



# Best Practices in Addressing Homelessness

## A Literature Review of Existing Research

*This report was prepared for BC Housing as part of our final class project for UBC's School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) course PLAN 530: Affordable Housing Policy and Planning. The research, while supported by BC Housing, does not necessarily reflect the views of BC Housing.*

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# Introduction to Homelessness

Home has many meanings, involving much more than shelter, including a place where basic human necessities are met. Homes are our sanctuaries, places where we can relax and be ourselves. This is demonstrated through common phrases like “home is where the heart is” and “there’s no place like home”. For many, this definition of home is not possible given their circumstances, where homes were places of trauma and have been lost all together. Addressing homelessness involves taking stock of the individual and structural factors that produce it, and applying appropriate solutions.

The Canadian Definition of Homelessness is “the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability of acquiring it” (Gaetz, et al. 2012).

Homelessness in Canada has been on the rise since the 1990s (Homelessness- Causes & Effects, 2001). This is a serious policy concern across Canada, as up to 200,000 people were homeless in 2014 (Goering, P. et al. 2014). Federal counts from 2018 show that this number has grown to 235,000. The growth in homelessness coincides with a shifting homeless demographic with an increasingly diverse makeup (Gaetz, et al. 2016). Recent efforts to chronicle changing demographics have shown that homelessness in Canada is experienced more by families, youth, Indigenous peoples, women, and other sub-populations; this is counter to the historic trend of homelessness being experienced by older single males (Gaetz, et al. 2016). The diversity of the homeless population relates to the many drivers of homelessness, including change in available budgets for social/affordable housing, a lack of affordable housing, rising real-estate costs, and loss of permanent employment (Homelessness- Causes & Effects, 2001). Individual conditions and structural factors play a large part in producing homelessness. The characteristics of homelessness also vary from person to person, some will experience chronic or episodic periods of homelessness. Central to addressing these concerns is the need for better data collection and sharing of information within the homelessness sector.

“Homelessness occurs on a continuum, there are different solutions and best practices to address individuals’ circumstances depending on where they are on the continuum” (Greenberg, T. 2007)

This report provides an overview of the best practices in addressing homelessness that have been documented in recent years. “A best practice must show that it produces better results than other approaches and that it is a practice that can potentially be adapted with success in other contexts and/or scaled up to a systems wide approach” (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013). Best practices can also be thought of as innovative approaches, transferable to other organizations, which have resulted in concrete, sustainable improvements in the lives of homeless persons (Best Practices Agencies, 1999). This report looks at a range of best practices; they can be applied in general to the homeless population, as well as solutions that can be tailored to individual needs.

Addressing homelessness is difficult for a number of reasons including historically unreliable data, lack of resources, lack of coordination from different levels of government, to name a few. This necessitates research into solutions that are adaptive, flexible, and cost effective. Many best practices that exist take the form of better systems of data collection and sharing between service providers, creation of affordable housing, ‘at risk’ homeless prevention, housing first initiatives, allowing for client ownership in projects, peer-support models, and supportive housing. Successful programs are also those that blend and combine approaches to tailor to the needs of the client.

## Rural Homelessness

Rural homelessness, like its urban counterpart, is an outcome of both structural and individual factors, with a lack of adequate housing as a core issue for both populations. There is a pressing need for appropriate housing and services to address rural homelessness (Greenburg, T. 2007). Rural contexts have less housing options in general, and even less supply of affordable, social, and supportive units. This poses challenges for addressing homelessness in smaller communities. Yet once housing is properly secured, it can have positive health benefits to the client and reduce overall systems costs (Greenburg, T. 2007).

Many individuals in rural settings find housing through the private market, as the social housing stock in rural areas is under supplied. Having market housing to address homelessness requires unique partnerships and programs to ensure housing success for rural clients. Securing market-rental units means finding landlords and property managers that are community-minded as 'housing providers' (Greenberg, T. 2007). Rural landlords need support to be able to provide housing for vulnerable populations. Programs that subsidize rent and other financial programs can greatly aid the landlord's ability to provide housing, and result in fewer evictions. Clients who live in market housing also need to be connected with supportive services to assist in their transition out of homelessness. The required supports vary with the client's level of need for care, which can be anywhere from 24 hour supports to casual assistance. Where housing location must also be taken into consideration. Housing that is centrally located is preferred so clients can access social services. Poverty limits clients' ability to drive and rural contexts often lack public transportation options (Greenberg, T. 2007). Lastly, social dynamics of small towns play a role in people's ability to find housing. In smaller communities, hard-to-house individuals are known by the community and are often stigmatized for their circumstances, which can be a barrier to housing.

## Pathway into Homelessness

There are many pathways into homelessness. The table below illustrates the five most common reasons for housing loss indicated by the various age groups across Canada (Homeless Partnering Strategies PiT Count 2016).

Youth (14-24)	Adult (25-49)	Older Adult (50-64)	Senior (65+)
34% Conflict with a parent or guardian	24% Addictions or substance use	20% Eviction: unable to pay rent	24% Eviction: unable to pay rent
18% Addiction or substance use	16% Eviction: unable to pay rent	20% Eviction: non-financial reasons	15% Illness or medical condition
12% Eviction: non-financial reasons	14% Eviction: non-financial reasons	17% Addictions or substance use	14% Eviction: non-financial reasons
12% Unsafe housing	13% Abuse by a partner or spouse	16% Job loss	11% Job loss
11% Eviction: unable to pay rent	13% Conflict with a partner or spouse	14% Unsafe housing	10% Addictions or substance use

Table Source - 2016 coordinated point-in-time count of homelessness in Canadian communities

Addiction and substance use were among the main causes, except among seniors. Eviction due to financial instability, which comes with loss in employment, was a key pathway for the older age groups. All age groups reported eviction for other non-financial reasons. Unsafe housing and abuse were also common factors among all groups, except for seniors. Medical reasons including illness were one of the main causes for seniors' loss of housing.

