness should be prioritized as both a distinct category of action and part of the overall strategy to end homelessness**

Homelessness in Aboriginal communities is disproportionately high, especially in urban areas. As such, it should be prioritized in order to reduce discrimination and the legacy of cultural disruption. At the same time, strategies to end homelessness must include components that address issues of Aboriginal Homelessness (along with other distinct and marginalized groups such as racialized communities, or LGBTQ youth).

Aboriginal peoples (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples) have distinct needs both in urban and on-reserve settings. While the focus on Aboriginal homelessness is primarily seen as an urban issue, the conditions of reserve housing, poor living conditions and high unemployment, are factors that lead to people moving to an urban area. Government action, especially at the federal level, on land claims and treaty negotiations will help improve the situation for Aboriginal peoples overall.

As in Recommendation 1, Aboriginal peoples and their representative governments must be seen as part of the solution, and all other levels of government must increase their commitment to reducing poverty within these communities.

Housing initiatives and programs should be culturally aware, sensitive and appropriate. Cultural sensitivity is a key component of developing programs or housing that will meet the needs of Aboriginals in urban settings. This includes recognition of the history of discrimination including residential schools and the removal of children from their family home by the child welfare system. It also includes inclusive decision-making processes, and awareness of language and traditions.

All levels of government need to improve Aboriginal accessibility to their programs by developing culturally aware methods of outreach and engagement.

Aboriginal people should play a role in the development of policy, programs, services and housing. Principles of Aboriginal engagement should be practiced by planners, government and the service sector in developing, delivering and evaluating programs to serve the needs of the Aboriginal homeless community. Self-determination is a key aspect of Aboriginal culture that should be recognized and fostered. Housing strategies and program design should honour this from a practical and political perspective.

## **6. Introduce more comprehensive data collection, performance monitoring, analysis and research**

Research can have an impact on the solutions to homelessness by providing those working to end homelessness with a deeper understanding of the problem, strong evidence for solutions and good ideas from other countries that can be replicated and adapted locally.

Research has also helped us understand how and why people become homeless. One example is a study by Serge et al., (2002) that investigated the link between youth homelessness and the child welfare system. They found that youth who left care at an earlier age were less successful in avoiding homelessness than those who left later. This information should be used to guide child welfare policies in order to reduce the number of youth who become homeless.

## 6.1 The Government of Canada should institute a national Point in Time Count of Homelessness

We cannot measure progress on homelessness in Canada if we lack good data, and haven't established a reliable benchmark. If we wish to implement a strategy to end homelessness that emphasizes Housing First, we need to be able to measure impact, identify successful strategies and demonstrate effective outcomes. Conducting pan-Canadian Point in Time counts on a one, two or three year cycle would provide much better data, and allow communities and all levels of government to more effectively calibrate and target their responses. A national point in count should:

- Utilize the Canadian Definition of Homelessness as a common definition.
- Employ a standardized methodology to which communities should be expected to adhere.
- Conduct the count within a narrow time frame in a given year (i.e. within the same week).

## 6.2 Funders should support communities to conduct effective and reliable program evaluations

In developing more effective responses to homelessness, it is increasingly important to know what works, why it works and for whom it works. Across Canada, communities have expressed the desire for more and better interventions that can contribute to ending homelessness, or that can prevent it from happening in the first place. Solid evidence for "promising" or "best" practices must come from rigorous and effective program evaluation. Unfortunately, in Canada there has not been a historic commitment to (or investment in) evaluating the effectiveness of programs and interventions. We need to make a shift to a culture of planning and evidence-based evaluation; communities should be given the tools to achieve this.

## 6.3 Mandate the implementation of Homelessness Information Management Systems

Communities today are responding to homelessness in an absence of accurate data, largely blind to the movement of people through the system, unable to monitor the effectiveness of programs and unable to effectively coordinate programs.

The Government of Canada can dramatically improve effectiveness of local responses to homelessness by mandating the implementation of homelessness information management systems as part of community plans. An information management system is a locally administered, community wide database used to confidentially aggregate data. They record and store client-level information on the characteristics and service needs of homeless persons. An information management system is typically a web-based software application that homeless service providers use to coordinate care, manage their operations, and better serve their clients.

