



**A PLACE TO CALL  
HOME**

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT  
ADVISORY PANEL ON  
HOMELESSNESS**



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## REFLECTIONS FROM OUR CO-CHAIRS

Homelessness affects all of us — not just those who are homeless — because when people have a home, they are healthier, more ready for employment, and better able to participate and contribute to their communities. When no one is left behind, we all benefit. That is why we are committed to ending homelessness.



We established the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness because we know that homelessness is a complex issue and we wanted to get the best advice from leaders in the community. As co-chairs we were grateful for their time and the recommendations they developed for government consideration. Their recommendations will help inform the next phase of our action plan, and strengthen the partnerships that are needed to work toward solutions to end homelessness.

In Ontario, we offer a range of supports across the homelessness and housing system, from emergency shelters to supportive housing, to rental supports to maintain stable housing. Homelessness is a pressing, urgent, and costly issue facing the housing system. That's why we are aligning this work with the government efforts to review, renew and transform the way we deliver our programs. This requires us to invest in the right things now so we are not paying more later.

In the course of our work as ministers, we have had the unique privilege to hear firsthand perspectives, experiences, and ideas from people across the province who have directly experienced homelessness or who are helping to reduce it.

We heard about people who lived much of their lives with undiagnosed mental illness, who, for years, moved in and out of a shelter or hospital. We heard from young people who had no place to call home, whose potential to live full and healthy lives was threatened far too early. And we heard about survivors who depended on friends and family to escape from abusive relationships, and who constantly had to ask themselves, "What will I do to find peace tonight, or tomorrow night?"

There are many root causes of homelessness, including structural factors, system factors and individual factors. A large number of homeless people, from all socio-economic backgrounds, have experienced mental health issues, addictions and/or trauma. These causes are significantly exacerbated when a person loses a home and becomes homeless.

We have also had the unique opportunity to hear from those who deliver programs and services to support our homeless population. These amazing workers shared their experiences, and most importantly, their successes. This gives us confidence that we can solve the problem of homelessness.

For example, we are inspired by the team at the London CARES, a highly collaborative community based Housing First service aimed at improving the health and housing outcomes of individuals experiencing homelessness in London, Ontario. Using a unique partnership model between Addiction Services of Thames Valley, Regional HIV/AIDS Connection, and the Unity Project for the Relief of Homelessness, London CARES provides Street Outreach and Housing Stability support on a 24-hour basis under the pillars of: harm reduction, prevention, treatment, enforcement and community collaboration.

In Hamilton, a charity called Indwell creates affordable housing communities that support people seeking health, wellness, and belonging. The organization offers a continuum of support across 180 units in Hamilton and 107 in Oxford, with 152 units under development and construction. Housing options range from intensive support with 24-hour on-site staff, to independent apartments with supports. The organization is committed to finding unique solutions to overcome obstacles for its tenants and strives to lead the way to ending homelessness.

We would like to express a sincere thank you to everyone who has taken the time to share their experiences and perspectives with the Panel, especially the presenters who had the courage to share personal experience. Your stories made a difference.

We would also like to thank Parliamentary Assistant Chris Ballard for his passion as a champion for youth homelessness.

This report provides a critical foundation for the government to build on. But we can't do it alone. To successfully end homelessness, everyone has a role to play – the federal government, provincial ministries, municipal partners, community agencies and the private sector.

We know this is an ambitious task, but with the right tools and a good plan we can make this happen.

Sincerely,

**Deb Matthews**

Co-Chair, Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness  
Deputy Premier  
President of the Treasury Board  
Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy

**Ted McMeekin**

Co-Chair, Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness  
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Panel commends the Ontario government for making a bold commitment to end homelessness and is pleased to present its advice to government. This report was created to lay the foundation to achieve this goal.

**The Panel recommends that the government set an aggressive target to end chronic homelessness within 10 years.**

In September 2014, the Ontario government announced its commitment to end homelessness as a part of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, *Realizing Our Potential, 2014-2019*. In response, the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness was established with a mandate to give advice on how to define and measure homelessness in Ontario, how to prioritize and set targets for ending homelessness, and how to build the evidence base and capacity to implement best practices around the province.

To respond to the complexity of the issue, the Panel invited 40 presenters with diverse perspectives and experiences with homelessness to help inform its work. Through the course of the discussions the following themes emerged:

1. **An Ontario definition must be inclusive and comprehensive**
2. **One size does not fit all**
3. **Most homelessness is hidden homelessness**
4. **Homelessness prevention is important**
5. **Youth homelessness is a pressing issue**
6. **Aboriginal Peoples are overrepresented**
7. **Chronic homelessness is an urgent problem**
8. **Institutional transition points are a systemic problem**
9. **Race plays a role when it comes to homelessness**
10. **Cultural sensitivity and awareness are needed**
11. **Collaboration is key**
12. **Communities need capacity**

All of these themes clearly showed that homelessness is experienced differently across the province, varying according to one's personal history, geographic location, language, sexual orientation, and/or racial, ethnic, and gender identity. Ending homelessness will require addressing the root causes of homelessness to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.

The following outlines the Panel's recommendations for government consideration.

## Defining homelessness in Ontario

The Panel recommends that:

1. The Province adopt a comprehensive, technical definition of homelessness for Ontario, adapted from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.
2. The Province adopt the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy definition for chronic homelessness.

## Prioritizing and setting targets to end homelessness in Ontario

The Panel recommends that:

3. The Province set four priorities to guide action to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness, focusing on:
  - Chronic homelessness
  - Youth homelessness
  - Aboriginal homelessness
  - Homelessness following transition from provincially-funded institutions and service systems
4. Local municipalities adopt additional, local priorities as appropriate.
5. The Province set an aggressive target to end chronic homelessness within 10 years.
6. The Province invest in further study, capacity building, and program implementation to inform the adoption of additional targets for ending homelessness in Ontario.

## Measuring homelessness and collecting data to track progress

The Panel recommends that:

7. Different approaches be used to collect data and develop indicators locally and provincially, in light of the need for both local flexibility and provincial data to track progress on ending homelessness. The Province should work toward improved standardization of data collection over time.
8. Provincial indicators for tracking progress on homelessness build on data collection already underway or planned across Ontario.

9. The Province monitor progress using a variety of provincial indicators. Chronic homelessness should be tracked as Ontario's key indicator, and a dashboard of indicators should be developed to measure progress on preventing and ending homelessness.
10. The Province develop a new approach to measuring homelessness following transition from provincially-funded institutions and service systems.
11. Ontario's 47 Service Managers carry out local enumeration using one or more approaches from a standardized menu of options. The Province should conduct further analysis before finalizing this menu of options, and promote standardization across each approach.
12. Service Managers develop local indicators to track (1) overall local homeless numbers and (2) local progress on provincial priorities to reduce youth, Aboriginal, and chronic homelessness. These indicators should be reported in Local Housing and Homelessness Plan reports.
13. Local communities be required to gather a minimum set of standardized data and common socio-demographic data. A detailed list of minimum data should be developed by the Province after further study.
14. Municipalities be required to carry out local equity impact assessments to work toward equitable outcomes of housing and homelessness plans and policies.

## Expanding the evidence base and building capacity to address homelessness

The Panel recommends that:

15. The Province develop a knowledge mobilization framework for sharing research and best practices.
16. The Centre of Excellence for Evidence-Based Decision Making, announced as part of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy and 2015 Ontario Budget, allocate resources to focus on homelessness, and work with sector organizations and key partners to assist in sharing and developing evidence, research and best practices.
17. The Province share local success stories and convene a provincial homelessness summit for local dialogue and information sharing.
18. The Province promote data integration and sharing of homelessness-related data across Ontario, and explore the potential of common intake systems for homeless-serving agencies.

19. The Province promote policy cohesion by inviting partners to review programs and policies, and commit to making continuous improvements to ensure people-friendly policies.
20. The Province support local capacity to promote cultural sensitivity and awareness, including providing education, training and support to create safe and welcoming spaces for all Ontarians.
21. The Province support local municipalities with tools, resources, and funding to support local capacity to carry out equity impact assessments.
22. The Province provide increased funding to support capacity building and local system transformation and commit to long-term, stable funding for affordable housing and homelessness-related programs, as opposed to annualized funding.
23. The Province work with all key partners and continue to engage with the federal government to develop a national housing strategy; to commit to long-term funding to create permanent, affordable housing; and to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness in Ontario and nation-wide.

## THE EXPERT ADVISORY PANEL ON HOMELESSNESS

In September 2014, the Ontario government announced a bold, long-term commitment to end homelessness as a part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Realizing Our Potential, 2014-2019. As a first step towards this goal, an Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness was established to provide advice on how to define and measure homelessness, how to prioritize and set targets for ending homelessness, and how to collect evidence and support the capacity of local actors to implement programs that work.<sup>1</sup>

This report provides a summary of what the Panel discussed and considered over the course of eight meetings, held between January and July 2015.

The Panel was made up of 14 members with diverse experiences and backgrounds related to homelessness. It was co-chaired by Deb Matthews, Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and by Ted McMeekin, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

### The Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness<sup>2</sup>

**Pedro Barata**, United Way Toronto & York Region

**Maya Chacaby**, Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

**Michael Creek**, Working for Change, Toronto

**Dr. Cheryl Forchuk**, Western University

**Dr. Stephen Gaetz**, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

**Dr. Stephen Hwang**, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto

**Dr. Kwame McKenzie**, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

**Mike Nadeau**, Commissioner of Social Services, City of Sault Ste. Marie

**Joe-Anne Priel**, Community and Emergency Services, City of Hamilton

**Bruce Rivers**, Covenant House Toronto

**Aseefa Sarang**, Across Boundaries, Toronto

**Michael Shapcott**, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

**Brian Smith**, formerly of WoodGreen Community Services, Toronto

**Simone Thibault**, Centretown Community Health Centre, Ottawa

<sup>1</sup> See [Appendix A](#) for full Terms of Reference.

<sup>2</sup> See [Appendix B](#) for full Panel member biographies.

## A Vision of Home

The Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness views homelessness as the lack of a safe and secure place to call your own. The Panel envisions an Ontario where all people have access to home, where home is understood as “a safe and secure place to call your own, where freedom, comforts, and needs are met, and where people have access to jobs, education, and supportive communities.”<sup>3</sup>

The Expert Advisory Panel commends the Ontario government for making a bold commitment to end homelessness, and this report provides the Panel’s recommendations for starting down the path to achieve this goal.

The Panel recommends that the Province set an aggressive target to end chronic homelessness within 10 years. The Panel also recommends that the Province prioritize action to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness facing youth, Aboriginal Peoples, and people transitioning from provincially-funded institutions and service systems.

Ending homelessness is a big task and it will require collaboration, capacity building, and increased funding for affordable housing and other supports. The Panel recommends that the Province work to build capacity, foster collaboration, and provide additional resources to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness in Ontario.



<sup>3</sup> This understanding of home was adapted from comments made by Marc Maracle, Executive Director of Ottawa’s Gignul Housing, who was a presenter at one of the Panel’s meetings. See page 24 for details.

## ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN ONTARIO: NEED FOR ACTION

### Context

*Homelessness is complex and is often the result of a number of interrelated factors, including individual factors such as traumatic events and mental health and addictions issues; system factors such as difficult transitions from child welfare, health care and correctional systems; and structural factors such as discrimination in accessing employment, economic hardship, and a lack of affordable housing.*

Over the past several decades, homelessness in Canada has been on the rise. According to The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014, issued by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, an estimated 35,000 Canadians are homeless on any given night, and 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness each year.<sup>4</sup>

While some data is available at the national level, understanding homelessness in Ontario is a challenge. There is a lack of high quality, comparable provincewide data on homelessness – a problem that the Expert Advisory Panel was in part established to address. The existing data indicate that the problem is serious. For example, in Toronto, more than 5,000 people were counted on the streets in one night in 2013. In Hamilton, 3,149 people stayed in overnight shelters in 2014. In rural and Northern communities there are problems too, with 720 people recorded as homeless during one week in Timmins in 2011. Provincewide, 168,711 households were waiting for social housing at the end of 2014.

In Ontario, some people spend time unsheltered – sleeping on park benches, in ravines, huddled in doorways, or on heating grates. Others who experience homelessness are emergency-sheltered, sleeping in overnight shelters, shelters for people affected by violence, or in motels that serve as shelters in over-burdened systems.

More still are among the ranks of the hidden homelessness – estimated to represent 80 per cent of those who have no place to call home. They include provisionally sheltered people and families who are “couch surfing” in unsustainable circumstances and often overcrowded housing to avoid the streets; women and children experiencing domestic violence and living in constant fear; people sleeping in abandoned buildings and overcrowded spaces (often sleeping in shifts); and families living in temporary accommodation due to evacuations.

In addition, many people who are temporarily sheltered in hospitals, jails, community detox, and the child welfare system often have no permanent place to go home to upon discharge.

While the experiences of all these people are unique and diverse, what they have in common is no place to call their own.

Furthermore, many Ontarians are at risk of becoming homeless as a result of a number of factors including economic hardship, precarious employment, barriers to opportunity, and

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<sup>4</sup> Gaetz, S., Gulliver, T., and Richter, T. (2014). The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2014. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

a lack of affordable housing. For example, in 2011, 11.4 per cent of Ontario renters were experiencing extreme affordability problems, meaning that they had low incomes and were spending more than 50 per cent of their income on rent, putting them at risk of becoming homeless.<sup>5</sup>

The impacts of homelessness are damaging and are not felt by all Ontarians equally. Mirroring broad patterns of social inequality, homelessness has unequal impacts that are interlinked with race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, language, immigration status, socio-economic status, mental health and addictions issues, regional location, and Aboriginal identity.

Many pathways into homelessness disproportionately affect people based on these identities. Discrimination in job and housing markets, for example, may affect members of LGBTIQ communities,<sup>6</sup> Aboriginal Peoples, people of colour, or immigrants – putting them at greater risk of becoming homeless. In turn, people's experiences with homeless-serving programs and services are deeply affected by identity and intersecting oppressions. These can influence their length of time and experience with homelessness, as well as their pathways into a permanent and safe home environment.