# Statistics and Pattern of Homelessness in Canada

	Canada		BC		Vancouver	
<i>Count is done every three years regionally</i>	Federal count 2016 and 2018		First Provincial count in 2018 ( PiT count 2018)		Annually in Vancouver since 2010	
Experiencing homelessness	35,000 (235,000 Experience homelessness in a year)		7655		3605	
Access emergency Shelters	150,000 access emergency shelters annually)		n/a		n/a	
Male	n/a	n/a	68%	5205	72%	2596
Female	27%	n/a	30%	2297	27%	973
Other Gender	n/a	n/a	2%	153	1%	361
Sheltered	n/a	n/a	63%	4823	71%	2573
Unsheltered	n/a	n/a	37%	2832	29%	1032
Youth	19%	6545	15%	1148	16%	577
Women and children	27% Women	9555	n/a	n/a	25%	901
Seniors	24%	8540	20%	1531	21%	757
Indigenous people	28-34%	9800 - 11900	38%	2908	34%	1233
Veterans	(2%)		n/a	n/a	4%	1442
			29% were from Foster care			

Historically, older single men were the majority of people who were experiencing homelessness. However, today we see a growing number of women, family and youth. Regular counts to maintain an accurate picture of the homeless community over time is essential in informing policy decisions. While there have been more counts done recently there are limitations to the data. Annual counts are understood to be an undercount, only capturing the visible portion of the homeless population. Hidden homelessness exists and with little information on the total size and demographic composition of the population.



# Best Practices

Understanding what practices work and which do not is a key part of addressing homelessness. Unfortunately, many organizations do not have the capacity to carry out research to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts. “A best practice is an intervention, method or technique that has consistently been proven effective through the most rigorous scientific research (especially conducted by independent researchers) and which has been replicated across several cases or examples” (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013). How well an approach works will influence where to direct resources within the homelessness sector.

Many successful best practices programs share the common trait of addressing clients’ needs first. This attitude represents a departure from a traditional approach where homelessness was *managed*, not leading to sustained improvement in the lives of those who were being helped. A good Canadian example of this is *Calgary’s Updated Plan to End Homelessness: People First in Housing First (2008)*. Calgary became the first Canadian city to launch a plan to end homelessness. Calgary’s plan adopts a person-centered lens, this means, learning what those experiencing homelessness need, then offering them real choice when it comes to housing and services (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2015). This attitude towards homelessness accounts for how different experiences of homelessness intersect with forms of exclusion that unevenly impact certain groups over others. For instance, the needs of women with children are different than the needs of youth aging out of care. Their different experiences with homelessness will affect what services and types of housing they need. Calgary’s plan recognizes this by “seeing people first, rather than labels or issues”. This means respect in meeting a person’s needs as they wish to have them met, rather than assuming what is best for someone else.

## KEY THEMES

- Client centered approach allowing for ownership in housing
- Experience with homelessness matters; different for each subpopulation
- Case management increases client success
- Sharing of data and ease of access between service providers
- System of care approach
- Peer and community support
- Focus on Indigenous centred services and programs
- Clients’ ability to tailor the services they need to move forward

CMHC, 1999, outlines in case studies on best practices many examples of client-oriented approaches.

The criteria assessing best practices as including:

- involvement of homeless persons and frontline service providers in developing solutions;
  - empowerment of homeless persons to access services, develop skills and actively pursue the goal of independence;
  - a safe and secure environment, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, children and youth;
  - provision of a variety of services to respond to the varying needs of the homeless populations.
- (CMHC, 1999)

Listed below are the best practices identified for many of the different subpopulations who experience homelessness. It is important to note that there will be variation in how each person within a population would like to be supported, but the table below lists some general practices that showed success for each group.

## Youth

The definition of Youth Homelessness in Canada is **“Situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13-24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire stable, safe or consistent residence.”**

([www.homelesshub.ca](http://www.homelesshub.ca))

The youth homeless population can be broken down into many different subpopulations. Each subpopulation has particular needs when it comes to housing and services.

LGBTQ2S	Youth with Acute Mental Health Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To create an environment that celebrates the identity of LGBTQ2S + community.</li> <li>To have support staff who identify as LGBTQS and have the relevant training to mentor each youth.</li> <li>To have access to relevant programs and peer networks.</li> <li>To create a friendly environment that offers social interaction.</li> <li>To have 24/7 staffing can provide a safe space for the LGBTQ2S.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide facilities with specialized clinical support.</li> <li>To explore strategies to mitigate the risk of eviction.</li> <li>To have access to counselors.</li> <li>To have readily available support services in case of emergency.</li> <li>To create space where they feel at home.</li> <li>To have substance and peer-pressure free environment.</li> </ul>
Indigenous Youth	Youth in Active Substance Use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To enable youth to connect with community activities, peer networks, and cultural support</li> <li>To offer culturally relevant programming, supports, and emphasis on healing.</li> <li>To employ Indigenous workers and Indigenous front-line staff in shelters and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To incorporate Harm Reduction strategies</li> <li>To have strategies to mitigate risk of eviction.</li> <li>To have spaces where support services are available and treatment options are present if desired.</li> </ul>