In mandating the implementation of an information management system, the government would not mandate the technology rather would:

- Define scope and intent of an information management system.
- Define a minimum core data set.
- Articulate minimum privacy standards (the more rigorous of Federal or Provincial privacy legislation).
- Articulate technological standards (to report to federal government).
- Allow information systems to be an allowable expense under HPS.
- Allow the Government of Canada to aggregate, analyze and report out on data collected.

HMIS systems have been in use in the United States for several years and has been used by the Calgary Homeless Foundation ([www.calgaryhomeless.com/hmis](http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/hmis)). The Government of Canada has invested in a more robust and flexible information management system called HIFIS (Homelessness Individual and Family Information System) which should be among the options for community information management systems, but not required or exclusive.

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## Footnotes

- Figure reproduced from City of Toronto, 2006 "Rental Housing Supply and Demand Indicators". Profile Toronto. City of Toronto, City Planning and Policy Research.
- Data sources for **Table 1: Affordable Housing in Canada**
  - CMA Population, 2011 Census**  
Based on the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) figures. According to CMHC a CMA "is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centered on a large urban area (known as the urban core). The census population count of the urban core is at least 10,000 to form a census agglomeration and at least 100,000 to form a census metropolitan area."  
Source: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm?fpv=3867>
  - Homeownership Rate, 2006**  
Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2008). Canadian Housing Observer: "Ownership Rates, Canada, Provinces, Territories and Metropolitan Areas, 1971–2006. Retrieved from: [http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob/data/upload/Table8\\_EN\\_w.xls](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob/data/upload/Table8_EN_w.xls)

- **Vacancy Rates, October 2012**  
Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2012). Rental Market Report: Canada Highlights. pp.5-6.
- **Average Rents, October 2012**  
Canada's listed average rents only represent the average rent across Canadian CMAs.  
Source: CMHC (2012). Rental Market Statistics.
- **Renters Core Housing Need, 2006 Census Data**  
CMHC (2011). Characteristics of Households in Core Housing Need, Canada, Provinces, Territories and Metropolitan Areas, 2001, 2006. Retrieved from: [http://www.cmhc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob/data/data\\_024.cfm](http://www.cmhc.ca/en/corp/about/cahoob/data/data_024.cfm).
- **Renters Severe Housing Need, 2006 Census Data**  
Source: CMHC (2010). Issue 8—Households in Core Housing Need and Spending at Least 50% of Their Income on Shelter. 2006 Census Housing Series.

### 3. Data sources for **Table 2: Affordable Housing in Canada**

- **Unemployment Rate, May 2013**  
Statistics Canada (2013). Table 282-0116 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by census metropolitan area based on 2006 census boundaries, 3-month moving average, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, monthly (persons unless otherwise noted), CANSIM (database). Retrieved from: <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&retrLang=eng&id=2820116&paSer=&pattern=&stByVal=1&p1=1&p2=37&tabMode=dataTable&csid=>
- **LICO and Market Basket Measure, 2009**  
Murphy, B., Zhang, X. and Dionne, C. (2012). Low Income in Canada: a Multi-line and Multi-index Perspective. Income Research Paper Series. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, pp.59-61.
- **Minimum Wage, 2012**  
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2013). Hourly Minimum Wages in CANADA for Adult Workers. Retrieved from: <http://srv116.services.gc.ca/dimt-wid/sm-mw/rpt2.aspx?lang=eng&dec=5>
- **Income Assistance Rates**
  - **British Columbia**  
The Province of British Columbia (2007). Rate Tables Income Assistance - Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, Province of British Columbia. Retrieved from: <http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/mhr/ia.htm>.
  - **Alberta**  
Alberta Human Services (2011). Income Support - Alberta Human Services - Government of Alberta. Retrieved from: <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/financial-support/689.html>.
  - **Saskatchewan**  
Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services (2012). Saskatchewan Assistance Rates. Retrieved from: <http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/SAP-rateCard.pdf>
  - **Manitoba**  
Manitoba (2012). Employment and Income Assistance for the General Assistance Category. Retrieved from: [http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/assistance/pubs/eia\\_general.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/assistance/pubs/eia_general.pdf).
  - **Ontario**  
City of Toronto (2012). City of Toronto: Employment and Social Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.toronto.ca/socialservices/foodrent.htm>.
  - **New Brunswick**  
Human Development Council (2012). Experiencing Homelessness in Saint John and New Brunswick. Saint John: Human Development Council, p.8.
  - **Nova Scotia**  
Nova Scotia Housing and Homelessness Network (2012). Halifax Report Card on Homelessness 2012. Halifax.

