

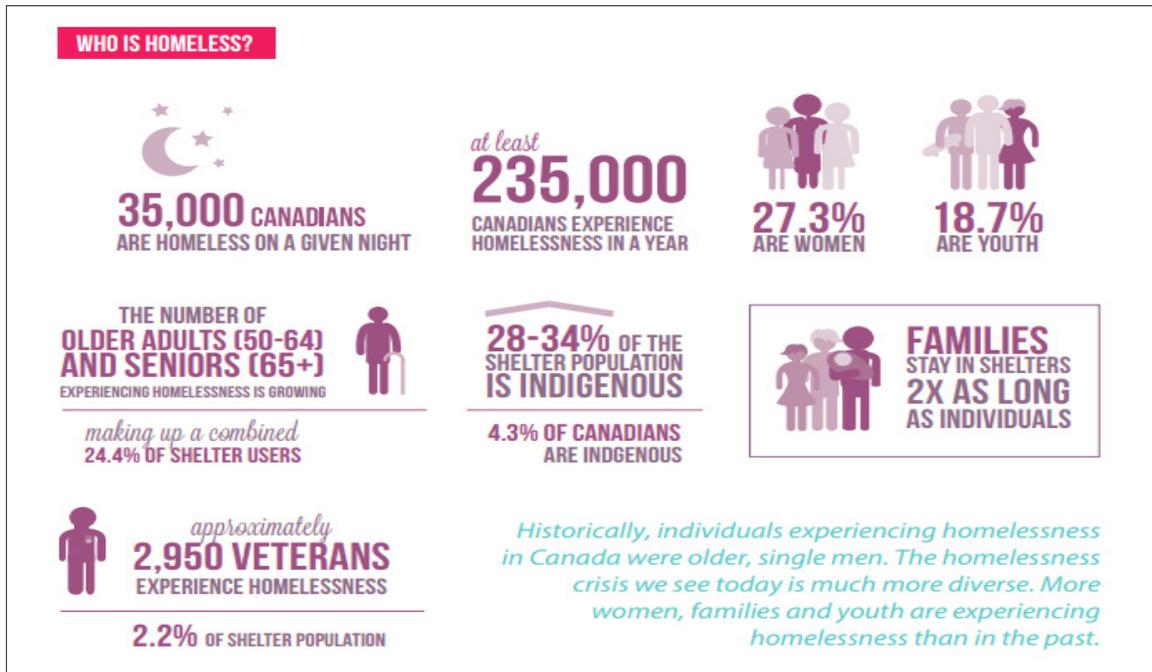


Information Bulletin

Knowledge - Creating Awareness for Safe Communities

Homelessness*

According to the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent or appropriate housing. It further describes it to include the lack of immediate prospects, or ability of acquiring adequate housing. Homelessness is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, or the individual/household's financial situation. It may also be impacted by an individual's mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges. Racism and discrimination may also impact an individual's ability to secure housing.



Realities of Homelessness in BC

- More men than women make up the “absolutely homeless” population living on the street and in emergency shelters.
- Women may be under-counted in homeless counts
- Lack of adequate and secure housing options has a greater impact on women
- Indigenous peoples are over-represented in poverty and homelessness
- Number of homeless youth (under 25) is growing
- Homeless population is aging
- Homeless people tend to have high incidences of chronic medical conditions
- Homeless individuals have high incidences of mental illness
- High incidence of drug addiction within homeless populations
- Direct correlation between traumatic brain injury and homelessness
- Main sources of income include income assistance/welfare, illegal activities
- Many homeless people work for an income – they are considered the working poor. Regardless of an income, these individuals cannot afford to secure permanent housing.

*Content excerpted from:

- Hales, Jennifer, 2010, “Learning about Homelessness in British Columbia: A Guide for Senior High-School Teachers,” Department of Economics, SFU
- The Homeless Hub: www.homelesshub.ca



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At Risk of Homelessness

Many individuals and families experience housing affordability problems, due to their income, local economy and the lack of appropriate affordable housing. The greater the shortfall of income to cover basic needs, the greater the risk of homelessness.

Additional factors that can contribute to individuals and families being at risk of homeless include:

- Precarious employment: those with unstable employment who live pay cheque to pay cheque. Non-standard employment that does not meet basic needs (low income, part-time vs full-time or, temporary employment)
- Sudden unemployment with few prospects and no additional financial support
- Supported housing with resources that are about to be discontinued
- Household facing eviction and lacking resources needed to afford alternate housing
- Those experiencing severe and persistent mental illness addictions or substance use or behavioural issues
- Division of household through separation, divorce, family members or roommates moving out, where the impacted do not have resources to keep the existing housing or secure other stable housing
- Experiencing the fear of or threat of, violence or abuse in current housing situation

Why are People Homeless?

Complex combination of factors:

- **Structural factors:** Economic and society issues. Lack of adequate income, access to affordable housing and health supports. Discrimination.
- **Systematic failures:** When existing systems of support and care for vulnerable members of society are inadequate or fail. Difficult transitions from child welfare system; inadequate discharge planning for individuals leaving hospitals, correctional institutions, mental health and addiction facilities; lack of support for immigrant and refugees.
- **Individual and relational factors:** Personal circumstances. Traumatic events, personal crisis, mental health and addiction challenges, family violence.