<p>housing options so that they are able to relate and communicate in an effective way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To focus on healing intergenerational trauma.</li> <li>• To create a safe space free of racial discrimination.</li> <li>• To create and foster a sense of community and belonging.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have 24-hour supports with overdose prevention.</li> <li>• To offer addiction counselling and services.</li> </ul>
<b>Youth Aging Out of Care</b>	<b>Youth in Recovery from Substance Use</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To offer opportunity to develop life skills through education and employment.</li> <li>• To have supportive peer environment.</li> <li>• To focus on mentorship programs.</li> <li>• To provide guidance and support to help youth transition effectively to adulthood and prepare for independence.</li> <li>• To offer peer living to reduce social isolation (if desired).</li> <li>• To Have positive social environment without presence of drug use.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have supportive environment.</li> <li>• To offer access to services to support rehabilitation and recovery.</li> <li>• To offer opportunity for personal development, education, financial support and life planning.</li> <li>• To offer stable housing.</li> <li>• To Reduce possibility of relapse by avoiding triggering substances.</li> </ul>

## Women and Children

Women frequently come under the category of “hidden homeless”, and the nature of homelessness differs from many of the other groups. They account for nearly 25% of homeless population in the region. Women are often fleeing homes that have a history experiencing domestic abuse, which requires special attention. Potential adverse outcomes for children include low birth weight, pre-term deliveries, increased risk of depression and anxiety. The children also face the risk of developmental disability and are under high risk for multiple episodes of homelessness for the family.

- Having women support staff would make the environment safer and more comfortable.
- Conduct a risk assessment of men with violent histories and evaluate their suitability for housing alongside the women.
- Support services such as peer support groups to be offered to women during their stay at any facility.
- Providing services for the children, for child development.
- To Increase security of tenure for women with children.

## Seniors

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, seniors will be the group that experiences the highest rate of mental illness in Canada by 2041. The definition of a senior is when someone is over the age of 55. The causes of homelessness for seniors can also be a result of the death of

a spouse, social isolation, discrimination, or a lack of awareness of available benefits and services.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing support services that cater to a variety of seniors.</li><li>• Providing accessibility and space ownership.</li><li>• Creating a non-institutional environment.</li><li>• To Encourage the seniors to meet their personal goals and keep their dreams alive.</li><li>• To offer housing options which are free from substantial noise.</li><li>• To Incorporate a 'buddy system' where residents support one another.</li><li>• To design communal spaces for interaction and community building.</li><li>• To have gender spaces, which may be important for promoting safety.</li><li>• To ensure dietary considerations for seniors.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Having some facilities which have pet friendly spaces.</li><li>• Accessibility to public transport and community services within walking distance.</li><li>• Charge rent geared to income.</li><li>• Helpful elements of shelters to be identified and applied in senior housing.</li><li>• To have 24/7 staff availability</li><li>• To have caring connections.</li><li>• To offer Inhouse Activity for interaction among seniors.</li><li>• The facility to respect the need for privacy and independent living.</li><li>• To prepared meals with flexible meal time.</li></ul> |
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## Indigenous People

Definition: "Indigenous homelessness is a condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities, lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, or ability to acquire such housing. Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships" (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012).

The Indigenous community is overrepresented in the homeless population. With Indigenous women experiencing some of the highest rates of homelessness. Due to the ongoing impacts of colonization, Indigenous people are also less likely to access shelter services.

- To conceptualize Indigenous homelessness as just the lack of adequate shelter is a misunderstanding of the complex legacy of colonization.
- Providing housing is just one piece in addressing Indigenous homelessness. There needs to be an additional focus on culture, community, and Indigenous ways of knowing and being that are closely tied with a connection to land.
- To offer Important to have Indigenous staff.
- Provision of culturally appropriate programs with the intent to provide services which deepens the client's connection with their culture. (Best practices Agencies, 1999)

## Summary

Homelessness has been growing in Canada since the 1990's. Evaluating best practices depends on the ability of the practice to result in concrete results and be adaptive to changing circumstances. Standardized quality data collection with networks in place to share information between service providers and governments is essential to making informed decisions. This helps to build capacity within the homelessness sector. Data collection has been improving, but there are still gaps that exist. Experience matters, there must be consideration of how homelessness is experienced by each subpopulation.

Youth is a broad category that encompasses many experiences and is broken into small subpopulations. Best practices for youth include readily available support services where youth feel at home. Creating spaces where clients can have positive peer interactions without the presence of substances is important for recovery while transitioning into permanent housing. In addition, access to services for professional development and education helps prepare young people for transitioning into adult life.

Most of the women and children that experience homelessness are fleeing from domestic violence. They want a housing environment where they can feel safe and secure and find a supportive community.

There are many factors that push seniors into homelessness. They range from: death of spouse, social isolation, discrimination, and lack of awareness of available benefits and services. Seniors' needs are related to accessibility, ownership over their housing situation, community contact and support, quiet housing, and flexibility over meal time and choice.

Indigenous people experience complications due to the ongoing colonial legacy of Canada. Indigenous homelessness is more than a lack of adequate housing. It is a multifaceted experience of trauma, disconnection, and marginalization. Indigenous people are overrepresented in the Canadian homeless population. All of this presents challenges for Indigenous people accessing mainstream supports and services. The Indigenous community needs housing conditions where they can gather as a community, have contact to culture, and reconnect with many aspects of Indigeneity that have been lost through colonization.

The complex nature of homelessness correlates with several contributing factors including: age, sex, mental health, domestic violence, addictions and substance use, family and cultural background, foster care, and lack of affordable housing. Difficult past experiences had by many homeless people reassert the importance of client-oriented solutions, allowing for the individuals to have input on how they can best move forward out of homelessness. This also is predicated on a need to increase the diversity of supply of affordable housing to accommodate these diverse groups of people in their transition out of chronic homelessness.