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, everyone has the right to equal treatment in housing without discrimination and harassment. In light of this, the Panel recognizes that no one should be left behind in the effort to move Ontarians out of homelessness and into secure, permanent, affordable housing.

## How it works in Ontario

Delivery of housing and homeless-related services is a local responsibility in Ontario, administered by 47 Service Managers, with many local, on-the-ground organizations involved in service delivery. The system in Ontario includes emergency shelters for the homeless, transitional and supportive housing, social and rental housing, and opportunities for homeownership.

The Panel recognizes that the Ontario government plays a key role in affordable housing and homelessness prevention. As part of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*, the government created the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy in 2010 – the first of its kind in Ontario – to improve access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing. Since 2003, Ontario has invested more than \$4 billion, which is the largest affordable housing investment in the province's history. This includes funding for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI).

While historically the federal government has been an active funding partner of the housing and homelessness services, since the 1980s there has been a steady withdrawal of federal funding for housing and homelessness. This has worsened the problem in Ontario.

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<sup>5</sup> Gaetz et al. (2014).

<sup>6</sup> LGBTIQ refers to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, questioning, and queer.



## Need for Action

Across Ontario, there is an urgent need to address homelessness. Despite significant provincial investment in affordable housing over the past several decades, more needs to be done to solve this pressing issue.

There is a need for action and funding that targets the full spectrum of homeless experiences – whether people are unsheltered, emergency sheltered, or provisionally sheltered and experiencing hidden homelessness. There is also a need for preventative efforts, and efforts targeting the root causes of homelessness, to ensure that people and families who are at risk of homelessness remain stably housed.

There is a need for action that pays attention to difference, acknowledging the varied and unequal experiences with homelessness that face Ontarians based on their diverse identities and geographic location – in rural, Northern, small urban, or urban Ontario.

Action will need to build on successful programs and best practices across the province, such as The Oaks Residence in Ottawa ([page 44](#)), and the 20,000 Homes Campaign that is currently underway in many communities across Ontario ([page 67](#)).

Action will need to be collaborative, involving all key partners – service providers, municipalities, the private sector, the provincial government, and the federal government. It will require resources to build capacity to understand the scope of the problem across Ontario, and to build the infrastructure to solve the problem. It will require additional funding for supports and for permanent housing, so that all Ontarians have a safe and secure place to call their own.



## WHAT WE HEARD: KEY THEMES

Building on the diversity and wide-ranging expertise of the Panel itself, 40 different presenters from roughly 15 groups with intersecting and cross-cutting membership were invited to share their knowledge on the varied experiences of homelessness facing Ontarians (see [Appendix C](#)).

While the Panel was interested to learn about causes of and solutions for homelessness facing these groups, presenters were also asked to focus their discussion around the Panel's mandate.

The following key themes have emerged through these discussions:

1. **An Ontario definition must be inclusive and comprehensive**
2. **One size does not fit all**
3. **Most homelessness is hidden homelessness**
4. **Homelessness prevention is important**
5. **Youth homelessness is a pressing issue**
6. **Aboriginal Peoples are overrepresented**
7. **Chronic homelessness is an urgent problem**
8. **Institutional transition points are a systemic problem**
9. **Race plays a role when it comes to homelessness**
10. **Cultural sensitivity and awareness are needed**
11. **Collaboration is key**
12. **Communities need capacity**

### 1. An Ontario definition must be inclusive and comprehensive

The experiences of homeless people are as diverse as Ontarians themselves. The Panel heard a consistent message from many groups: make sure that the definition reflects broad experiences – of youth facing exploitation on the streets, of Aboriginal Peoples who are overrepresented among the homeless population, of women facing violence in the home or as victims of sex trafficking, of families in overcrowded housing in Northern communities, of people who are sleeping on a friend's couch because they have no home – and so on. An inclusive definition speaks to the structural forces and personal experiences that lead to homelessness, and reflects Ontario's diversity.

Ontario's definition must also be comprehensive, addressing the experiences facing people at risk of homelessness, the hidden homeless, and those who chronically spend time on the streets and in shelters. A comprehensive definition paves the way for a comprehensive

strategy, which includes both upstream preventative interventions to keep people from becoming homeless, as well as downstream solutions to meet the immediate needs of those who are currently homeless and in distress.

## 2. One size does not fit all

Experiences with homelessness in Ontario differ according to one's location, identity, and personal history. When it comes to enumerating people experiencing homelessness, this reality means that the same methods will not work in all places or for all people.

Approaches to enumerating people who are homeless in big cities – such as street counts – may not work in small urban, rural, and northern contexts where hidden homelessness is more common. Enumeration that relies on shelter use may yield accurate data for single men, but is less reliable when it comes to women, families, Aboriginal Peoples, LBTTQ youth, immigrants, and other groups who tend to avoid emergency shelters. Even survey questions may not resonate with all audiences as some people without permanent shelter may view themselves as “street involved” but not “homeless.”

Similarly, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to homelessness. Initiatives aimed at veterans may not work for youth. Services that assist the chronically homeless may not work for immigrants, whose needs may differ still from those of refugees. When it comes to trauma, women's experiences, responses to, and recovery from trauma are different from those of men.

Several groups that the Panel heard from made the call for unique and distinctive homelessness plans and services – including Aboriginal Peoples and communities, women subject to sex trafficking, youth, and members of LBTTQ communities.

## 3. Most homelessness is hidden homelessness

Hidden homelessness is an important issue in Ontario, and while it's a challenge to measure, it should be part of any homelessness strategy. The hidden homeless include people who live in temporary, provisional accommodation, in a situation that is not sustainable. The hidden homeless may be moving from one friend's couch to another, temporarily living with family, sleeping in a car, or coping in an unsafe environment that is not a home.



*A one-size-fits-all approach does not work. We've learned that youth avoid shelters because they are too structured, and veterans avoid shelters because they are not structured enough."*

- Dr. Cheryl Forchuk,  
Panel Member

Because the hidden homeless are not visible on the street or using homeless-serving shelters and facilities, they are difficult to find and enumerate. Researchers have estimated that most homeless people, however, fall into this category. One study in Vancouver projected that 3.5 homeless people are hidden for every one person on the street and in shelters.<sup>7</sup> It is understood that the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness – up to 80 per cent – are hidden, while the 20 per cent who are visible on streets and in shelters represent only the tip of the iceberg.<sup>8</sup>



Disadvantaged and marginalized populations face barriers to accessing shelters and support services, and are more likely to experience hidden homelessness. The Panel heard that women are often among the hidden homeless because they are staying with an abusive spouse, living in unfit locations, or hiding due to their immigration status, rather than living in an emergency shelter or on the street. Shelters and agencies may not feel safe for women, youth, victims of violence, and people from LGBTTTQ communities. Immigrants, refugees, ethno-racial and racialized people may encounter discrimination or culturally inhospitable environments at homeless-serving institutions. For Aboriginal Peoples, experiences of racism and colonial dispossession, along with mental health and addictions issues, have worked to deter many from interacting with shelters, government agencies, and charitable institutions.

Hidden homelessness also has a geographical dimension. In Northern, rural, and small communities, the vast majority of homeless people remain hidden, whether to avoid stigma or simply because shelters are not locally available.

<sup>7</sup> Eberle, M., Krauss, D., Serge, L. (2009). Results of the pilot study to estimate the size of the hidden homeless population in Metro Vancouver. Available online at: [homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/4qoegog5.pdf](http://homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/4qoegog5.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Wellesley Institute. (2010). Precarious housing in Canada. Toronto: The Wellesley Institute

Many people who are considered to be among the hidden homeless do not themselves identify as homeless – posing a challenge for measurement. This may be to avoid stigma, out of fear of social service intervention (from the Children’s Aid Society, for example), because they are experiencing issues with mental health and/or addictions, or because they have become accustomed to provisional housing situations. The Panel learned that in Aboriginal communities, people living in overcrowded or substandard housing, or in camps or temporary shelters, will often not self-identify as homeless. Similarly, provisionally-housed newcomers to Canada may not consider themselves homeless.

### Hidden Homelessness and Immigrant Perspectives

Immigrants face unique issues related to homelessness. People with temporary or migrant worker status may not be eligible to receive Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits or to access emergency shelters. Many immigrants will not seek any support or government assistance because they fear negative consequences such as deportation, or being barred from sponsoring family members.

For these and other reasons, immigrants are more likely to experience hidden homelessness, seeking temporary refuge with friends or family, rather than living on the streets or in a shelter.

The Panel learned that many immigrants who are homeless may not define themselves as homeless – especially if they are coping in non-permanent shelter situations. Many feel a sense of shame and seek to conceal their homeless status – making the scale of the problem even more difficult to understand.

## 4. Homelessness prevention is important

Homelessness interventions often focus on the emergency end of the spectrum, providing housing and supports to people who are homeless and urgently in need. A comprehensive approach to ending homelessness must also, however, focus on prevention. Targeting the causes of homelessness upstream will reduce the number of people who end up experiencing homelessness downstream.

Panel members and presenters identified many pathways into homelessness. Youth, for example, often become homeless because of dysfunctional families, disrupted home environments, or involvement with the child welfare system, according to presenter Dr. Jeff Turnbull, Medical Director of the Inner City Health Project and Chief of Staff at the Ottawa Hospital.

Violence and trauma were also identified as key factors leading to homelessness, especially for women and youth who experience violence. Repeated episodes of violence and abuse cause trauma, which increases people's vulnerability and often leads to chronic homelessness. These experiences worsen mental health issues and/or addictions issues, and can also lead to criminal justice system involvement.

By helping people access safe, affordable, and adequate housing, we can prevent them from suffering additional trauma caused by homelessness, and from developing worsened mental health and/or addictions issues.

For 90 per cent of homeless people in Canada, poverty and the limited availability of affordable housing are the main factors that lead to homelessness.<sup>9</sup> Addressing economic hardship and affordable housing issues are critical elements in a preventative strategy.



*We need to focus on prevention – look upstream to see if we can solve the problem before it becomes a problem.”*

- Brian Smith,  
Panel Member



<sup>9</sup> Gaetz et al., 2014, page 41.

## Brigette's Story

**Brigette Lapointe presented to the Panel as a member of Women Speak Out, a collective of women who use their personal experiences with homelessness and poverty to educate the public and to push for change.**

Brigette was eight when she first experienced what it was like to be homeless. Her mother was fleeing an abusive relationship and the family arrived in Toronto where they did not have a place to live.

Years later, Brigette found herself in a similar situation. She had to leave her beautiful home because of an abusive relationship.

"I finally made the decision to leave and take my son. Here I was – a single parent. No money, low self-esteem. How was I to survive?"

Brigette went to a shelter for abused women and stayed there for a few months. She started to make another home for herself and her son. She went back to school and found employment. But life continued to take a toll on her.

"My son left to move in with his dad, my fiancé died, my restaurant failed. An addiction took hold. It cost me my home – another one gone."

Brigette was homeless again – couch surfing, staying at hotels, staying with friends – seeking safety anywhere she could. Unable to afford adequate housing, she lived in a place that was "run-down" and formerly vacant.

"It fueled my addiction. I couldn't even make the place nice. A couple of years ago I could not continue to live there."

Brigette left her place and became homeless in order to pursue treatment for her addiction. After finishing her program she spent a month in a homeless shelter.

"I remember being so scared when I walked in. Is this what I got clean for? It was the worst feeling. I knew the world of addiction, but did not know the world of shelters."

Brigette applied for social housing in Toronto and is currently on the waiting list, likely for a few years. She got accepted into St. Felix House temporary residence, has maintained her recovery, and holds down two part-time jobs.

"The home is incredible, it's the safety, it's the security – it's empowering... life is good."

Brigette's one-year stay in temporary housing, however, was coming to an end.

"In October I will be back to being homeless. My jobs don't produce enough for me to pay market value rent. So I don't know what I will do."

Brigette felt that much could be done to help people in her situation:

"Having a caring and supportive person in your life is very important, to give you hope. Someone to share the good and the bad. For me, it's important to have a place to be able to go and stay that gave me the chance to heal."

## 5. Youth homelessness is a pressing issue

Youth homelessness in Canada is a serious problem. An estimated 6,000 young people use emergency shelters each night, and 30,000 youth sleep in shelters over the course of a year.<sup>10</sup> Youth who become homeless have often experienced violence or trauma, family breakdown, or issues transitioning from the child welfare system.

Once homeless, youth are vulnerable to exploitation, and many use drugs and alcohol to cope with life on the streets or to self-medicate for issues with mental health. The longer youth go without a home, the greater the negative impacts on their health and life chances. In addition, youth are overrepresented – making up 20 per cent of the homeless population in Canada.<sup>11</sup>

There is a moral imperative to keep youth safe and provide better opportunities to the younger generation. The Panel has identified youth homelessness as a key area where interventions would have a wide-ranging impact. Addressing youth homelessness is also preventative, as many homeless youth experience violence and trauma, and go on to become chronically homeless adults.

### A Social and Economic Need for Action

According to Raising the Roof (2009), there are social as well as economic costs to youth homelessness:

“It costs an estimated \$30,000 - \$40,000 per year to keep a youth in the shelter system. The cost of keeping one youth in detention is estimated at over \$250 per day, or \$100,000 per year. Canada’s adult homeless population – estimated by government to be 150,000 and by non-governmental agencies as high as 300,000 – costs taxpayers between \$4.5 and \$6 billion annually.”



<sup>10</sup> Segaert, A. (2012). The National Shelter Study: Emergency shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009. Ottawa: Homelessness Partnering Secretariat, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

<sup>11</sup> Gaetz et al. (2014).