#### 4. How is food insecurity measured in Canada?

Food insecurity is measured by Statistics Canada through the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), a cross-sectional survey that collects health related information from about 60,000 Canadians per year. The survey consists of 18 questions asking the respondent whether he/she or other household members experienced the conditions described, which range in severity from experiences of anxiety that food will run out before household members have money to buy more, to modifying amount of food consumed, to experiencing hunger, and at greatest extremes, going whole days without eating. These questions distinguish the experiences of adults from those of children, recognizing that in households with children, adults may compromise their own food intakes as a way to free up scarce resources for children.

In putting together this table, Tarasuk's team (Proof, 2013) classified households as either food secure or marginally, moderately or severely food insecure, based on the number of positive responses to the questions posed. Food secure households are those who gave no indication of income-related problems of food access. Those who are marginally food insecure have reported some concern or problem of food access over the past 12 months. Households classified as moderately food insecure have reported compromises in the quality and/or quantity of food consumed among adults and/or children. Those classed as severely food insecure have reported more extensive compromises, including reduced food intakes among adults and/or children because of a lack of money for food.

5. 'Total households' excludes those households with missing values for food security. That is, they did not provide a response to one or more questions on the household food security module. For CMAs other than Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver household numbers have been rounded to the nearest 50.

#### 6. Estimating the number of homeless people in Canada on a given day.

Estimating the number of people who are homeless on a given day in Canada is inherently challenging, even with strong data. The calculation of homelessness presented in this report is only a ball park estimate, and so there should be caution in quoting this figure. The reason is that there is very little reliable data on homelessness either at a pan-Canadian or community level. Canada, unlike other countries including the United States, does not conduct coordinated point-in-time counts across the country. In addition, as suggested in Footnote iii, very few communities conduct point in time counts, and when they do, they are using different definitions and categories of homelessness, (some include provisionally accommodated individuals but most do not), utilize different methodologies, and conduct them at different times of year.

As such, creating this estimate required that we rely on a broad range of data sources, some (Segaert, for example) much more reliable than others. Our estimate of those who are provisionally accommodated is particularly problematic. Our estimate of those in temporary institutional accommodation draws from a small sample of point in time counts, and no consistent definition was used.

#### 7. Comparing Point in Time Counts

In our investigation, we found a small number of Canadian communities have conducted reliable point in time counts of homelessness in the past ten years. Major cities such as Montreal, Hamilton, Ottawa and Winnipeg have not conducted such counts. Some cities conduct counts on a regular cycle allowing them to measure progress over time (Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto) while others do not. In comparing the data from the different counts that do exist, one should exercise some caution, as these counts are not coordinated in any way (that is, communities decide on a process independent of what other communities are doing), they typically use different definitions and categories of homelessness, (some include provisionally accommodated individuals but most do not), employ different methodologies, and conduct them at different times of year. Comparing between counts thus is highly problematic and speculative. It is recommended that in the future, the Government of Canada encourage communities to coordinate point in time counts, using similar definitions and methodologies.

8. Again it must be stressed that comparisons between municipalities are problematic because the figures reported here represent different indicators and measurement.

#### 9. Data sources for **Table 4: Point in time counts of homelessness in select Canadian cities**

- **City Population, 2011 Census**

Figures are based on City population rather than CMA population.

- **Emergency Shelter Beds, 2011**

As of 2011 the Shelter Capacity Report includes statistics for transitional housing, VAW shelters and emergency shelters however the figures included in Table 4 are for emergency beds only.