# Addressing Homelessness Between the Levels of Government

Only after the 1960's in Canada did being "homeless" mean being "unhoused". Prior to that homeless meant living in poor-quality housing. The term homeless was mainly applied to transient men who did not have any family ties such as migrant workers who travelled and did not have stable housing during the Great Depression. The poorest part of major cities had cheap accommodation, in 'Skid row' rooming houses or flophouses. Some form of housing was found by even the destitute (Hulchanski, J.D, 2009).

Churches and missionary organizations took the lead to helping those in *need* with food and shelter, as the government's role was minimal. The Federal Government at the end of the second world war created the Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) so that home ownerships and mortgages became more accessible to people and organizations. (Laird, Gordon, 2007). This was the beginning of government initiatives to address housing for Canadians.

The first Canadian National Report Card on Homelessness was compiled by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN) and the National Alliance to End Homelessness in 2013. (Gaetz, 2013). The report will investigate what has been done over the years in the various levels including, the Federal, Provincial (BC), and Municipal (Vancouver) governments and the recent advancements being made.

FEDERAL	
Over the years	<p>There was a termination of federal funding for social housing over the last 25 years which resulted in the complete transfer of social housing to the provincial government.</p> <p>Historically it is also noted that there was no consistent funding for data collection from the Federal level to make it consistent across provinces.</p>
Recent advancements	<p>The Federal Government now has a National Housing Strategy (10-year investment plan) to create affordable housing and enhance long term stable housing. This is done in partnership with Homelessness Partnering Strategy. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognition of housing as a human right.</li><li>• The national Housing Strategy.</li><li>• Partnerships across public, private and not-for-profit sectors.</li><li>• More Initiatives have been formulated to provide safe, affordable and appropriate housing.</li></ul>
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canadian Observatory on Homelessness leading the way, and under effective leadership better results can be seen.</li><li>• Reimagining Federal leadership on preventing homelessness.</li></ul>

# PROVINCIAL

Over the years	<table><tr><td>2004 Provincial Homelessness Initiative</td><td>2005 Emergency Shelters</td><td>2006 Homeless Outreach – PHI Phase 2</td><td>2007 SRO preservation</td></tr><tr><td>2009 Women's Transitional Homes</td><td>2010 Provincial / Municipal Partnerships (MOU's)</td><td>2014 Homeless Prevention</td><td>2017 Modular Housing</td></tr></table>	2004 Provincial Homelessness Initiative	2005 Emergency Shelters	2006 Homeless Outreach – PHI Phase 2	2007 SRO preservation	2009 Women's Transitional Homes	2010 Provincial / Municipal Partnerships (MOU's)	2014 Homeless Prevention	2017 Modular Housing
2004 Provincial Homelessness Initiative	2005 Emergency Shelters	2006 Homeless Outreach – PHI Phase 2	2007 SRO preservation						
2009 Women's Transitional Homes	2010 Provincial / Municipal Partnerships (MOU's)	2014 Homeless Prevention	2017 Modular Housing						
Recent advancements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In February 2018 the government introduced a 30-point plan for a fairer housing market.</li><li>• Investments of over \$6.6 billion over 10 years in homes and housing support in urban, suburban and rural areas.</li><li>• Building more than 14,000 rental units for the middle-income families who are struggling to find housing.</li><li>• Safe and secure housing for women and children who are fleeing violence and abuse.</li><li>• The government is partnering with universities, institutes and colleges to build housing for post secondary students.</li><li>• Upgrading existing projects to prioritize affordability.</li><li>• Partnering to build social housing for Indigenous people.</li><li>• Building 2,500 new supportive homes for people struggling with homelessness.</li><li>• Extending the life quality and affordability of existing affordable housing.</li><li>• Empowering the local governments.</li></ul>								
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• System of supportive housing for people with mental illness.</li><li>• Targeting programs for youth ages 16-18.</li><li>• Increase support services for landlords, property managers and the individuals.</li><li>• Increasing the supply of new affordable housing.</li><li>• Targeting those at risk of homelessness into programs.</li><li>• Preserving existing housing – Especially SRO's (enabling legislations to preserve SRO's).</li></ul>								

# MUNICIPAL

## Over the years

Since the decline of federal funding, municipalities across the province have shouldered the responsibility for housing. “As the expiry of federal funding approaches, the need for operational flexibility and entrepreneurship within the non-profit housing sector is increasing. The transfer of selected assets is a key way that BC Housing is able to respond to and meet this need” (Shayne Ramsay CEO, BC Housing). There has been greater realization of the magnitude of homelessness and municipalities have tried to take initiative on better counting and data collection and collaboration and assistance to nonprofits to address the issue of homelessness.

## Recent Advancements

- The many agencies involved in addressing homelessness working together in a system-wide approach to address homelessness.
  - The development and implementation of comprehensive federal and provincial poverty reduction strategies, with alignment between both.
  - The improvement and expansion of home care for chronic health issues, mental illness and addictions.
  - The establishment of transitional supported-living programs for youth aging out of foster care / child welfare system.
  - The expansion of programs to meet the need for holistic and culturally safe support services to assist Indigenous people and families in securing and maintaining housing.
  - The establishment of discharge planning programs to ensure subsidized or market housing on release from incarceration.
  - Increase in the supply of rental housing that is affordable to households with incomes below \$30,000 per year.
  - An increase in the shelter component of income assistance to reflect average market rents.
  - An increase in the affordable rental housing supply, including through supporting retention of existing affordable rental units, as well as through supporting the construction of new units.
  - The provision of additional transitional housing units to meet housing demand.
  - The improvement and expansion of appropriate, accessible and timely communication and information about available shelter services.
- (Retrieved from Metro Vancouver Homeless Strategy 2017)

## Recommendations

- Improve relationship with the public library to secure accessible public space.
- Identify potential vacant land/ sites which are not going to be developed for a period to use as shelters or sites for temporary modular housing.
- Training and education of community members who are willing to support homelessness initiatives in their communities.
- Increase support services for landlords, property managers and the individuals.