Addressing youth homelessness will have positive impacts on people from oppressed and racially marginalized groups, who tend to be overrepresented. While LGBTTTQ youth represent 5 to 10 per cent of the population, they make up 25 to 40 per cent of homeless youth. Aboriginal youth are similarly overrepresented, and in some parts of the province, youth of colour are also overrepresented.<sup>12</sup>

The Panel has heard repeatedly that youth homelessness is different from adult homelessness, and that distinct policies need to be developed to assist homeless youth. Interventions will need to be co-ordinated, involving education, employment, housing, mental health services and supports, and mentorship.<sup>13</sup> Family reunification efforts also warrant special consideration.

In addition, there must be efforts to address systemic gaps that serve as pathways into youth homelessness. In Ontario, youth leaving the child welfare system may be more likely to become homeless, a situation that is magnified for Aboriginal youth. Ensuring that transitioning from child welfare is not a pathway into homelessness should be a provincial priority.



<sup>12</sup> Covenant House. (2015). Youth transitional housing toolkit. Toronto: Covenant House.

<sup>13</sup> Raising the Roof (2009).

## 6. Aboriginal Peoples are overrepresented

First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples are significantly overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness in Canada. While representing 2.4 per cent of the Ontario population, Aboriginal Peoples make up 16 per cent of the homeless population in Toronto, 30 per cent in Ottawa, 39 per cent in Timmins, 55 per cent in Thunder Bay, and 99.9 per cent in Sioux Lookout.<sup>14</sup>

Aboriginal youth are overrepresented among homeless youth, and also overrepresented in the child welfare system. Aboriginal women have three times the likelihood of experiencing violent victimization, making them more vulnerable to homelessness.<sup>15</sup> Mental health, addictions, and issues with trauma are also prominent for Aboriginal Peoples experiencing homelessness.

According to Veronica Nicholson, Executive Director of the Timmins Native Friendship Centre, the root causes of homelessness for Aboriginal Peoples relate to “oppression, dispossession of land and culture, created dependence on social welfare, and [...] government funding cuts.”

Presenters to the Panel explained how Aboriginal homelessness is intricately related to Canada’s colonial past and present, to pervasive institutional racism, and to inter-generational trauma – realities that have been given comprehensive treatment in the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, released in June 2015. The findings of the Commission underscore the urgent need to address Aboriginal homelessness – a stark sign of enduring social inequality – as a priority for action.

The Panel learned that Aboriginal Peoples are more likely to experience hidden homelessness, posing a challenge for enumerating and measurement. Many who have no place to call home will avoid shelters due to distrust, racism, and traumatic experiences with church- or state-run agencies. There is also a lack of research on Aboriginal homelessness,<sup>16</sup> and a need for culturally competent research approaches that embrace Aboriginal research methodologies.<sup>17</sup>



*We didn’t get into this situation overnight or by ourselves, and we won’t get out of it overnight or by ourselves – we depend on collaboration.”*

- Marc Maracle,  
Executive Director,  
Gignul Housing, Ottawa



*Aboriginal People are overrepresented and Aboriginal youth are deeply affected.*

*In light of these realities and the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation report, I think we must prioritize homelessness experienced by Aboriginal People.”*

- Joe-Anne Priel,  
Panel Member

<sup>14</sup> Gaetz et al. (2014); Kauppi, C., Pallard, H., Lemieux, S., and Nkosi, T. (2012). Homelessness in Timmins, January 2011 : Final Report. Sudbury: Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy, Laurentian University; Sider, D. (2005). A sociological analysis of root causes of Aboriginal homelessness in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. Toronto: Canadian Race Relations Foundation.

<sup>15</sup> Brennan, S. (2009). Violent victimization of Aboriginal women in the Canadian provinces, 2009. Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-X. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

<sup>16</sup> Some exceptions include: Belanger et al. (2012). Assessing urban Aboriginal housing and homelessness in Canada. Ottawa: National Association of Friendship Centres and the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians; Christensen, J. (2012). “They want a different life”: Rural northern settlement dynamics and pathways to homelessness in Yellowknife and Inuvik, Northwest Territories. The Canadian Geographer. 56(4): 419-438; Patrick, C. (2014). Aboriginal homelessness in Canada: A literature review. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

<sup>17</sup> See for example: Distasio et al. (2005). Home is where the heart is and right now that is nowhere: An examination of homelessness among Aboriginal people in Prairie cities. Winnipeg: The Institute of Urban Studies.

Adequate, safe, secure, and affordable housing is central to addressing Aboriginal homelessness. Both on- and off-reserve, Aboriginal Peoples are more likely to live in unaffordable, poor quality, and overcrowded housing. In off-reserve markets, high housing costs and ongoing discrimination (in housing and employment) limit access to quality housing. Protecting Aboriginal housing assets – and building more – were identified as priorities for both prevention and for addressing Aboriginal homelessness.

## 7. Chronic homelessness is an urgent problem

People who experience chronic homelessness have gone long periods of time without a home, while episodic homelessness is experienced by those who oscillate between being housed and being homeless. People in these circumstances often have disabling conditions, such as chronic physical or mental illness, or substance abuse problems. In Canada the chronically homeless are estimated to make up about two to four per cent of all homeless people. Jointly, however, the chronic and episodically homeless access a disproportionate amount – close to 50 per cent – of the resources dedicated to serving people experiencing homelessness.<sup>18</sup> These include resources offered by governments and service providers in the housing and homeless-serving system, but also across government in the areas of health, social services, and criminal justice.

Life on the streets and in shelters makes the chronically homeless vulnerable to serious health crises, violence, and criminal justice system involvement.

There is a strong moral argument to be made for helping those with complex needs who are experiencing tremendous hardship. There is also an economic argument in favour of providing housing and supports, rather than more costly emergency services.<sup>19</sup>

**The Targeted Engagement and Diversion (TED) Program** in Ottawa helps some of the most vulnerable homeless people get immediate health care instead of otherwise being taken to a hospital emergency room (ER). TED offers people a safe place to detox, and then supports access to treatment for addictions, mental and physical health issues.

In its first year of operation, the program found that about 96 per cent of clients could be helped through TED, rather than going to an ER. The pilot successfully reduced emergency service usage, and is estimated to have generated \$1.7 million in health care savings per year.

### Spending to Save

Findings from the **At Home/ Chez Soi** program (a four-year research demonstration funded by the Mental Health Commission of Canada) revealed that providing “Housing First” to high-need participants not only saves lives, but it also saves money.

**For every \$10 investment** in Housing First supports, **savings of up to \$21.72 were gained** in averted costs for hospitalization and other government services. Participants in the program also spent fewer nights in shelters and emergency departments.

<sup>18</sup> Gaetz et al. (2014).

<sup>19</sup> Gaetz et al. (2014).

In Alberta, for example, providing Housing First<sup>20</sup> to homeless clients led to dramatic reductions in emergency room visits, days in the hospital, and interactions with Emergency Medical Services, as well as reduced interactions with police, fewer days in jail, and fewer court appearances.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to focusing on chronic homelessness, the Panel recognized that efforts to address prevention and hidden homelessness are also necessary. Researchers have found that men (older white men in particular) are overrepresented in the chronically homeless population,<sup>22</sup> while women and the racially marginalized are underrepresented. As such, any focus on chronic homelessness must be paired with strategies that address the full spectrum of homeless experiences – including for the hidden homeless – and must also take action on preventing homelessness.

## Michael's Story

**Michael Creek is a member of the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, and in his presentation to the Panel he shared his lived experience with homelessness. He is now the Strategic Director of Working for Change.**

In his early 30s, Michael moved to Vancouver, where he became a sales manager for a video reproduction company. He had been in his new job for only three months when he felt a pain in his side – he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

"It was the beginning of the most painful stage of my life. Up until then I had a good job, income, a special person – I had a middle class life. In the end I beat cancer but I lost everything."

Michael had savings but it wasn't enough. His partner began to use drugs after being diagnosed with HIV, and one night he left with all of their money. While they later repaired what happened that night, his former partner passed away shortly after.

After this loss, Michael wandered the streets. He spent the night in a ravine, mostly crying. He began to store his things in a locker at the bus terminal.

"I tried the shelter system and it was not for me. People were inches apart. Drug dealers were taking advantage of people. The staff were indifferent. I was scared every moment." Michael spent the next three years couch surfing.

"There are hidden effects of being homeless. A scar left in the heart and the mind."

"I needed someone that I could have turned to, someone who would go that extra mile for me. Now I use my experience to make change. We are teachers. A home, a job, a friend, and social change – that is our motto at Working for Change."

<sup>20</sup> Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centres on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional supports and services as needed.

<sup>21</sup> Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. (2013). *A Plan for Alberta Ending Homelessness in Ten Years: Three Year Progress Report*. Edmonton: Government of Alberta.

<sup>22</sup> Burt, M. (2003). Chronic homelessness: Emergence of a public policy. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*. 39(3): 1267-1279.

## 8. Institutional transition points are a systemic problem

Many people experiencing hidden homelessness are temporarily accommodated in a range of institutions and service systems. They may be in institutions such as hospitals and prisons, in the child welfare system, or women's shelters. However, there is a lack of firm data on how many homeless people are provisionally accommodated in this way.

People who are in transition from provincially-funded institutions or other service systems may be particularly vulnerable to homelessness. A study of youth homelessness in Canada by Raising the Roof found that 43 per cent of respondents had a history of involvement with the child welfare system, and more than half of homeless youth have been involved with the criminal justice system.<sup>23</sup> People who are incarcerated are often caught in a revolving door between jails and shelters. In a study of provincial correctional centres in the Greater Toronto Area, one-third of all prisoners are expected to be homeless upon discharge, while another 12 per cent were at risk of homelessness, with no plans in place for housing.<sup>24</sup>

Supporting transitions could make an impact in preventing homelessness, as people who interact with various systems may be at greater risk of becoming homeless. It would also provide an opportunity to engage with and assist homeless people who come into these systems, and prevent them from being discharged back into homelessness after their care, treatment, or incarceration is complete.

A recent study in London, Ontario, demonstrated how a focus on key institutional transition points can successfully prevent homelessness. In this study, more than 200 people being discharged from psychiatric facilities to "no fixed address" were assisted in finding housing and paying for rental housing. The results were dramatic and the majority of participants were prevented from becoming homeless. In this example, the costs of implementing measures to ensure people were not transitioning into homelessness and keeping people in their homes was less than the increased medical costs associated with homelessness and housing people in shelters.<sup>25</sup>



*Transition points are critical to any effort to end homelessness."*

- Dr. Cheryl Forchuk,  
Panel Member

<sup>23</sup> Raising the Roof Foundation (2009), Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions.

<sup>24</sup> John Howard Society of Toronto. (2010). Homeless and jailed: Jailed and homeless. Toronto: John Howard Society of Toronto.

<sup>25</sup> Forchuk et al. (2013). Preventing psychiatric discharge into homelessness. Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health. 32(3): 31-42.

## 9. Race plays a role when it comes to homelessness

The Panel recognizes that in order to understand and solve homelessness, race matters. When it comes to poverty, housing access, and social inequality in Ontario, racialized communities are disproportionately affected. According to the Colour of Poverty Campaign,<sup>26</sup> communities of colour are more likely to experience poverty, and to have related problems like poor health, lower education, and precarious employment, than are those with European backgrounds. In addition, racialized peoples encounter systemic racism that limits fair access to housing, and they are more likely to be victims of police violence.

People with mental health issues are likely to remain homeless for longer, and less likely to achieve housing security – especially for users facing structural oppressions.

According to Doret Phillips, a presenter to the Panel from Across Boundaries (an ethno-racial community mental health centre), studies of homelessness have typically omitted race from the analysis. In future research, a focus on race should be central, and policy interventions need to be informed by anti-racism, anti-oppression, and anti-Black racism frameworks.

A best practice approach that adopted these frameworks was carried out at the Toronto site of the At Home/Chez Soi project. At this site, Housing First participants were offered ethno-racial intensive case management. This involved a holistic approach to mental health care, and helped participants to address experiences of oppression and racism.<sup>27</sup>



*The interlocking nature of oppression needs to be considered in any analysis of homelessness.”*

- Doret Phillips,  
Across Boundaries



<sup>26</sup> The Colour of Poverty Campaign – Colour of Change Network is a community-based province-wide network of organizations and individuals whose aim is to raise awareness and promote racial equality in Canada. Their factsheet, released in 2007 is available at [learningandviolence.net/IrnTeach/material/PovertyFactSheets-aug07.pdf](http://learningandviolence.net/IrnTeach/material/PovertyFactSheets-aug07.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Stergiopoulos et al. (2014). At Home/Chez Soi project: Toronto site final report. Calgary: Mental Health Commission of Canada.

## 10. Cultural sensitivity and awareness are needed

There is a need for cultural sensitivity, understanding, and awareness across the housing and homeless-serving system. For many people who are from marginalized and oppressed groups, discrimination is often a reality in shelter and agency settings. For LGBTTTQ adults and youth, homophobia and transphobia among clients and staff at many homeless-serving institutions have made these unsafe and even hostile spaces. Treatment options for women are often simply not available, and a trauma-informed lens is not often applied in service environments. For Aboriginal Peoples, immigrants, refugees, and ethno-racial and racialized people, discriminatory and culturally insensitive procedures, language, and actions are deterrents to accessing service. In some places, a culture of accepting discriminatory attitudes is institutionalized.

Homeless populations are also subject to potential exploitation at shelters and agencies. These spaces are often targeted by sex traffickers and are recruiting grounds for the drug trade. It is essential that spaces meant to support vulnerable people are not spaces where they face greater risk of exploitation.

The importance of actively offering services in French, *l'offre active*, has been highlighted for Francophone communities accessing housing and homelessness-related services. Proactively offering service in a client's official language of choice; allowing clients to express themselves in the language in which they feel most comfortable; and creating conditions for better communication will all lead to inclusive service. It is also in line with Ontario's French Language Services Act, which guarantees active delivery of French language services, especially in designated areas of the province.

Cultural sensitivity and awareness are needed at agencies that serve homeless individuals. Across Ontario there are different levels of capacity, resources, and knowledge for promoting these competencies. Supports and resources are needed to build cultural sensitivity and awareness among service providers provincially. In addition to promoting equitable outcomes at the service level, equity must be pursued within and across the broader housing and homeless-serving system.