Source: Homelessness Partnering Secretariat (2012). 2011 Shelter Capacity Report. Ottawa: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

- **Point-in-time count data**

Point-in-time counts are conducted differently throughout the country, therefore the data yielded is difficult to compare. As a baseline, each of the listed cities enumerate the unsheltered and sheltered population separately, though how they define those categories may differ. Further, some cities count homeless individuals in other accommodations such as transitional housing, jails, hospitals, motels, VAW shelters and campsites. As such, we have included an 'Other' category that encompasses either some or all of these indicators. It is important to note that the PIT counts listed are for select cities only, rather than an exhaustive list. Further, communities such as Vancouver and Toronto have not yet published the findings for their most recent counts.



- **Vancouver**  
Thomson, M., Woodward, J., Billows, S. and Greenwell, P. (2012). 6th Homeless Count in City of Vancouver. Vancouver: Eberle Planning and Research.
- **Kelowna**  
Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (2011). Knowledge for Action: Hidden Homelessness in Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nelson and Nanaimo.
- **Calgary**  
Calgary Homeless Foundation (2012). Point-in-time Count Report.
- **Red Deer**  
OrgCode Consulting, Inc (2012). Red Deer Point In Time [PIT] Homeless Count.
- **Edmonton**  
Sorensen, M. (2013) 2012 Edmonton Homelessness Count. Edmonton: Homeward Trust Foundation.
- **Lethbridge**  
City of Lethbridge (2012). "Bringing Lethbridge Home" 2012 Lethbridge Homeless Census. Lethbridge: Social Housing in Action.
- **Saskatoon**  
Chopin, N. and Wormith, D. (2008). Count of Saskatoon's Homeless Population: Research Findings. Saskatoon: Community-University Institute for Social Research.  
Data from the more recent 2012 Saskatoon PIT count can be found in the 2013 Saskatoon Plan to End Homelessness, located here: <http://www.unitedwaysaskatoon.ca/documents/P2EHReport-Final.pdf>
- **Toronto**  
City of Toronto (2009). Street Needs Assessment Results 2009.

10. It should be noted that because the Segart study does not include people staying in Violence Against Women shelters, the percentage of adult males relative to other demographic groups including adult females, children and youth is overestimated).

11. This table is reproduced with permission from: Belanger, Y., Weasel Head, G., & Awosoga, O. (2012) Assessing Urban Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness in Canada. Ottawa: National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) and the Office of the Federal Interlocuter for Métis and Non-Status Indians (OFI), Ottawa, Ontario

**12. How we calculated the Annual Cost of Homelessness**

The At Home/Chez Soi project has come up with a calculation of the unit costs of homelessness that we believe to be the most accurate and methodologically sound estimates produced in Canada to date (Latimer, et al., 2013). Preliminary findings estimate the mean annual cost to be \$42,484 per person, with a range of \$0 to \$350,000 annually. The service cost estimate included institutional costs such as emergency shelter stays, visits to hospital or time spent incarcerated, as well as the use of ambulatory services such as doctors visits, social services, etc. This research undoubtedly provides the most reliable estimate of the cost of homelessness per individual.

In creating our calculation, we applied the mean of participant costs within the bottom 90% of the At Home/Chez Soi sample (\$29,971) to a reasonable estimate of the size of the transient homeless population in Canada (180,000) cited in Figure 3. We came up with an annual cost to the Canadian economy of \$5,594,780,000. Using the same logic, we calculated the cost of chronic homelessness to be \$1657,980,000, based on an estimate of the size of this population (20,000) and a mean annual cost of the 90% percentile as being \$82,899. Our resulting estimate for the annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy is in Canada is \$7,052,760,000.

A word of caution about these estimates. First, the sampling used by At Home/Chez Soi was not random, as the selection criteria was to identify participants who had mental illness or addictions challenges, which suggests that higher needs individuals within the homeless population are overrepresented. The second caution is we have to be careful in estimating savings that would be generated by housing this population, for many will be high service users once housed, and may require supports (including income, social services, health supports, etc.) for the rest of their lives.