Homelessness and Youth

Homelessness in youth is distinct from adult homeless population

- Causes of homelessness differ. Typically, they result from family problems/conflicts; physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Previous involvement with the child welfare system may also play a role
- Street youth lack experience and capacity to live independently:
 - Little or no experience with renting or running a household
 - Taking on a part time job becomes difficult when youth lack work experience
 - Have to grow into adulthood without the guidance necessary for the transition
 - Increased vulnerability to crime, exploitation and human trafficking

Homelessness with Indigenous People

Indigenous peoples are over-represented in poverty and homelessness across BC and Canada

- In BC, Indigenous individuals are over-represented among the homeless population with severe addictions and mental illness
- Indigenous women face severe housing challenges, whether they live on reserve or in rural, urban, northern or remote communities. The lack of affordable housing can lead to the criminalization of Aboriginal women. These are women who attempt to secure affordable housing and are at risk of exploitation by landlords and gangs.

Colonial policies separated Indigenous peoples from their land, homes, communities and each other. Many advocacy groups argue that the roots of Indigenous homelessness lie in the multi-generational experiences of residential schools, wardship through the child welfare system, and economic and social marginalization from mainstream Canadian society.

55% of on-reserve housing across Canada is in need of major repairs or replacement. The *Indian Act* stipulates that reserve properties belong to the Crown, making it difficult for Indigenous people to obtain financing for construction or major repairs.

Homelessness

Where do the Homeless Sleep?

Outside or in unsafe dwellings: park benches, nooks and crannies in stairwells or doorways, bank machine outlets, bus shelters, parking garages, under bridges, in cars, in makeshift shelters, in abandoned buildings. Where homeless people sleep can deem them vulnerable to violence, theft, illness and sleep-deprivation.

Emergency Shelters: Some homeless people sleep in emergency shelters and drop-in centres. Shelters typically have restricted hours where people typically enter on first-come-first-served basis. Many shelters are restrictive in who they admit as well as what an individual is allowed to bring in with them.

Transition Houses: Typically provide longer-term, safe and supportive housing for people working towards the goal of living independently in the community. These may be women fleeing abusive situations, women who are mentally ill, or those recovering from addictions. The length of time a person stays in a transition house can vary and is typically dependent on individual needs.

Couch Surfing: Approximately half of BC's homeless population is estimated to "couch surf". This refers to when people, sleep in the homes of friends, family and sometimes strangers. Couch surfers traditionally have not formal home of their own. In northern BC communities where the weather can be colder, couch surfing is more common. Women and youth tend to couch surf rather than live-in situations where the environment may be dangerous.



Consequences of Homelessness

People without a home or live in precarious housing are at risk of a numerous of problems that can impact quality of life.

Lack of safety: Where homeless people sleep and live can leave them vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation, theft, and crime.

Impact on physical and mental health:

- The death rate among homeless people is higher than among non-homeless compared to the average life expectancy of 75
- Rates of Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, cancer, tuberculosis and other illnesses and the incidence of traumatic brain injuries are higher among people who are homeless
- Many people living in the streets show signs of severe depression, describe themselves as depressed
- Many homeless people are perpetually sleep-deprived
- Malnutrition: Nutritional value of food homeless individuals is able to obtain can be poor. Diets lacking in nutrition are linked to a number of health and cognitive problems.

Barriers to employment: No permanent address or reliable means of communication for job applications; challenges accessing facilities to maintain a standard of cleanliness and hygiene; difficulties finding storage for belongings.

Barriers to education: Similar to the challenges faced in securing employment, homelessness impacts the ability of youth to participate in the education system or skills training for employment. Additional challenges include: finding a place to study and do homework effectively and accessing resources to assist in educational success.

Isolation and alienation: Homeless individuals are frequently alone and living on the margins of society without stable, caring relationships.

Low social skills and low adaptive functioning: Adverse events in the lives of homeless individuals as well as the underlying causes of homelessness may have resulted in cognitive impairments and a decreased ability to effectively make socially acceptable judgments.



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Resources:

Province of BC Social Housing webpage: provides information on a wide range of subsidized housing and rental assistance options in BC, along with information on provincial strategy to address homelessness. www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/social-housing

BC Housing: works in partnership with the private and non-profit sectors, provincial health authorities and ministries, other levels of government and community groups to develop a range of housing options. Offers information about housing assistance and homelessness services. www.bchousing.org

Government of Canada Homelessness Strategy Partnership: a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness by providing direct support and funding to 61 designated communities and to organizations that address Aboriginal homelessness across Canada. www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness.html

Homeless Hub: a web-based research library and information centre providing a single place to find homelessness information from across Canada. This resource contains a page dedicated to community profiles of communities across BC and Canada, highlighting homelessness statistics and providing links to community plans and strategies to address homelessness. www.homelesshub.ca

Community Workspace on Homelessness: an interactive space for communities and by communities, providing an opportunity for leaders, service providers and policymakers to share information, seek input and guidance from others, as well as have discussions around homelessness. www.workspaceonhomelessness.ca

www.stophomelessness.ca: a website of the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness providing information and links to resources to address homelessness.

Homelessness Strategies: Visit the websites for individual Cities and Municipalities across British Columbia for the strategies that have been developed to address the individual needs of the community. Civic Info BC maintains a directory of local government and related organizations. www.civicinfo.bc.ca

Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (SPARC BC): conducts applied social research, social policy analysis for various social justice topics, including homelessness. Maintains a online library of various social justice topics. www.sparc.bc.ca

Homelessness: A Teacher's Guide: a guided designed to engage teachers and students in learning and activities related to Homelessness. www.triciestaskforce.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/teachersguidelr_10.pdf

Learning about Homelessness in BC: A Guide for Senior High School Teachers: www.sfu.ca/~pendakur/teaching/homelessness/Learning.About.Homelessness.pdf