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make public land available for new housing.</li> <li>• Enhance accessibility to employment.</li> <li>• Better data collection to acknowledge the individual (knowing the person by name rather than just a number).</li> <li>• Investment in training and education for sectors and staff.</li> <li>• Good support systems for staff dealing with homeless.</li> <li>• Encourage nonprofit housing providers to take on commercial activities.</li> <li>• Increase funding to enhance the capacity of nonprofits.</li> </ul> |
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## Summary

Since the 1990s, homelessness has been on the rise because of the lack of Federal funding for social housing, and the downloading of responsibility of housing onto the Provincial Governments over the last 25 years. Recently, the Federal Government released the new “National Housing Strategy” that promises \$40 billion in investment to affordable housing. The increase of affordable housing stock helps prevent the population *at risk* of homelessness from sliding down the homelessness continuum. The British Columbian Government can help preserve affordable housing stock, especially SROs. There are new zoning regulations which allow municipalities to zone for rental tenure to preserve rental units. The Provincial and Municipal Governments have also been making changes through several policies, making land available for temporary modular housing, assisting NGO’s to increase housing stock, and improve emergency shelter facilities. However promising recent action taken by the Federal and Provincial Governments is, it still falls short of addressing the problem. A focus on preventing homelessness is the next step in improving a systems response to homelessness, as prevention requires broad level coordination and cooperation.

## Preventing Homelessness

Homelessness prevention represents a large opportunity to decrease the prevalence of homelessness in Canada. Unfortunately, prevention measures have been neglected in recent years with federal disinvestment in housing and other structural factors. Homelessness has been addressed over the past 25 years by managing the problem through a ‘crisis response’ (Gaetz, Dej, 2017). This means that individuals receive emergency services after they are already experiencing homelessness. Is there a better way to fit prevention into our response to homelessness, rather than addressing it after the fact? Gaetz and Dej (2017) suggest that prevention can complement housing first programs shifting our approach from crisis intervention to one that focuses on prevention, and successful exits from homelessness. Inspiration for creating a robust system of prevention comes from the public health model (Gaetz, Dej, 2017). Public health has made big improvements to creating a preventive system of medicine.

The public health model breaks prevention down into three parts: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary means working to avoid illness or injury in the first place, secondary looks at treating illness or injury after it has been detected, and tertiary involves managing long-term health problems (Gaetz, Dej, 2017). This model could be applied through a system-wide approach to address homelessness in a similar way. Current efforts are mostly directed at managing homelessness. Increasingly there are efforts to lift people out of homelessness with housing first programs. Yet

there remains a large gap to fill in primary prevention measures. The *at-risk* population represents the majority of those who would benefit from a homelessness prevention response. As noted above in the report, there are many pathways into homelessness making it a very complex issue to address. Prevention is done through policies and strategies that work at a structural level (Gaetz, DeJ, 2017). In addition, there is an international body of evidence from Ireland and Australia documenting the changing responses to homelessness over time.

In Ireland they have adopted a national perspective on homelessness (Homelessness- an integrated strategy), which is a cross-departmental team representing seven departments (Hayes, et al. 2003). This strategy resulted in better coordination between all the service providers that deal with health, education, welfare, and preventative measures (Hayes, et al. 2003). Ireland's strategy also detailed areas that need improvement: clarification of responsibilities of local authorities; coordinated homeless forum in each county with representatives from government and voluntary bodies; better funding arrangements with three-year commitments; better provisions in health, education, and education for homeless people (Hayes, et al. 2003).

The state of Victoria in Australia has been the site of many policy initiatives by government and non-governmental organizations. The Australian Government is taking more responsibility in addressing homelessness which is a change from services providers mainly being charitable organizations such as churches (Hayes, et al. 2003). The response to homelessness in Victoria is done through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and the Transitional Housing Management Programme (THMP). The services clients need in Victoria are: personal support, crisis and transitional accommodation, and housing assistance (Hayes, et al. 2003). SAAP provides services to the various homeless sub-populations while working with the THMP to assist homeless persons as they transition into long-term housing (Hayes, et al. 2003). The coordination between these two agencies shows the kind of partnerships that are needed to treat homelessness in a holistic manner.

The government there also drafted the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, Directions for Changes. This is a vision-based document that brings together perspectives from the homeless sector to continue making progress in addressing homelessness. The document advocates for a whole government approach, partnerships with the third sector and prevention (Hayes, et al. 2003). An all hands-on deck government approach is needed to change the structural factors contributing to homelessness (Hayes, et al. 2003).

These examples show the different strategies that go into preventing homelessness, much like public health, prevention requires targeted interventions and a range of practices (Gaetz, DeJ, 2017). Most importantly more resources need to be allocated to primary prevention measures. As policy changes, better ways at preventing homelessness will come into existence.