***There needs to be zero tolerance for homophobia and transphobia. This needs to be explicit, and it has to come from the top."***

- Helen Kennedy,  
Egale Canada Human  
Rights Trust

## Madonna's Story

At 21, Madonna had a good life. She was married with two children and had a dream home and a job as a law clerk. All this changed when her husband, her childhood sweetheart, became abusive.

"That was the end of that. I came out not the same woman and I'm not the same today. I came out full of fear." Madonna had a breakdown. She began to go to parties and to use drugs. "The feeling I got was I could take on anything and I felt strong. All my fears were gone...and that was my downfall."

Madonna lost everything – her home, her children, her friends. She ended up on the streets, often sleeping on a park bench. Her daily routine was driven by her addiction.

"I was turned away from emergency rooms because I didn't have ID. It's a stigma that goes with homelessness, with being a drug addict, and a prostitute."

For 23 years Madonna lived on the streets. She had nowhere else to go, as years of involvement with violence and theft put strains on her family relationships.

"In that context, you lose sight of housing, governments, and agencies. It is a void. I wouldn't go to a shelter because I was afraid I would lose my bench or that I would be hurt – but I was sleeping outside! It didn't make sense."

Finally a friend who had gotten off of the streets helped Madonna to get treatment for her addiction. After she got out, however, Madonna had nowhere to go. With assistance from several agencies she was able to access housing. With a place to live, she went to school, graduated from a business program with honours and began to work.

Madonna has since become ill and has lost her ability to work. She has undergone 15 surgeries. While she still lives in a nice home, she can no longer use the stairs and needs to transfer to an accessible unit. She has been told that she is ineligible for a different unit unless she is homeless or suffering abuse.

"I'm not willing to give up all I've worked for just to get into a different type of housing. It's really hard for me. People are wonderful at the beginning but they are not there now. They have their own lives to lead, and I'm stuck needing an apartment I can't get into."

Madonna emphasized the importance of doing outreach, to make contact with people on the streets and connect them with transitional housing. She is grateful for the opportunity to be involved with Voices from the Streets, and to share her story with others.



## 11. Collaboration is key

Ending homelessness in Ontario will be a collaborative effort. Every day across the province, a vast array of local service providers, private and non-profit organizations, charities, community health centres, legal clinics, and a range of other agencies, provide assistance and support to people facing homelessness. Ending homelessness will depend on collaboration and partnership among service providers, and between governments and service providers.

Collaboration is important across all orders of government. Efforts will work best if federal, provincial and municipal initiatives are all aligned. Strong leadership is required at the provincial level to co-ordinate across ministries within government, adopting a holistic approach. Collaboration across ministries with responsibilities for housing, health, community and social services, justice, and children and youth will be required to prevent and end homelessness.

Collaboration is also key within and across municipalities.

In a given local community, integrated planning and research across different departments will promote a better response. The Panel learned that it is beneficial to build partnerships to share data and best practices across municipalities. Another good practice may be for multiple municipalities to work together and to jointly offer homelessness services. There is a role for provincial leadership in fostering collective action across municipalities.

## 12. Communities need capacity

Across Ontario, communities have different levels of capacity, resources, and staffing. To build a strong base of data and evidence related to homelessness in Ontario, the Province will need to take a leadership role in helping to build local capacity. Provincial support should be provided, as necessary, for assisting in the development of data collection systems, for implementing local approaches for counting the homeless, for sharing data provincially, for curating and making sense of research findings, and for program evaluation.

Capacity is also about resources. In addition to supporting data collection and sharing, local communities need funding capacity to build the infrastructure that is required to assist people experiencing homelessness. Additional funding will be required to build and operate new social and affordable housing, to support transformation of the shelter system, and to provide the supports that people require in order to achieve housing stability.



*Sweetgrass is often braided into three strands, and we can think of the Province, municipalities, and the federal government as strands in this way.*

*It represents our relationship and ability to collaborate – if we all work together, we can do good things.”*

- Cindy Sue Montana McCormack,  
Social Planning and  
Research Council of  
Hamilton

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key recommendations of the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness represent the Panel's best advice to government on its mandate items, based on the Panel's discussions and what was heard from the presenters.

### Defining Homelessness in Ontario

The Panel recommends that:

1. The Province adopt a comprehensive, technical definition of homelessness for Ontario, adapted from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.
2. The Province adopt the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy definition for "chronic homelessness."

The Panel views homelessness as the lack of a home – the lack of a safe and secure place to call your own.

A consistent theme that emerged in the Panel's discussions was the difference between being housed and having a home. In a home, one is not subject to violence. In a home, one has freedom to come and go, to be safe, to host friends and family, to pursue hobbies and interests, and to find refuge. The Panel wanted these values to be reflected in the Province's understanding of homelessness in Ontario.

At one meeting, presenter Marc Maracle, Executive Director of Ottawa's Gignul Housing, shared a short, powerful understanding of home that resonated with the Panel members. This inspirational statement speaks to the value of home and the role of home in linking people to opportunity, supportive community, and social inclusion.

**HOME** is a **safe** and **secure** place to call your own, where freedom, comforts, and needs are met.

The Panel envisions an Ontario where all people have access to a home. This vision is supported by a detailed, technical definition of homelessness that will support the work of measurement and setting targets.

**Homelessness describes the situation of a person or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability of acquiring it.**

Homelessness describes a range of housing circumstances, with people being without shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized here as a typology that includes:

### Types of Homelessness (See Appendix D for more detail)

1. **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation.
2. **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying overnight in shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by violence.
3. **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure.
4. **At-risk-of-Homelessness**, refers to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious and does not meet public health or safety standards. It should be noted that for many homelessness is not a static state, but a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and often.

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 and a sense of home. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the person/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural, or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to become homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful, and distressing. The solution to ending homelessness is to ensure housing stability, and housing that is appropriate (i.e. affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible, and suitable in size), and includes required services as needed, in addition to income and supports.

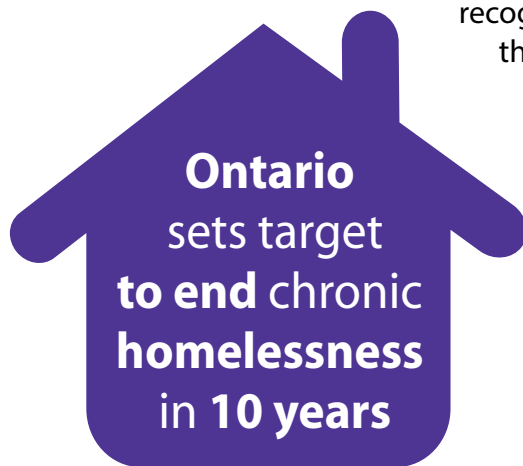
Numerous populations, such as youth, women, families, people with mental health and/or addictions issues, people impacted by violence, seniors, veterans, immigrants, refugees, ethno-racial and racialized people, and members of LGBTTTQ communities experience homelessness due to a unique constellation of circumstances and as such

the appropriateness of community responses has to take into account such diversity. The overrepresentation of Aboriginal Peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples) amongst Canadian homelessness populations necessitates the inclusion of their historical, experiential, and cultural perspectives, as well as the experience with colonization and racism, in their consideration of homelessness.

**Chronic homelessness** refers to people, often with disabling conditions (e.g. chronic physical or mental illness, substance abuse problems), who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year (i.e. have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation).

For this more detailed portion of Ontario's definition, the Panel has proposed an adapted version of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness's (COH) definition.<sup>28</sup> The Panel chose to work with the COH definition to support a shared language of homelessness across the country, and to support co-ordinated policy responses and common methods of counting.

The Panel also chose to make some changes and additions, recognizing it as a living text and not the final word on the topic. The amended version reflects what was heard from presenters, and incorporates these diverse and varied perspectives.



This definition outlines four types of homelessness, ranging from the experience of being literally unsheltered to being at risk of homelessness (see [Appendix D](#)).

Finally, the Panel has included chronic homelessness in Ontario's definition, to guide policy making and counting.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The Canadian Observatory definition is available on-line at: [homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition](http://homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition)

<sup>29</sup> Our definition for Chronic Homelessness is that used by the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

## Prioritizing and Setting Targets to End Homelessness in Ontario

The Panel recommends that:

3. The Province set four priorities to guide action, to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness, focusing on:
  - Chronic homelessness
  - Youth homelessness
  - Aboriginal homelessness
  - Homelessness following transition from provincially-funded institutions and service systems
4. Local municipalities adopt additional priorities as appropriate.
5. The Province set an aggressive target to end chronic homelessness within 10 years.
6. The Province invests in further study, capacity building, and program implementation to inform the adoption of additional targets for ending homelessness in Ontario.

One aspect of the Panel's mandate was to provide advice on setting priorities to guide a provincial action plan to end homelessness. While setting priorities is a challenge, a plan for action must start somewhere.

**The Panel recommends the Province set four priorities to guide action, to prevent, reduce and end homelessness.**

### Prioritizing Provincial Action

**Chronic Homelessness:** Chronically homeless people experience tremendous hardship, and too many have died on our streets. Helping the most vulnerable to find homes and supports is the right thing to do.

**Youth Homelessness:** All young people ought to be safe, healthy, and ready to take up opportunities – not vulnerable to violence, insecurity, and hopelessness on the streets.

**Aboriginal Homelessness:** The Panel values the pursuit of meaningful reconciliation with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Ensuring that all Aboriginal Peoples have a safe and affordable home will begin to address socio-economic inequality – an important step towards reconciliation.

**Homelessness following transitions from provincially-funded institutions and service systems:** Provincially-funded institutions should support access to services as individuals transition back into the community.

The Panel recognizes that these priorities will evolve as circumstances change across the province and as progress is made.

Many of the key themes identified in the Panel's meetings tended to intersect around these four priorities. The Panel also identified many intersections across the diversity of homeless groups. Within the four provincial priority groups, there are also women, seniors, veterans, people with physical disabilities, LGBTTTQ communities, French speakers, immigrants, refugees, and ethno-racial and racialized people.

These four provincial priorities were selected in an effort to promote comprehensive action on homelessness, addressing all four types of homelessness outlined in the comprehensive definition recommended by the Panel. Taken together, these priorities provide a strong start towards ending homelessness in Ontario.

Those who are chronically homeless often fit within the **(1) unsheltered** and **(2) emergency sheltered** types of homelessness. Preventing homelessness among people released from provincially-funded institutions and systems works primarily to assist those who are **(3) provisionally accommodated** in jails, hospitals, or the child welfare system without a permanent home. Youth and Aboriginal Peoples who are homeless may fall anywhere along this typology. However, the Panel understands that both youth and Aboriginal Peoples are more likely to experience hidden homelessness (type 3 in our definition), and are well represented among those who are **(4) at-risk of homelessness**.

Provincial Priority	Types of Homelessness in Ontario's Comprehensive Definition			
	(1) Unsheltered	(2) Emergency Sheltered	(3) Provisionally Accommodated	(4) At-Risk of Homelessness
Chronic Homelessness	•	•		
Youth Homelessness	•	•	•	•
Aboriginal Homelessness	•	•	•	•
Transition from Provincially-Funded Institutions and Service Systems			•	

Table 1: Intersections between provincial priorities and types of homelessness in Ontario's definition

There is a need for both preventative (upstream) efforts to assist people before they become homeless, as well as urgent (downstream) efforts to help people currently homeless and in distress. These priorities tackle both, emphasizing the need for prevention for youth and Aboriginal Peoples at risk of becoming homeless and for the provisionally accommodated in provincial institutions and service systems. Downstream interventions are also emphasized for street-involved youth and Aboriginal Peoples, and for chronically homeless people suffering the long-term impacts of life on the streets.

There is a need to address both hidden and visible homelessness. With the recommended priorities, the Panel promotes assistance for chronically homeless people, who are often visibly without shelter, and also people experiencing hidden homelessness, including those provisionally accommodated in provincial institutions and systems, as well as Aboriginal Peoples and youth.

The Panel also acknowledged that mental health, addictions, and trauma are prominent issues among youth, Aboriginal, and chronic homeless populations and must be addressed through comprehensive preventative measures in order to successfully end homelessness in the long-term. A key opportunity for addressing these issues is at transition points in the system – from jails, the child welfare system, hospitals, domestic violence shelters, and so on.

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**The Panel recommends that local municipalities adopt additional, local priorities, as appropriate.**

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Recognizing that local conditions vary widely, the Panel recommends that municipalities adopt additional local priorities as appropriate. For example, if homelessness facing immigrant populations is a key local issue, it can be identified as a priority in a local plan to prevent, reduce and end homelessness.

The Panel recognizes that by setting priorities there will be additional pressure on local systems to continue to serve everyone effectively, and that to serve these priority areas municipalities may need additional resources.

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**The Panel recommends that the Province set a bold target to end chronic homelessness within 10 years.**

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The Panel commends the Province's bold goal to end homelessness, and recommends that the Province set an aggressive target to end chronic homelessness within 10 years.<sup>30</sup>

With this recommendation, it is recognized that people experiencing chronic homelessness are urgently in need of access to permanent housing and supports. In addition, the Panel recognizes that a disproportionate amount of resources are dedicated to serving chronically homeless individuals, and that significant cost savings can be achieved by targeting this group right away. These savings will be felt by service providers and government, not only in housing and homeless-serving fields, but also in areas related to health, criminal justice and community services.

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<sup>30</sup> For example, the Province may consider establishing a target of reducing the incidence of homelessness by 95%.

On a practical level, the Panel is also aware of data collection activities related to chronic homelessness that are underway in parts of the province that may be available, and suggests that the provincial government work through 2016 to confirm high quality baseline data that can be used to track progress towards achieving this target.

**The Panel recommends that the Province invest in further study, capacity building, and program implementation to inform the adoption of additional targets for ending homelessness in Ontario.**

Setting a target to end chronic homelessness is a critical initial step. Further study should be conducted to inform a detailed schedule for how this can be achieved. This schedule should recognize the time required to build capacity and the physical infrastructure required to address homelessness on the ground. With this schedule, the Province should avoid imposing blanket expectations on all communities, which might penalize those that have already made strides in reducing homelessness locally.

As more information becomes available, the Province should set clear targets for the remaining three provincial priority areas, and make an equally bold commitment to end youth and Aboriginal homelessness, and homelessness that may follow transition from provincially-funded institutions and service systems. As progress is made towards achieving these targets, the Province should continuously monitor and adapt its plans, working towards the ultimate goal of ending homelessness – for all people in all parts of Ontario – for good.

“

*People who are chronically homeless are overrepresented in their use of resources, and the issues they face are severe. Prioritizing their struggles shows that the Province is serious – taking on difficult challenges right away.”*

- Michael Creek,  
Panel Member





## Measuring Homelessness and Collecting Data to Track Progress

The Panel recommends that:

7. Different approaches be used to collect data and develop indicators locally and provincially, in light of the need for both local flexibility and provincial data to track progress on ending homelessness. The Province should work toward improved standardization of data collection over time.
8. Provincial indicators for tracking progress on homelessness build on data collection already underway or planned across Ontario.
9. The Province monitor progress using a variety of provincial indicators. Chronic homelessness should be tracked as Ontario's key indicator, and a dashboard of indicators should be developed to measure progress on preventing and ending homelessness.
10. The Province develop a new approach to measuring homelessness related to the transition from provincially-funded institutions and service systems.
11. Ontario's 47 municipal Service Managers carry out local enumeration using one or more approaches from a standardized menu of options. The Province should conduct further analysis before finalizing this menu of options, and promote standardization across each approach.
12. Service Managers develop local indicators to track (1) overall local homelessness numbers and (2) local progress on the provincial priorities to reduce youth, Aboriginal, and chronic homelessness. These indicators should be reported in annual Local Housing and Homelessness Plan reports.
13. Local communities be required to gather a minimum set of standardized data and common socio-demographic data. A detailed list of minimum data should be developed by the Province after further study.
14. Municipalities be required to carry out local equity impact assessments to work toward equitable outcomes of housing and homelessness plans and policies.

Initiatives to enumerate the number of people experiencing homelessness provide valuable data to inform smart policy making and program design. By collecting data on key measures (also called indicators) of homelessness year after year, the government can evaluate whether homelessness is declining or on the rise. Data on homelessness is also valuable for building an understanding of who is experiencing homelessness and where problems are acute, and for evaluating which interventions work best. This allows governments to invest wisely in areas that require assistance, and in programs that are most effective.

There are many approaches to enumerating the homeless population that have been used in Ontario, across Canada, and internationally.

**Direct** approaches to measurement directly enumerate people who are homeless. This can be done using population-level surveys (like national censuses) that include questions about homelessness. Data from shelters and agencies can also be used to estimate how many people are homeless.

In many places, street counting exercises seek to enumerate people “living rough” out-of-doors and in non-shelter environments. **Point-in-Time (PiT)** counts, for example, involve a one-day canvassing effort in which teams of volunteers comb the streets to find, count, and administer short surveys to homeless people.

**Registry Weeks** use a similar approach to PiT counts, in which volunteers find and survey homeless people over a multi-day period, collecting personal information that is used to prioritize people for housing and supports.

A limitation of common measurement approaches is that they do not enumerate the hidden homeless – a group that accounts for the bulk of the homeless population. These methods undercount women, Aboriginal Peoples, immigrants, racialized people, youth, and people from LGBTIQ communities. This reality underscores the need for a range of approaches to enumeration in order to reflect the diverse realities of Ontarians who are homeless.

In some places, extra effort has been undertaken to enumerate the hard-to-find populations, and to understand their particular needs. For example, to better understand Aboriginal Peoples’ experiences with homelessness, the City of Hamilton designed a special data collection approach, while the Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board partnered with local Aboriginal friendship centres to gather information.

Another way to overcome the limitations of common methods is to use indirect measures. Indirect measures capture data on causal forces that lead to homelessness, and are often used to estimate how many people are at risk of homelessness or experiencing hidden homelessness. For example, measures for poverty, housing need, immigration and settlement trends, and incidence of domestic violence can serve as indicators of the upstream issues that cause homelessness. Tracking progress on these indicators is one way of gauging the success of efforts to prevent homelessness.

In February 2015, **the Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton** led an urban homelessness survey, organized for and with Aboriginal Peoples and communities. Organizers used a “magnet event” with cultural activities (e.g., drumming, dancing, singing) and Aboriginal food to draw in participants. Volunteers were motivated to help with survey gathering about their own community. Many had experience with homelessness and were especially helpful in outreach.

**The Panel recommends that different approaches be used to collect data and develop indicators locally and provincially, in light of the need for both local flexibility and provincial data to track progress on ending homelessness.**

The Panel worked hard to reconcile the need for local flexibility with the desire to roll out a standardized, provincewide approach to enumeration. On the one hand, the Panel recognized that a standardized approach to enumeration would provide high-quality, replicable data. Such data would be well suited for scientific analysis, and provide clear and comparable numbers for tracking progress. On the other hand, the Panel heard loud and clear that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work for all communities across Ontario. Given the varying levels of capacity and resources across Ontario, it would also be costly and less effective to support the adoption of standardized methods provincewide.

Diverse approaches are also needed as a result of Ontario's housing landscape. Housing and homelessness services are locally administered by 47 Service Managers, and local needs and priorities vary based on geography, community size, climate, and the local demographics. Promoting local flexibility to respond to local conditions is a central tenet of provincial housing policy.

At this point in time, the Panel sees limited value in imposing a standardized approach to enumeration across Ontario. Instead, the Panel recommends that Service Managers adopt locally-appropriate methods for enumerating homelessness, from a menu of recommended enumeration approaches.

This is a flexible option that also promotes a level of standardization by requiring that in all places where the same method is used, it must be implemented in the same, standardized way. A limitation of this approach is that the Province cannot credibly tally up local numbers that are derived from different methods in order to produce a single provincewide indicator. However, data can be aggregated and compared within and among communities using the same enumeration approach.

In the future, as local capacity to enumerate homelessness improves, the Panel encourages the Province to pursue greater standardization of data collection on homelessness provincewide.



*Point-in-Time counts are not effective in low-density rural and Northern areas."*

- Mike Nadeau,  
Panel Member

**The Panel recommends that provincial indicators for tracking progress on homelessness build on data collection already underway or planned across Ontario.**

Many communities and service providers across the province already collect data, often using more than one approach. There is room for provincial leadership to synthesize this data and to identify a range of indicators that can be monitored to gauge progress on ending homelessness in Ontario.

**A Strong Base to Build On**

Many communities in Ontario have agreed to take part in **Point-in-Time counts** in 2016, as part of the federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The counts will be repeated every two years, providing comparable data that can be tracked biennially.

**Registry Weeks** are planned for six communities across the province, with more anticipated.

**The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)** is a common data collection system used in communities, representing 81 per cent of Ontario's population.

In addition, under the provincial government's **Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)**, all Ontario Service Managers provide annual updates on a set of indicators for tracking homelessness.



*There is already so much energy invested in collecting data and measuring homelessness— let's capitalize on that."*

- Aseefa Sarang,  
Panel Member



**The Panel recommends that the Province monitor progress using a variety of provincial indicators. Chronic homelessness should be tracked as Ontario's key indicator, and a dashboard of indicators should be developed to measure progress on preventing and ending homelessness.**

The Province should monitor progress using a variety of provincial indicators:

**1 Key Indicator:** While no single indicator will accurately reflect the state of homelessness in Ontario, there is value in choosing a “headline” indicator that is consistently measured and reported on to highlight progress. The Panel recommends tracking chronic homelessness as Ontario's key indicator.

This will draw on data that will be collected biennially across several Ontario communities (beginning in early 2016) as part of the federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS).

Developing a provincial indicator from a sample of cities that are using the same enumeration approach follows the Seven Cities model used in Alberta.

**2 Dashboard of Indicators:** Because homelessness is complex, one indicator simply cannot reflect the whole picture. Progress should be monitored provincially on an additional dashboard of indicators to gauge success on prevention and on ending homelessness for all groups and across all types of homelessness. The dashboard may include, for example, measures for housing affordability, housing need, poverty, evictions, vacancy rates, precarious employment, mental health and addictions issues, child welfare activity, and violence against women.

The Panel recommends that the Province populate this dashboard based on further study. Many potential measures are presently available and ready to use.

**3 Provincial Priority Indicators:** Progress should also be tracked on the three additional provincial priorities to guide action.

There are challenges that come with trying to measure both youth and Aboriginal homelessness, as many people in these groups experience hidden homelessness. For these priorities, the Province may choose to spotlight communities that have been innovative in their efforts to track and reduce homelessness among youth and Aboriginal Peoples.

Alternatively, the Province may choose to use data derived from the sample of Ontario communities using HPS Point-in-Time counts, as has been recommended for tracking the chronic homelessness provincial priority. With this approach, data on youth and Aboriginal status is collected.

For measuring the provincial priority of homelessness from transition from provincially-funded institutions and service systems, a new enumeration approach is recommended.

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**The Panel recommends that the Province develop a new approach for measuring homelessness following transition from provincially-funded institutions and service systems, and use this as an indicator to track progress.**

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Developing this approach to measurement will require collaboration across government. The approach should systematically count how many people are transitioning from Ontario's systems – including child welfare, justice and health care – and may be at risk of becoming homeless.

Once action is taken to develop better transition points, it will create data that will demonstrate the success of preventative efforts as people entering these systems are prevented from becoming homeless. It will also track success in breaking the cycle, by preventing homeless people from being discharged back into homelessness after care or incarceration.

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**The Panel recommends that local enumeration be carried out by all of Ontario's 47 Service Managers, using one or more approach from a standardized menu of recommended options.**

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As recommended, all Service Managers should be required to enumerate homelessness, applying one or more approach from the standardized menu of options, including (see [Appendix E](#) for details):

- Point-in Time counts using the Federal Homelessness Partnering methodology
- Registry Weeks
- Period-Prevalence Counts
- Intake data from shelters and homeless-serving agencies
- Estimating with proxy measures
- Methods for estimating hidden homelessness

The Province should conduct further analysis before finalizing this menu of options, and include details on how to implement each approach to promote standardization across the communities. In particular, the Panel encourages the Province to do further study on how to carry out prevalence counts, and best practices for using proxy measures, to inform a guide for standardized updates by municipalities.

The Panel also recommends that the Province explore the development of standardized approaches for counting people experiencing hidden homelessness, supporting efforts

by researchers, organizations, and local communities to come up with innovative ways to enumerate and better understand hidden homelessness.

The Panel recognizes that approaches to enumerating and addressing homelessness are not static, and that today's best practices will evolve and improve over time. As such, local innovation is encouraged, and the recommended enumeration methods should be seen as a starting point for a local approach.

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**The Panel recommends that Service Managers develop local indicators to track (1) overall local homelessness numbers and (2) local progress on the provincial priorities to reduce youth, Aboriginal and chronic homelessness.**

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The Panel recognizes that Local Housing and Homelessness Plans were first required by provincial legislation as of January 1, 2014, and require annual progress reports. Five-year updates to these plans are to be developed by January 1, 2019, and the Panel recommends that local indicators be developed by the time of those updates.

Local indicators for tracking overall homelessness and progress on provincial priorities can be achieved using a report card format. While these indicators will be derived from different enumeration methods, key trends can still be tracked provincially, demonstrating whether local homelessness is declining, on the rise, or if no change has been registered.

A key value of this local approach to enumeration is that it will allow the Province to track progress at a granular level. In communities where significant progress is evident (overall, or for a particular priority group), the Province can take a leadership role in identifying best practices and promote similar approaches in communities with similar conditions.

The Province may develop a single indicator to track progress across all communities, outlining the percentage of communities that have achieved reductions in homelessness (or reductions in one or more provincial priority areas).

Communities have varying levels of capacity, staff and resources. As such, the Panel recommends that the Province take a leadership role in providing support and information to facilitate the adoption of best practices; to encourage collaboration and capacity building; and to support the collection of comparable data where feasible and appropriate.

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**The Panel recommends that communities be required to gather a minimum set of common socio-demographic and other data.**

The Panel identified a need for co-ordination across Ontario's various service providers, agencies, and local governments to collect a standardized set of minimum data – not only during intake procedures, but as a part of homelessness enumeration. At present, there is a lack of consistency in collecting even basic socio-demographic data. This makes it difficult to understand the extent to which certain sub-populations experience homelessness, and to target supports to meet their particular needs. Language data, for example, are not routinely collected, making it challenging to compare the unique experiences of Francophone Ontarians with the Anglophone population.

The Province should require that all communities gather a minimum set of common socio-demographic and other data, such as length of time spent homeless. This should be collected consistently provincewide, regardless of the enumeration approach selected. It should include socio-demographic data such as, but not limited to, language spoken, gender, age, and Aboriginal status. A detailed list of minimum data should be developed by the Province after further study.

The Province may draw on the experience of the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network which has developed a set of eight standardized questions for hospitals and Community Health Centres. These questions gather information on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, income, and other demographic characteristics.<sup>31</sup>

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**The Panel recommends that municipalities be required to carry out local equity impact assessments to work towards equitable outcomes of housing and homelessness plans and policies.**

Policies often have unintended consequences, and may overlook certain groups for assistance, or incorporate barriers to access that systematically exclude certain people and not others. The collection of a minimum standardized set of socio-demographic data will enable all communities to evaluate the equity impacts of local housing and homelessness programming. Once communities know who is being served (or excluded) from homelessness and housing-related assistance, it will be possible to make policy adjustments and promote more equitable outcomes.