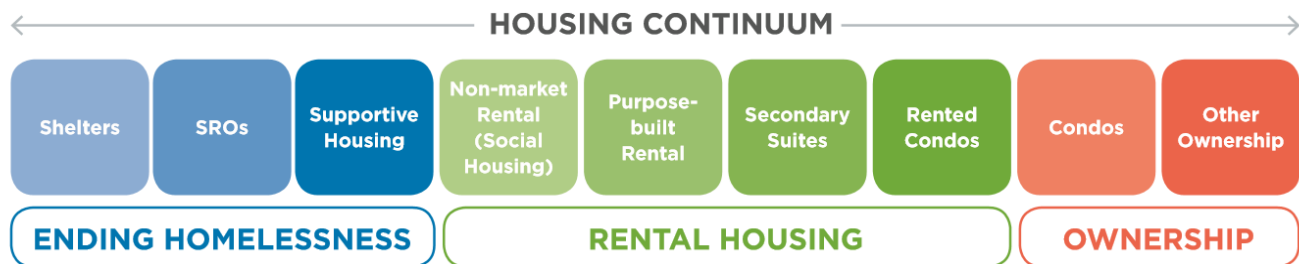
## Income Mixing

Income mixing is an example for social housing policy that through different mechanisms allows for diversity of income brackets in the housing sector. There are many different way countries around the world have sought to achieve income mixing. Policies from Australia, Canada, and Germany ensure income mixing or mixed tenure when new buildings are constructed (Fitzpatrick, S. et al. 2007). Income mixing, and mixed tenure can help to integrate lower income tenants and serve to prevent homelessness by providing more housing options.

# A Right to Accommodation

Examples of right to accommodation come from the UK, where homeless individuals are secured temporary accommodation until they can find permanent housing (Fitzpatrick, S. et al. 2007). Germany and England have made significant efforts for homeless prevention (Fitzpatrick, S. et al. 2007). A right to accommodation can provide the language needed to shift the focus from managing homelessness to directly addressing the core issues of homelessness. This is in line with the concept of housing as a human right which has been used recently in Canada's National Housing Strategy.

## The Housing Continuum



**Image Source:** Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy. (2011).

Individuals who experience homelessness can fall anywhere on the housing continuum, jumping around from place to place. Past approaches in addressing homelessness have relied on emergency shelters and the assumption that people need to be *ready* for housing. Recent studies have shown that housing an individual first would provide a stable setting to allow recovery from substance use, unemployment and other factors which have contributed to an individual's homeless state and wellbeing. There are issues to present along the entire continuum, such as inflation in the market, individuals' income to rent ratio, stability, neighborhood and community acceptance, and availability of housing stock. Addressing issues across the housing spectrum can tighten up the gaps that have been allowing people to slip into increasingly unstable forms of housing.

The Housing First model was developed originally in the United States to address long-term homelessness, for people with mental health problems and substance abuse. Since then, housing first has shown its effectiveness in allowing people to move up the housing continuum into stable housing.

## Housing First

Housing first is recovery-oriented solution to homelessness that involves moving people into housing as quickly as possible (Gaetz, 2013). Housing first programs operate on the principle that people are more successful in meeting their needs and moving forward with their lives once they are in quality, stable housing. Housing first was pioneered in the United States in the 1990s through New York City's Pathways to Housing program. Since then, many other jurisdictions have opted for housing first programs in their communities. Housing first programs pair individuals with housing and necessary supports sometimes known as "wrap around supports" that respond to clients' needs. Housing with *support* is the key factor that makes housing first a 'recovery-oriented' approach, rather than a 'treatment first' approach, where clients must be deemed ready for housing (Gaetz, 2013). In

Canada the majority of responses to homelessness rely upon emergency shelters and crisis services for health care (Goering, P. et al. 2014).

The cost of implementing a housing first program is about equal to other emergency services in the short term, but the costs become reduced as the client remains in stable housing (Goering, P. et al. 2014). Housing first can also result in an increased capacity in other emergency services and transitional housing. This is because as successful participants are able to find stable housing, they open up availabilities in other programs for clients who require more intensive support. Clients' change in service use also shifts from acute care and crisis intervention to an emphasis on community services. This indicates that client needs become more about moving forward with community relationships as they maintain stable housing and require fewer emergency services.

Housing first can be thought of as embedded within a systems approach to homelessness (Gaetz, 2013). This means that homeless programs are within a 'system of care' where all service and program elements within the homelessness sector are guided by the core principles of the housing first model (Gaetz, 2013). As well sharing of data and having standard forms for intake improve service efficiency. The core principals are: Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements, consumer choice and self-determination, recovery orientation, individualized and client-driven supports, and social and community integration (Gaetz, 2013). The core principles allow for consistency in approach when communities decide to adopt housing first programs. These principles are the reference to determine if a program truly falls under the housing first umbrella.

There has been promising research that demonstrates that housing first can be implemented successfully in Canada (Goering, P. et al. 2014). The same study showed that housing first is adaptable to different Canadian contexts and populations, whether the communities are small or large, rural or urban. Many of these programs are able to succeed with relatively limited resources. Pacifica Housing in Victoria through their Streets to Homes program has been able to run on an average budget of \$7500 per person per year. The Streets to Homes program, which is a housing first model implemented in Victoria BC has been successful because of the series of partnerships that are in place to support the common goals of the program. Partnerships allow for a diverse range of actors to contribute their support and resources to running successful programs on modest budgets.

The ability for housing first initiatives to network with other service providers as mentioned above can be a key component in maintaining a high quality of service and viability of the overall program. The homelessness sector in B.C. operates on small budgets, so the advantages that are gained through innovative partnerships take strain off overburdened providers.

## Successful Practices Implemented in BC and Internationally

Homelessness is not unique to the Canadian context. There have been well documented cases of successful programs implemented around the world. We will turn our eyes towards a few of these case studies to see what lessons can be identified and applied to the Canadian context. Many of the practices have been replicated with degrees of success in various cities.