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<sup>31</sup> [mountsinai.on.ca/about\\_us/human-rights/measuring-health-equity](https://mountsinai.on.ca/about_us/human-rights/measuring-health-equity)



## Expanding the Evidence Base and Building Capacity to Address Homelessness

The Panel recommends that:

15. The Province develop a knowledge mobilization framework for sharing research and best practices.
16. The Centre of Excellence for Evidence-Based Decision Making, announced as part of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy and 2015 Ontario Budget, allocate resources to focus on homelessness, and work with sector organizations and key partners to assist in sharing and developing evidence, research and best practices.
17. The Province share local success stories, and convene a provincial homelessness summit for local dialogue and information sharing.
18. The Province promote data integration and sharing of homelessness-related data across Ontario, and explore the potential for common intake systems for homeless-serving agencies.
19. The Province promote policy cohesion by inviting partners to review programs and policies, and commit to making continuous improvements to ensure people-friendly policies.
20. The Province support local capacity to promote cultural sensitivity and awareness, including providing education, training and support to create safe and welcoming spaces for all Ontarians.
21. The Province support local municipalities with tools, resources and funding to support local capacity to carry out equity impact assessments.
22. The Province provide increased funding to support capacity building and local system transformation, and commit to long-term, stable funding for affordable housing and homelessness related programs, as opposed to annualized funding.
23. The Province work with all key partners and continue to engage with the federal government to develop a national housing strategy; to commit to long-term funding to create permanent, affordable housing; and to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness in Ontario and nation-wide.

To prevent, reduce, and end homelessness in Ontario, program design and service delivery must be informed by up-to-date evidence, best practices, and research findings. Across the province, however, municipalities and service providers vary greatly in their capacity to collect data, share evidence, and translate research findings into local practice.

Across Ontario, many innovative practices are underway when it comes to enumerating local homeless populations and implementing programs to help them. In addition, there are data

being collected by governments, agencies and researchers in Canada and internationally on what works to address homelessness. The challenge facing the sector as a whole is how to share, access, and make sense of this data to guide program design and implementation; and how to collaborate across all orders of government, and across the sector, for successful outcomes.

**The Panel recommends that the Province develop a knowledge mobilization framework for sharing research and best practices.**

The framework should consider the information needs of frontline service providers, agencies, and municipalities, and promote practical, accessible, and intuitive channels for sharing information. It should consider how and where additional research needs to be generated – for example, by promoting longitudinal studies with Aboriginal partners about homelessness in Aboriginal communities. It should also consider how to build capacity within the provincial government to assess program performance, and to develop outcomes-focused and evidence-informed policies and programs.

There are many best practices for knowledge mobilization that might be developed, supported, or used as inspiration in a provincial framework.

**The Homeless Hub**, a common research repository, operated by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, is a free, online resource that provides a curated selection of homelessness-related research, data, evidence, and tools for translating research into practice.

**Toolkits** provide detailed resources and instructions for service providers on how to implement best practices. Examples of toolkits for preventing and addressing youth homelessness include the Youth Transitional Housing Toolkit, created by Toronto's Covenant House, and the Youth Employment Toolkit for employers and agencies, created by Raising the Roof.



*There is so much evidence and so much research – how do you make sense of it at the municipal level? How do municipalities implement these ideas given the parameters we are working within?"*

- Joe-Anne Priel,  
Panel Member

It is also possible to go beyond simply sharing information, and develop ways to deliver **education and training**. For example, learning modules can be developed, or teams can be trained and dispatched across communities to visit service providers to inform them about best practice programs (e.g., Housing First). Evidence-based education practices on how to successfully implement programs can promote better outcomes.

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**The Panel recommends that the Province’s Centre of Excellence for Evidence-Based Decision Making allocate resources to focus on homelessness, and work with sector organizations and key partners to assist in sharing and developing evidence, research and best practices.**

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The members of the Panel noted that as part of the Province’s 2014-2019 Poverty Reduction Strategy and the 2015 Ontario Budget, there is a commitment to establish a Centre of Excellence for Evidence-Based Decision Making to support evidence-informed decision making and information sharing within government. There may be value in aligning the Centre’s work with homelessness-related knowledge mobilization.

The Panel recommends that the centre allocate resources to focus on homelessness, and work with sector organizations and key partners to assist in sharing and developing evidence, research, and best practices.

The centre should promote excellence in design, development, implementation and evaluation of service models, and work across government to examine how policies, funding mechanisms and accountability help or hinder the goal of ending homelessness.

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**The Panel recommends that the Province share local success stories, and convene a provincial homelessness summit for local dialogue and information sharing.**

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There are many local resources and practices that could be tapped into to build a base of evidence related to homelessness in Ontario. Over the course of the Panel’s discussions, several successful programs were referenced. Below are just a few examples of successful programs in Ontario. The Panel sees value in drawing on data from local enumeration practices, assessing what works well in various local contexts, and promoting these approaches.

**Homeward Bound** is a comprehensive employment program for single mothers in unstable housing conditions that is operated by Toronto’s WoodGreen Community Services. In creating the program, WoodGreen worked with women, people with lived experience, and First Nations organizations to inform their program design.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For more details on Homeward Bound, see [woodgreen.org/ServiceDetail.aspx?id=195](http://woodgreen.org/ServiceDetail.aspx?id=195)

**Thunder Bay's SOS Street Outreach Services Program** provides support to intoxicated or homeless individuals in the winter, offering 12-hour daily support, seven days per week. The pilot successfully reduced the need for incarceration, and alleviated pressure on withdrawal management services and the hospital emergency room. Funding from the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative was provided to this program.<sup>33</sup>

**Waterloo Region's Step Home Programs** were also raised as a promising practice. These people-centered programs provide options and support to end persistent homelessness in the Region of Waterloo.<sup>34</sup>

**The Oaks Residence in Ottawa** provides supportive housing for chronically homeless men and women living with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Residents are assisted through intensive case management support and wrap-around services, delivered in partnership by the Shepherds of Good Hope, Inner City Health and Canadian Mental Health Association staff.

**Poverty, Homelessness and Migration (PHM)**, Laurentian University. Funded as a five-year Community-University Research Alliance, PHM is a bilingual, tri-cultural and multi-disciplinary project within the Centre for Research in Social Justice and Policy. It has incorporated best practices in Aboriginal, Francophone and Anglophone community action research. It examines factors related to homelessness in Northern Ontario. Researchers are working with community partners in planning, interpreting and sharing results. The team has used an enumeration approach, period-prevalence counts, that suits the unique needs of people in northern towns and cities. Since the study was launched, counts have taken place in Sudbury, Timmins, North Bay, Hearst, Moosonee and Cochrane.

The Panel recommends provincial support for local dialogue and information sharing in the form of a **Provincial Homelessness Summit**. At this summit, municipalities, service providers, and people with lived experience can meet to share knowledge and discuss emerging research, service delivery challenges, and effective strategies. This should be supplemented by local efforts to promote ongoing dialogue and information sharing within communities and across partner communities (for example, establishing local communities of practice).

**The Panel recommends that the Province promote data integration and sharing of homelessness-related data across Ontario, and explore the potential for common intake systems for homeless-serving agencies.**

The Panel heard that a variety of client and program data relevant to the homelessness population is available across the province. There is work underway to explore the integration of some of the existing data collection systems – for example, integrating housing and health data. Recognizing that there are often legislative barriers to data integration around privacy

<sup>33</sup> For more details see [shelterhouse.on.ca/article/sos-program-480.asp](https://shelterhouse.on.ca/article/sos-program-480.asp)

<sup>34</sup> See [communityservices.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/communityprogramssupports/stephome.asp](https://communityservices.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/communityprogramssupports/stephome.asp)

considerations, this is an area of work that needs to be further explored at the provincial level. Doing this could aid in better assessment of client needs, tracking of client pathways and, ultimately, service provision.

In line with Ontario's open government initiative, the Panel also recommends that homelessness-related data in Ontario be shared as widely as possible. Data shared with the Province by municipalities should also be shared with the broader public.

The Panel members identified a need for the use of common intake systems by organizations and agencies across the housing and homeless-serving system. A co-ordinated system for collecting data would allow for comparisons, and facilitate monitoring and evaluation.

An inspiring example is Alberta's **Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS)**, a standardized information collection platform currently used for intake by 70 service providers, including shelters, food banks, and other agencies. HMIS prevents people from having to tell their story multiple times to each service provider. It provides data for enumerating homelessness or gauging demand for supportive services. A similar system in Ontario would streamline access to services for the most vulnerable.

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**The Panel recommends that the Province promote policy cohesion by inviting partners to review programs and policies, and commit to making continuous improvements to ensure people-friendly policies.**

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The Panel also recognized that policies within and across government can sometimes work at cross-purposes. Homelessness can result as an unintended consequence at the intersection of incompatible policies. The Panel recommends that the Province create a space for dialogue around how to fix the (so-called) "stupid rules" that can needlessly lead to suffering and hardship, and commit to making continuous improvements to ensure people-friendly policies. The Province should invite a broad range of partners to review programs and policies, identify problems, and provide input on how to fix the gaps and build policy cohesion.

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**The Panel recommends that the Province support local capacity to promote cultural sensitivity and awareness, including providing education, training and support to create safe and welcoming spaces for all Ontarians.**

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A key theme that emerged during the Panel's meetings was the need for cultural sensitivity and competency in local homeless-serving organizations. A lack of sensitivity and awareness deters service use among immigrants, refugees, ethno-racial and racialized people, Aboriginal Peoples and communities, people with mental health and addictions issues, people from LGBTQ communities, and Francophone communities. Education and support to create safe and welcoming spaces for all Ontarians is a necessity.

**The Panel recommends that the Province support local municipalities with tools, resources and funding to support local capacity to carry out equity impact assessments.**

The Panel has recommended that the Province require local municipalities to assess the equity impacts of their policies and programs to end homelessness. In some communities, additional resources and investment will be required to build capacity to carry out equity impact assessments. The Panel recommends that the Province support local municipalities with tools, resources and funding.

**The Panel recommends that the Province provide increased funding to support capacity building and local system transformation, and commit to long-term, stable funding for affordable housing and homelessness related programs, as opposed to annualized funding.**

Throughout the Panel's deliberations, it was made clear that building capacity requires resources. Whether it is capacity to collect data; carry out research; train staff; develop programs or evaluate programs; carry out equity impact assessments; transform local systems; build new housing; enhance cultural sensitivity and awareness; or offer new supports – all of these things require funding. New funding for change is necessary to produce long-term positive outcomes.

The Panel recommends that the Province invest in building capacity to end homelessness at both provincial and local levels. One successful example of building capacity for local program evaluation has recently been initiated through the Province's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Local Poverty Reduction Fund provides funding to community organizations to support the evaluation of local poverty reduction initiatives. This will help to build an evidence base for social policy and programs, including homelessness, in Ontario.

The Panel also recommends that the Province increase funding for housing and homelessness-related programs and services. This should include funding for permanent housing for people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness, and a commitment to long-term and stable funding for housing and homelessness-related programs, as opposed to annualized funding.



*We say to researchers – what are you going to do with us, not to us? Cultural competency is needed."*

- Veronica Nicholson,  
Timmins Native Friendship  
Centre

**The Panel recommends that the Province work with all key partners and continue to engage with the federal government to develop a national housing strategy; to commit to long-term funding to create permanent affordable housing; and to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness in Ontario and nation-wide.**

The Province should explore developing and expanding programs for permanent affordable housing, transitional housing, mental health and addictions support, wrap-around supports, triaging programs, preventing transition into homelessness from provincially-funded institutions and service systems, and other best practice interventions for preventing, reducing and ending homelessness.

Further data and study are needed before moving forward with a full plan to end homelessness. While work to enumerate homeless populations is undertaken, the Panel recommends immediate action – a down payment – to demonstrate the commitment to ending homelessness. The down payment may, for example, provide new support for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, which allows communities the flexibility to target spending to specific local needs. Another area for immediate action could relate to taking steps to address institutional transition points that may lead to homelessness. Committing to immediate action acknowledges that along with further study and analysis to inform a longer term plan, Ontario’s homelessness problems are acute and require immediate attention.



*We know there are people out there that we could be helping now.”*

- Michael Creek,  
Panel Member



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## APPENDIX A: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EXPERT ADVISORY PANEL ON HOMELESSNESS

### Background

Ontario's 2014-2019 Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), *Realizing Our Potential*, commits the Province to a long-term goal to end homelessness. The strategy notes that to solve a problem, you must be able to measure it. Although Ontario has made significant progress in transforming its approach to homelessness, there are no common, systematic approaches to measuring the number of homeless people in Ontario, and therefore no way to measure the success of overall efforts.

To address this issue, the PRS commits the government to seek expert advice, including from those with lived experience, on:

- defining the problem
- understanding how to measure it, track it and collect the data
- defining a baseline and setting a target related to homelessness

The PRS also commits the Province to develop a plan and report back annually on progress made. To fulfill the commitments made under the PRS, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Treasury Board Secretariat are establishing an Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness.

### Mandate

The Panel will be co-chaired by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The purpose of the Panel will be to provide expert advice to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy on the following:

- a. A provincial definition of homelessness (reflecting the diversity of experiences with homelessness)
- b. Approaches and methods to collect, measure and track data related to homelessness in Ontario, including methods to make data widely available and usable
- c. Approaches to establishing a target related to homelessness for Ontario
- d. Methods to more effectively collect, disseminate and apply existing and emerging evidence about what programs, interventions and investments are most successful in different contexts and for different sub-populations
- e. Approaches to expand the base of evidence and its application in Ontario

## Panel composition

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will appoint approximately 12 to 15 members reflecting Ontario's geographic diversity and a wide range of experience and expertise in homelessness issues, including, but not limited to:

- People with lived experience of homelessness
- People with expertise in Aboriginal and youth homelessness
- People with technical expertise in homelessness-related data and measurement
- People with subject-matter knowledge and expertise
- People with knowledge of current Ontario practices in tracking/measuring homelessness locally

The Panel will be asked to engage in broader discussions with additional experts and people with lived experience and be expected to draw on a variety of perspectives such as youth, seniors, Aboriginal Peoples, LGBTTTQ, rural and northern perspectives, etc. This engagement may include inviting additional individuals into specific Panel meetings and/or sub-groups of the Panel holding separate meetings with individuals representing specific populations or perspectives. The Panel may also need to draw on the expertise of a broader group of data-related homelessness experts.

## Responsibilities of the panel members

The Panel members will be expected to utilize their expertise, knowledge and available resources to provide best advice to the government.

The Panel's work will be guided by the following key principles:

- a. Public interest remains paramount and protected
- b. Recommendations and advice aligns with the government's overall strategic directions and priorities
- c. The process remains transparent and professional

## Panel secretariat and support to the panel

The work of the Panel will be supported by a Panel Secretariat housed within MMAH. The Secretariat will include dedicated MMAH staff with responsibility for supporting Panel logistics and co-ordination, communications, research and analysis (including data analysis), and other support as needed. The Secretariat will draw as appropriate on relevant staff expertise in other ministries (e.g. Poverty Reduction Strategy Office, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, etc.).

## Deliverables

The Panel members are expected to provide advice and recommendations to support the development of:

- A provincial definition of homelessness (reflecting the diversity of experiences with homelessness)
- Approaches and methods to collect, measure and track data related to homelessness in Ontario, including methods to make data widely available and usable
- Approaches to establishing a target related to homelessness for Ontario
- Methods to more effectively collect, disseminate and apply existing and emerging evidence about what programs, interventions and investments are most successful in different contexts and for different sub-populations in Ontario
- Approaches to expand the base of evidence and its application in Ontario

## Timeframe

The work of the Panel is expected to begin in early 2015. A detailed work plan will be created after the inaugural meeting of the Panel.

The Panel is a short-term body with a mandate of six months. At the discretion of the ministers, the Panel's mandate may be extended for a period not exceeding a further six months.

## Ex-officio membership

The Deputy Minister and the Assistant Deputy Minister (Housing Division) of MMAH and the Executive Director for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office at Treasury Board Secretariat will serve as ex-officio members of the Panel.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing may appoint other ex-officio members as needed.

## Remuneration

Panel members shall not be paid any remuneration for their participation and service to the Panel. However, the Panel members will be reimbursed for travel, meal and accommodation expenses in accordance with the Management Board of Cabinet's Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive.

## Conflict of interest

All appointees to the Panel are required to declare to the Chairs of the Panel any actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest arising in regard to any matter under discussion by the Panel.

## Confidentiality and access to information

All materials produced by the Panel, including research analysis, reports and recommendations, remain the property of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and will be released publicly at the discretion of the ministry.

Background research reports prepared for the Panel are the sole property of the Ministry and will be made available to the public at the discretion of the ministry.

Documents in the possession of the Ontario Public Service related to the work or support for the Panel will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

## APPENDIX B: EXPERT ADVISORY PANEL ON HOMELESSNESS PANEL MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES



### Pedro Barata

Pedro Barata's involvement in the non-profit sector spans almost two decades, with a variety of roles in communications, research, public policy, and community development. As Vice President, Communications and Public Affairs at United Way Toronto & York Region, Pedro is responsible for message and brand positioning, media relations and public policy engagement. Pedro has experience working within and across a variety of settings, including community-based organizations, strategic philanthropy, and various levels of government.



### Maya Chacaby

Maya Chacaby is Anishinaabe, Beaver Clan from Kaministiquia. She is the Aboriginal Cultural Competency Education Coordinator at the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres and has been leading training sessions across the province for numerous sectors, including District School Boards, health service providers, hospitals, law enforcement, Children's Aid, municipal leadership, provincial ministries, and Tribal Councils. Maya also teaches linguistics and sociology at York University and has designed several Aboriginal youth-based leadership initiatives provincially.



### Michael Creek

Michael Creek is the Director of Strategic Initiatives with Working for Change, former Coordinator of the Toronto Speakers Bureau: Voices from the Street, where he has learned research, public policy, and public speaking. Michael sits on the boards of Social Planning Toronto, Inner City Family Health Team, and is a member of 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction. Michael is a survivor of cancer, physical and mental abuse, homelessness, poverty, and is a psychiatric consumer/survivor. Michael continues to work with marginalized people and encourages them to speak out so that their voices can make a difference in shaping policy and planning with governments.



### Dr. Cheryl Forchuk

Dr. Cheryl Forchuk is a Distinguished University Professor in nursing and psychiatry at Western University, and Assistant Director at the Lawson Health Research Institute. Her current research includes exploring issues related to poverty, housing/homelessness and inclusion for people with mental illness/addiction, and the development and testing of new approaches to mental health care such as the transitional discharge model and the use of smart technologies.



### Dr. Stephen Gaetz

Dr. Stephen Gaetz is a Professor at York University and Director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Homeless Hub. Dr. Gaetz is committed to increasing the impact of research on homelessness policy, planning, and practice, thereby contributing to solutions to end homelessness in Canada. His research on homelessness has focused on youth, economic strategies, nutritional vulnerability, education, legal, and justice issues, as well as solutions to homelessness from both a Canadian and international perspective.



### Dr. Stephen Hwang

Dr. Stephen Hwang is a practicing physician in general internal medicine at St. Michael's Hospital. He is also the Chair of Homelessness, Housing, and Health at St. Michael's Hospital, University of Toronto. Dr. Hwang's research focuses on improving the health of people who are homeless and vulnerably housed and the effects of housing on people's health.



### Dr. Kwame McKenzie

Dr. Kwame McKenzie is Medical Director of Underserved Populations at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto. Additionally, Dr. McKenzie is Director of the Social Aetiology of Mental Illness (SAMI) CIHR Training Program. He is a full Professor and the Co-Director of the Division of Equity, Gender and Population in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto. Dr. McKenzie is also the Chief Executive Officer of the Wellesley Institute.



### Mike Nadeau

Mike Nadeau is the Commissioner of Social Services for the City of Sault Ste. Marie. Previously, Mike was the Executive Director of the Ontario Native Welfare Administrators' Association (ONWAA). He is a subject matter expert on the administration of social services, program development, and homelessness issues in Northern Ontario.



### Joe-Anne Priel

Joe-Anne is the General Manager of the Community and Emergency Services Department with the City of Hamilton. This department offers a unique blend of human services, including income assistance, management of the child care system, two long-term care facilities, employment services for those that have difficulty accessing the labour market, recreation programming, housing and homelessness initiatives, and fire and paramedic services. In conjunction with community partners, Joe-Anne led the development of the Social Vision for the City of Hamilton, which is regarded as a key social policy paper used to guide the city to reach its goal of being a safe, healthy, vibrant, and caring community.



### Bruce Rivers

Bruce Rivers, a highly regarded child welfare expert and advocate, assumed the post of Covenant House Toronto Executive Director in 2011. Over the past 30 years, he has held a number of senior executive roles, including 16 years as Executive Director of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto. He has strong skills supported by hands-on experience in social service program planning, policy, and service delivery, as well as financial planning, administration, and fundraising.





### Aseefa Sarang

Aseefa Sarang is currently the Executive Director of Across Boundaries and has been with the organization since 1995. Previously, she was President of the newly amalgamated Addictions and Mental Health Ontario Board and a Member of the Provincial Collaborative Advisory Group (PCAG) for Service Collaborative Initiatives, facilitated by CAMH. She co-authored various academic articles on the Toronto site findings of the “third arm” of the At Home/Chez Soi project on homelessness and mental health, Mental Health Commission of Canada. She holds a dedicated interest and commitment to health equity for marginalized/racialized communities. Aseefa completed her undergraduate at the University of Toronto and received a Master’s degree in Leadership from the University of Guelph.



### Michael Shapcott

Michael Shapcott has worked extensively in Toronto, nationally, and internationally on social innovation, housing and housing rights, poverty, social exclusion, urban health, and health equity. He is a founding member and Director of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, and a founding member of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network. From 1990 to 1993, he was manager of the Rupert pilot project, which provided healthy and safe housing to 525 people who were chronically homeless.



### Brian Smith

Brian Smith is former CEO of the WoodGreen Community Services where he continued WoodGreen’s tradition of growing and diversifying programs to meet the needs of the community, including developing a “wrap around” service model that puts the client’s needs at the centre. He has also advocated for policy changes that allow social service agencies to better serve vulnerable populations. WoodGreen operates 800 units of safe, affordable housing in Toronto’s east end.



## Simone Thibault

Simone Thibault is the Executive Director of the Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC), serving diverse populations in downtown Ottawa, including LGBTQ, immigrants and refugees, isolated seniors, young families, and individuals on low income, including those who are homeless or poorly housed. Programs run by the CCHC also stretch further to cover the City of Ottawa and the Champlain region. Simone has led a number of non-profit community-based organizations for the past 25 years. She has shared her leadership at a number of regional and provincial networks to enable positive change in the area of community health and well-being, woman abuse, health equity, as well as the reality of francophone populations in a minority context.

## Staff Support to the Panel

The Panel wishes to acknowledge the work of the staff members from the Housing Policy Branch, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office, Treasury Board Secretariat, who contributed expertise, research, writing and other support to this process.



Group photo of the panel members, co-chairs and provincial staff.

## APPENDIX C: PRESENTERS TO THE PANEL

The Panel decided early on in its process to learn from diverse voices and hear about how homelessness is experienced across different communities and perspectives in Ontario. While the Panel was interested to learn about causes of and solutions for homelessness facing these groups, presenters were also asked to focus their discussion around the Panel's mandate.

The Panel invited 40 presenters to share perspectives from a range of groups experiencing homelessness, including:

- youth
- LGBTTQ communities<sup>35</sup>
- seniors
- veterans
- people with physical disabilities
- people with mental health issues, addictions and trauma
- new immigrants, refugees, and racialized communities
- people with lived experience
- women and families
- victims of domestic violence
- sex trade workers
- French language communities
- Aboriginal Peoples
- Northern and rural communities
- urban and suburban communities

### Presenters to the Panel

**Dr. Alex Abramovich**, Postdoctoral Fellow, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

**Maureen Adams**, Director of Advocacy and Communities, YWCA Toronto

**Dr. Tim Aubry**, Professor, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, Researcher, Centre for Research on Educational and Community Service

**Madonna Broderick**, Member, Voices from the Street

**Amy Casipullai**, Senior Coordinator of Policy and Communications, Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants

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<sup>35</sup> LGBTTQ refers to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, questioning, and queer.

**Michael Creek**, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Working for Change

**Henry Dagher**, Manager, Community Development and Homelessness Partnerships, Employment and Social Development Canada

**Amanda DiFalco**, Manager, Homelessness Policy and Programs, City of Hamilton

**Diane Dyson**, Director of Research and Public Policy, WoodGreen Community Services

**Jane Eastwood**, Director of Community Services, Fred Victor Women's Day Program

**Dr. Cheryl Forchuk**, Professor and Associate Director, Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, Western University

**Dr. Stephen Gaetz**, Professor, York University, Director, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

**Barbara Gosse**, Senior Director of Research, Policy, and Innovation, Canadian Women's Foundation

**Étienne Grandmaître St-Pierre**, Executive Director, Action Logement

**Juliet Jackson**, Director, Strategic Planning, Policy, and Partnerships, Region of Peel

**Tyler Johnson**, Member, Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities

**Helen Kennedy**, Executive Director, Egale Canada Human Rights Trust

**Dr. Paul Kurdyak**, Director of Health Outcomes and Performance Evaluation Research Unit, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

**Dave Landers**, Chief Executive Officer, Cochrane District Social Services Board

**Brigette Lapointe**, Member, Voices from the Street

**Susan Macphail**, Director of Community and Women's Programs, My Sister's Place

**Marc Maracle**, Executive Director, Gignul Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Ottawa

**Sharon Mason**, Manager, Community Development and Homelessness Partnerships, Employment and Social Development Canada

**Heather McGregor**, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Toronto

**Mary Menzies**, Director of Housing Services, Durham Region

**Linda Mitchelson**, Social Services Division Manager, City of Peterborough

**Cindy Sue Montana McCormack**, Social Planner, Hamilton Social Planning and Research Council

**Mike Nadeau**, Commissioner of Social Services, City of Sault Ste. Marie

**Veronica Nicholson**, Executive Director, Timmins Native Friendship Centre

**Olivia Nuamah**, Executive Director, Inner City Family Health Team, Toronto

**Aaron Park**, Housing Programs Lead, District of Thunder Bay Social Services and Administration Board

**Doret Phillips**, Program Manager, Across Boundaries

**Saku Pinta**, Senior Social Policy Analyst, Chief Administrative Office, District of Thunder Bay Social Services and Administration Board

**Angela Pye**, Social Planning Associate, Region of Waterloo

**Laural Raine**, Planning and Project Consultant, City of Toronto

**Jan Richardson**, Manager of Homelessness, City of London, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Arthur Labatt School of Nursing, Western University

**Sue Ritchie**, Manager, Program Design and Development, Human Services Department, Region of Peel

**Sylvain Roy**, Neuropsychologist, Inner City Family Health Team, Toronto

**Dr. Jeff Turnbull**, Medical Director, Inner City Family Health Project, and Chief of Staff, Ottawa Hospital

**Petra Wolfbeiss**, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

## APPENDIX D: TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS

This detailed typology of homelessness describes the range of accommodations that people without appropriate, stable and permanent housing may experience. Those without acceptable housing experience a range of types of homelessness, from being unsheltered, to having housing that is insecure or inappropriate. As homelessness is not one single event or state of being, it is important to recognize that at different points in time people may find themselves experiencing different types of homelessness.

### 1. Unsheltered

This includes people who lack housing and who are not accessing emergency shelter or accommodation, except during extreme weather conditions. In most cases, people are staying in places that are not designed for or fit for human habitation.

#### 1.1 People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract

- Public space, sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, etc.
- Private space and vacant buildings (squatting)

#### 1.2 People living in places not intended for human habitation

- Living in cars or other vehicles
- Living in garages, attics, closets or buildings not designed for habitation
- People in makeshift shelters, shacks or tents

### 2. Emergency Sheltered

This refers to people who, because they cannot secure permanent housing, are accessing emergency shelter and system supports, generally provided at no cost or minimal cost to the user. Such accommodation represents a stop-gap institutional response to homelessness provided by government, non-profit, faith based organizations and/or volunteers.