## MODULAR HOUSING – VANCOUVER

Modular housing is built with pre cast elements which can be manufactured off site, resulting in very fast construction periods. The ability to create a number of high quality housing units eases some of the demand for some of the homeless population.

Another advantage of modular housing is its ability to occupy vacant land, usually owned by the city. The sites used are scheduled for development in the future which will require a new location for the modular housing units.

Mitchell Lagimodiere now lives in a modular housing building called Sarah Ross House. He is in his mid-50's and considers himself a jack of all trades. He was blessed to find a spot in the modular housing project. He had a previous history of substance use. He is recorded stating "I had a bad drug habit when I was younger, and to go downtown would be just asking to get back into it. There's no way I'll go back down there" (Howell, 2019). The Sarah Ross house which is not in the vicinity of Downtown eastside is a preferred location for Mitchell as he does not wish to get back into substance use.

Modular housing is flexible and can be easily transported to new sites to take advantage of vacant land. While it is not permanent, it does increase the supply of affordable housing in a city and can be deployed where ever there is vacant land available. This is a decentralized model that can be adapted to suit the needs of the targeted subpopulation. There also is the potential for these models to gain community acceptance through slow integration with the community, and successful results of the clients.



The 52-unit modular housing building on Keele Street is known as Sarah Ross House. It opened last summer. Photo: Dan Toulgoet



Mitchell Lagimodiere on the path that he and friends made outside Sarah Ross House. Photo: Dan Toulgoet

## COMMUNITY LAND TRUST – NEW YORK

Community Land Trust is a nonprofit organization which purchases and holds land for the benefit of a community. The purpose is to make land perpetually available for affordable housing. The housing options are more affordable than market housing because the cost of the land is eliminated. They usually target low- and moderate-income residents. They operate on a portfolio approach, where there is an ability to transfer capital between sites.

This model is a good example of how to address homelessness by providing heavily subsidized affordable housing in locations where otherwise it is not possible. The outcome could be targeting people from various demographic and income levels. Having low-income housing units available enables a smoother transition from homelessness.

By increasing affordable housing stock, we are also able to prevent people who are on the verge of homelessness. CLT's are a modest intervention that works to retain and create more affordable housing for the community.

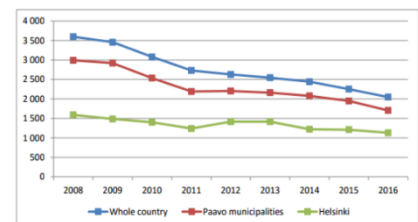


## HOUSING FIRST – FINLAND

There has been a rise in European homelessness in areas such as the UK, Germany and France. However, the trend in Finland has been a decline in homelessness.

Housing first was introduced in Finland in 2007. The outcome showed that by giving people permanent housing, it was easier to solve health and social problems. The residents receive individual tailored support services. There was an increase in the stock of affordable rental units. Even though it seemed like the upfront cost per person is more, there is a savings as it costs almost an average of €9600 (14,400 CAD) a year to support a person being homeless.

Long-term homelessness has decreased significantly since the PAAVO program was introduced by the Finnish Government, which made housing first the default approach taken by the Finnish Government. As a result of the program, there has been a significant decrease in people sleeping rough in Finland. In the UK, a study by the homeless charity Crisis found that a policy of this kind in the UK could be more than five times as effective and nearly five times more cost-effective than existing services.



## DESIGN SOLUTIONS – PORTLAND

In Fall of 2015, Portland declared a state of emergency because of the high number of people without homes living on the street. The city had a lack of affordable housing and the city's shelters were overburdened.

In the Spring of 2016 - the POD (Partners on Dwelling) initiative was launched to help address this crisis. The initiative was in collaboration between a group called Village Coalition and (advocates, activists and houseless individuals) together with students from the Center for Public Interest Design (CPID), a research and action center within the Portland State University's School of Architecture. The initiative helped create well designed dwellings where informal villages were already being constructed. The strength here is having designers address problems through innovative design solution.



## FOYER MODEL – AUSTRALIA

The Foyer Model was introduced by the British Government in response to high youth unemployment, and the success of this model led to replication throughout the country. This model has been successful in UK and Australia and is being piloted in Canada in Edmonton and Calgary.

This is a housing model which has shown to be effective for youth. There is a wide range of differing needs among young people based on age, maturity, resilience and level of independence, and personal circumstances. Some come with experiences of sexism, racism and homophobia and this has to be dealt with skillfully and this model provides the all-round support needed to address that.

It is a transitional housing model for youth and has gained popularity over the years. Here young people are housed for a longer time and are given the necessary living skills and are enrolled in education and training. Young people are provided with housing for almost two to three years, with emphasis and links to employment opportunities, education, training and mentoring. With the Foyer Plus model, young people enhance their education, social relationships and engagement, and have better employment and housing outcomes.

At some of these programs, young people who have already left the service are given additional months of support to help them transition to independent living. It is an important step to have a smooth transition into stable housing. The Foyer Plus model can be easily adapted in both small and large communities and in both rural and urban contexts.

Diagram 1 Housing Options for Homeless Youth



## PATHWAY TO HOME – DUBLIN

Dublin is facing challenges addressing homelessness, in 2012 4,837 individuals used Dublin's emergency shelters (Sustaining Dublin's Pathway to Home, 2014). Ireland's ability to provide social housing and accompanying social services is impacted. Social housing outputs have been reduced from 8,000 units in 2008 to less than 1,500 units in 2012 (Sustaining Dublin's Pathway to Home, 2014). Dublin's homeless action plan will be aligned with a plan to improve health and wellbeing. Dublin has engaged in several partnerships to diversify the services on offer to the homeless population.