#### 2.1 Emergency overnight shelters for the homeless

These facilities are designed to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. Such short-term emergency shelters may target specific sub-populations, including women, families, youth or Aboriginal Persons, for instance. These shelters typically have minimal eligibility criteria, offer shared sleeping facilities and amenities, and often expect clients to leave in the morning. They may or may not offer food, clothing or other services. Some emergency shelters allow people to stay on an ongoing basis while others are short term and are set up to respond to special circumstances, such as extreme weather.

## 2.2 Shelters for people affected by violence

These shelters provide basic emergency and crisis services including safe accommodation, meals, information, and referral. They provide a high security environment for women (and sometimes men) and children fleeing family violence or other crisis situations. Residents are not required to leave during the day. These facilities offer private rooms for families and a range of supports to help residents rebuild their lives.

## 2.3 Emergency shelter for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fire, floods, and communities facing imminent eviction

### 3. Provisionally Accommodated

This describes situations in which people who are technically homeless and without permanent shelter access accommodation that offers no prospect of permanence. Those who are provisionally accommodated may be accessing temporary housing provided by government or the non-profit sector, or may have independently made arrangements for short-term accommodation.

#### 3.1 Interim housing for people who are homeless

Interim housing is a systems-supported form of housing that is meant to bridge the gap between unsheltered homelessness or emergency accommodation and permanent housing. In some cases referred to as transitional housing, this form of accommodation typically provides services beyond basic needs, offers residents more privacy, and places greater emphasis on participation and social engagement. Interim housing targets those who would benefit from structure, support and skill-building prior to moving to long-term housing stability, with the ultimate goal of preventing a return to homelessness. In the case of second-stage housing for those impacted by family violence, the key characteristics of this housing are the safety and security it provides, trauma recovery supports, along with the ultimate goal of preventing re-victimization. Interim housing has time limitations on residency, but generally allows for a longer stay (in some cases up to three years) compared to emergency shelters.

#### 3.2 People living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing

Often referred to as couch surfers or the hidden homeless, this describes people who stay with friends, family, or even strangers. They are typically not paying rent, their duration of stay is unsustainable in the long term, and they do not have the means to secure their own permanent housing in the future. They differ from those who are staying with friends or

family out of choice in anticipation of pre-arranged accommodation, whether in their current hometown or an altogether new community. This living situation is understood by both parties to be temporary, and the assumption is that it will not become permanent.

### 3.3 People accessing short-term, temporary rental accommodation without security of tenure

In some cases people who are homeless make temporary rental arrangements, such as staying in motels, hostels, rooming houses, etc. Although occupants pay rent, the accommodation does not offer the possibility of permanency. People living in these situations are often considered to be part of the hidden homeless population.

### 3.4 People in institutional care who lack permanent housing arrangements

Individuals are considered to be provisionally accommodated and at risk of homelessness if there are no arrangements in place to ensure they move into safe, permanent housing upon release from institutional care. This includes individuals who:

- a. were homeless prior to admittance (where their stay may be short-term or long-term) and who have no plan for permanent accommodation after release
- b. had housing prior to admittance, but lost their housing while in institutional care
- c. had housing prior to admittance, but cannot go back due to changes in their needs

In any case, without adequate discharge planning and support, which includes arrangements for safe and reliable housing (and necessary aftercare or community-based services), there is a likelihood that these individuals may transition into homelessness following their release. Institutional care includes: penal institutions, medical/mental health institutions, residential treatment programs or withdrawal management centers, children's institutions/group homes.

### 3.5 Accommodation/reception centres for immigrants and refugees

Prior to securing their own housing, recently arrived immigrants and refugees may be temporarily housed while receiving settlement support and orientation to life in Canada. They are considered to be homeless if they have no means or prospects of securing permanent housing.

## 4. At Risk of Homelessness

Although not technically homeless, this includes people whose current housing situations are dangerously lacking security or stability, and so are considered to be at risk of homelessness. They are in housing that is intended for permanent human habitation, and could potentially be permanent (as opposed to those who are provisionally accommodated). However, as a result of external hardship, poverty, personal crisis, discrimination, a lack of other available



and affordable housing, insecurity of tenure and/or the inappropriateness of their current housing (which may be overcrowded or does not meet public health and safety standards), residents may be at risk of homelessness.

It is important to distinguish between those at imminent risk of becoming homeless and those who are precariously housed. No matter the level of probability, all who can be categorized as being at risk of homelessness possess a shared vulnerability; for them, a single event, unexpected expense, crisis, or trigger may lead to a loss of housing. As the risk factors mount and compound, so too does the possibility of becoming homeless.

#### 4.1 People at imminent risk of becoming homeless

Many factors can contribute to individuals and families being at imminent risk of homelessness. Though in some cases individual factors (such as those listed below) may be most significant, in most cases it is the interaction of structural and individual risk that, in the context of a crisis, influence pathways into homelessness. In other words, what separates those who are at risk of homelessness due to precarious housing from those who are at imminent risk is the onset of a crisis, a turn in events, or the increase in acuity of one or more underlying risk factors. Factors that may contribute as singular or co-occurring factors include:

- Precarious employment: Many people have unstable employment and live pay cheque to pay cheque. Precarious employment describes non-standard employment that does not meet basic needs, is poorly paid, part-time (when full-time work is desired), temporary, and/or insecure and unprotected. An unanticipated expense, increases in cost of living or a change in employment status may undermine their ability to maintain housing.
- Sudden unemployment with few prospects, and little to no financial savings/assets or social supports to turn to for assistance.
- Housing with supports that are about to be discontinued. Some Housing First models provide supports, but on a time-limited basis. If resources such as aftercare services are withdrawn but are still needed, individuals and families may be at imminent risk of re-entering homelessness.
- Households facing eviction, lacking the resources needed (including social supports) to afford other housing, or living in areas with low availability of affordable housing.
- Severe and persistent mental illness, active addictions, substance use and/or behavioural issues.
- Division of household (due to separation, divorce, conflicts between caregivers and children, or roommates moving out) where the affected do not have the resources to keep the existing housing or secure other stable housing.

- Violence/abuse (or direct fear of) in current housing situations, including: people facing family/gender violence and abuse; children and youth experiencing neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; seniors facing abuse; and people facing abuse or discrimination caused by racism or homophobia or misogyny.
  - people facing family/gender violence and abuse
  - children and youth experiencing neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
  - seniors facing abuse
  - people facing abuse or discrimination caused by racism or homophobia or misogyny
- Institutional care that is inadequate or unsuited to the needs of the individual or family.

#### 4.2 People who are precariously housed

Many people experience severe housing affordability problems, due to their income, the local economy and/or the lack of affordable housing that meets their needs in the local market. The income of these households is not sufficient to cover the household's basic shelter and non-shelter costs. This includes people who receive government assistance but who do not have sufficient funds to pay for basic needs.

The greater the shortfall of income in covering basic costs, the greater the risk of homelessness. The precariously housed face challenges that, in the absence of an intervention, may lead to homelessness. Those who manage to retain their housing in such circumstances often do so at the expense of meeting their nutritional needs, heating their homes, providing proper child care, and covering other expenses that contribute to health and well-being.

## APPENDIX E: A MENU OF RECOMMENDED APPROACHES FOR ENUMERATION

The Panel recommends that the Province require that all local Service Managers adopt a method for enumerating homelessness, choosing from among a menu of recommended approaches. While there is flexibility in selecting an option (or options), the chosen method must be implemented consistently in all areas where it is applied.

The following provides an overview of each of the recommended enumeration methods, including their benefits and limitations.

### Point-in-Time Counts (Homelessness Partnering Strategy Methodology)

Point-in-Time (PiT) counts provide a snapshot of the homeless populations on a given day of the year. The federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) has developed a standardized approach to PiT counts that the Panel recommends for any Ontario community choosing to use this approach.

The HPS PiT methodology counts unsheltered and emergency-sheltered populations. Data are collected for PiT counts by trained volunteer canvassers who physically locate, count, and collect survey data from homeless people. Surveys are also carried out at emergency shelters, women's shelters, and in transitional housing. A standardized 10-question survey is used for HPS PiT counts, with an option to add questions related to local data needs. HPS has developed an implementation guide, toolkit, and training materials to support communities in carrying out PiT counts. HPS also encourages communities to undertake their counts on the same day, if possible.

A key limitation of the PiT methodology is that it does not capture data on people experiencing hidden homelessness, or people who are at risk of homelessness. As such, this approach is recognized to undercount women, youth, LGBTTTQ communities, Aboriginal Peoples, immigrants, refugees, ethno-racial and racialized people, and others who are likely to experience hidden homelessness.

### Registry Weeks (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Methodology)

Registry Weeks are used to create a list of the most vulnerable homeless people in a community in order to prioritize access to permanent housing and supports. Registry Weeks originated in the United States, and have been promoted in Canada as part of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness 20,000 Homes Campaign.

The Registry Week methodology involves a co-ordinated, multi-day count of homeless people on the streets, in shelters, and in other community-identified spaces frequented by homeless individuals. Volunteer enumerators administer a 35-question survey – a pre-screening and triage tool – which collects personal data and ranks participants on a Vulnerability Index. Data collected are then used to prioritize individuals for accessing rapid rehousing and other supports.

The 20,000 Homes Campaign has tools and resources available to support communities in adopting this approach to understand local homelessness issues and prioritize people for access to Housing First supports. Six communities in Ontario have signed up for Registry Weeks and three pilots have been completed.

The limitations of Registry Weeks are similar to those of PiT counts in that they do not tend to capture people who are experiencing hidden homelessness or people who are at risk. In addition, Registry Weeks are intended to gather data on the most vulnerable homeless people to prioritize them for housing and supports, and not necessarily carried out to determine a count of all unsheltered and emergency sheltered people more broadly. As such, data from Registry Weeks can overrepresent the high-needs end of the spectrum of homeless experiences.

## Period-Prevalence Counts

A period-prevalence approach captures the prevalence of homelessness over a longer time period, rather than at a single point in time. Typically, period-prevalence counts collect data from homeless-serving shelters and agencies, and other institutions.

In Timmins, Ontario, this approach was used to estimate homelessness over the period of one week. Data were collected from 31 service providers (such as shelters and food banks), where surveys were administered to homeless clients. This approach is recognized as preferred in rural and Northern areas where there are fewer visibly homeless people on the streets and in shelters.

Prevalence of homelessness can also be determined with the use of retrospective data, collected as a part of a general population survey or as part of a telephone survey. With this approach, people are asked about their current and former experiences with homelessness. It is possible to gauge if homelessness is declining or on the rise if these surveys are repeated over time.

While providing useful information, this approach undercounts the number of people experiencing homeless.<sup>36</sup>

## Intake Data from Shelters and Homeless-Serving Agencies

Intake data collected at shelters and other homeless-serving agencies can be used to count emergency-sheltered homeless populations, and capture data on unsheltered people who come into contact with agencies. This data can be used in combination with PiT counts, and can provide longer-term estimates (e.g. monthly or annually) of how many people use shelters and services. Because this data is typically already being collected, the use of it for homeless enumeration is one of the most easy and cost-effective approaches.

The Panel recommends that the Province encourage the collection of comparable data for shelter and agency intake across Ontario. This may include the use of (or compatibility with)

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<sup>36</sup> Kauppi et al. (2012).

the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), a software developed by the federal Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS), that is available to shelters to collect and manage client data. In Ontario, HIFIS and systems that use comparable questions are used in jurisdictions representing 81 per cent of the population.

The Panel recognizes that the use of shelter and agency data is limited as an enumeration approach, as it collects data only on people using the shelter system or accessing homeless-serving agencies. As a result, it captures fewer people who are unsheltered and does not enumerate the provisionally accommodated hidden homeless or people who are at risk of homelessness. In addition, the data collected in shelters are limited by the existing homeless infrastructure in a given locality. For example, if a shelter has 30 beds, data will only be collected on who is in those beds, and not how many people are homeless elsewhere in the community. Where shelters and agencies to serve the homeless do not exist, this approach will not successfully capture data on local experiences with homelessness. For these reasons, administrative data of this sort is often used in concert with other enumeration approaches.

### Estimating with Proxy Measures

In addition to directly counting people in shelters, on streets, or in institutions, another method is to use proxy indicators to measure homelessness. Poverty and lack of affordable housing are key factors that lead to homelessness, and measures of these and other conditions can suggest how many are at risk of homelessness, and whether this is changing. Proxy measures are used in New Zealand,<sup>37</sup> and in Toronto, a Risk of Homelessness Index was derived from combining six housing indicators.<sup>38</sup>

### Enumerating Hidden Homelessness

Enumerating hidden homelessness is a challenge. It is possible to improve the response rate from hidden homeless populations by planning magnet events to accompany other approaches to counting, such as PiT counts or Registry Weeks. Magnet events are a social engagement strategy to reach marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as youth and Aboriginal Peoples. Well publicized in advance, the events are intended to draw people to a common place on a given day and make contact to carry out enumeration.

In Hamilton, Ontario, a magnet event with food and entertainment was held to encourage Aboriginal Peoples experiencing homelessness to take part in an Urban Aboriginal Housing Survey.

Hidden homelessness can also be counted with a telephone survey. With this approach, households in a given area are contacted and asked if they have people staying with them who are currently homeless.

<sup>37</sup> Amore et al. (2013). Severe housing deprivation: The problem and its measurement. Report commissioned by Official Statistics Research, through Statistics New Zealand. Wellington: University of Otago.

<sup>38</sup> Paradis, E. (2013). Nine out of every ten families at risk of homelessness in Toronto's ageing rental high-rise buildings. Research Update. Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership.





## **Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing**

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2015

ISBN 978-1-4606-6260-1 (PDF)

ISBN 978-1-4606-6259-5 (Print)

150/10/15

Disponible en français