Dublin's homeless action plan is known as Pathway to Home and was adopted in 2008. It is a model that emphasises preventing homelessness, a holistic approach responding to clients needs by placing them with services and emergency shelter, and case management as a client moves into independent living with supports (Sustaining Dublin's Pathway to Home, 2014). Clients either find housing through market rentals or supportive housing. Even with a general reduction in spending on public services, spending on homeless services has remained a priority. For this reason, a significant amount of funding is made available to respond to homelessness by the state through a range of programs (Sustaining Dublin's Pathway to Home, 2014).

## **SMALL HOUSING BC – VANCOUVER**

SHBC is a non-profit society registered and based in Vancouver. Its focus is on development and promotion of small housing forms in British Columbia. It actively champions the creation and inclusion of smaller forms of housing established single-family neighborhoods across BC communities.



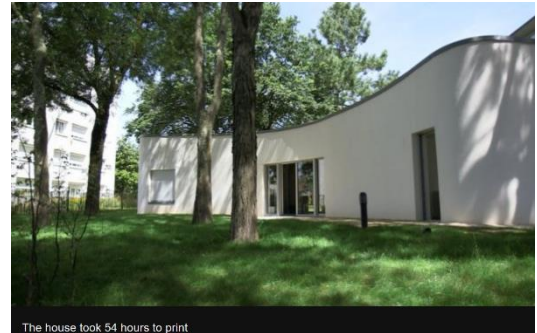
Small Housing Includes: small lot homes, house-plexes, grow homes, cottage housing, cohousing, secondary suites (units within the principal home such as a basement), laneway housing (detached accessory dwelling units), suites in duplexes, lock-off suites, micro-suites, tiny homes and collective housing. There are many advantages to small homes, they are affordable, provide urban infill, and help diversify the stock of housing to accommodate wider housing needs.

## **3D PRINTING – FRANCE**

The Ramdanis were the first family to move into a 3D printed house. The house was built in around 54 hours, and the contractors took additional time to finish the windows, doors and roofs. The house built was a 4-bedroom unit. The housing was built as a collaboration between the City Council, the housing association and the University of Nantes.

The project was undertaken to test this technology to see if this could become mainstream for housing, and also the principle could be applied to other building types. The house was designed by a team of architects, scientists and programmers, in a studio and then programmed into a 3D printer. Each wall comprises of two layers of the insulator polyurethane, with a space in-between which is filled with cement. A well-insulated and durable wall is created. The windows, doors and roof are then fitted in. The efficient design results in minimal construction waste and ability to for the units to be accessible. The project

was envisioned by Benoit Furet, who heads the project at University of Nantes. He has a heart for social housing. He states, "And here I wanted to create a house that is social housing, but with much more modern architecture." He believes that with evolving technology and scale of use the cost of construction will drop drastically over the next 10-15 years.



# Conclusion

The delivery of homeless services has changed tremendously over time. We are now seeing the reintroduction of government funding to address homelessness and housing in general. With these new opportunities comes the important task of coordinating stakeholders to address homelessness in a dignified, evidence-based manner. While there have been many improvements in homelessness services, there needs to be more resources allocated to preventative measures. This will require systems level coordination and increasing the supply of affordable housing units. There is considerable evidence in the strength of housing first as one of the best practices for addressing homelessness for majority of the people groups identified. The housing first example in Finland shows this model results in a decrease in levels of homelessness. Housing alone is not sufficient; it should be coupled with the support services required for the smooth transition into permanent housing.

The level of supports needed by homeless population varies by individual, which places the importance on a client-oriented approach to address their specific needs. These specialized supports take the form of 24/7 staffing, supportive environment for community connections, mental health and addiction services, as well as cultural connection for Indigenous folks. The need for people to have a positive peer and community environment is very important, as most of the individuals who experience homelessness come from foster care background, or histories of trauma and relationship turmoil.

Successful programs require quality data and ways to have data shared across the homelessness sector. As data improves best practices will also improve. An outcome of better data collection is that having an accurate population counts helps substantiate advocacy efforts which can be directed to government and the broader community.

However, it is not sufficient to address homelessness by just housing homeless individuals; there is room for large scale potential impact by preventing homelessness before it occurs. With an understanding of pathways into homelessness, there is hope to find innovative solutions to prevent homelessness. With partnerships and collaborative effort between levels of government to provide long-term investment in addressing this issue, it is possible steadily reduce the numbers of people who are at risk of homelessness and who will sleep rough.

The evidence collected through this report showcased the promising work that has already been done to improve the lives of many people. Many of these best practices are awaiting large scale systems adoption which will have a much bigger impact.

# Direction Forward (Future Research Initiatives)

We identified a gap in the design element of housing solutions available. The Pod Initiative in Portland is a good example where we see design professionals researching and collaborating to address housing solutions which are innovative, quick and cost effective. There is great potential within the realm of architecture and design to provide housing solutions which are innovative whilst still being cost-effective.

More work needs to be done on creating an integrated approach to homelessness at a national level in Canada. We have seen examples where the homelessness sector comes together on a small scale, so the ability to scale collaboration to a systems-wide approach could be very impactful.

Overall, we see that Canada is a successful country and a sought-after destination for immigrants all over the world. Many of the immigrants are well qualified professionals from other countries who come to Canada for a better standard of living. Many of them bring sufficient capital with them when they relocate and invest in the local market. We see potential and further research opportunity on how immigration policies and a percentage of investments from foreign investors could be channeled to fund initiatives to address homelessness, as when one makes Canada their home it may seem possible to also in some way assist a resident of Canada who is without a home.

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